



Image credit: Boat house burnt by Suffragettes at Eastville Park, 1913 (ref. 43207/22/19/22)

Bristol Archives

Sources for research: Politics and campaigning



Online catalogue archives.bristol.gov.uk
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Introduction

Bristol Archives holds records relating to political parties, politicians and trade unions, as well as material relating to campaign groups which fought for social change.

This guide covers selected collections and papers from the mid-18th century onwards, although it is not a comprehensive list.

Further material is listed in our online catalogue. To search thoroughly, try different search terms. Using a wildcard asterisk will find more results, for example 'politic*'.

We aim to represent all political parties and welcome further donations of material.

Political collections: Political organisations

Bristol East (later Bristol South East) Labour Party, 1916-1992 (ref. [40488](#))

Minutes, reports, correspondence, financial records, photographs, plans and printed material.

Bristol South East Constituency Labour Party, 1918-1994 (ref. [39035](#))

Minutes, correspondence, membership records, financial records and newspaper clippings.

Bristol South Labour Party, 1919-1993 (ref. [40517](#))

Minutes, agendas, reports, administrative papers, correspondence and publications.

Bristol Fabian Society and the Bristol Labour Party, 1941-1989 (ref. [44303](#))

Minutes, agendas, printed material and newspaper clippings.

Bristol West Labour Party, 1936-1940 & 1958-1983 (refs. [40315](#) & [38598](#))

Minutes, agendas, reports, correspondence and financial records.

South West Regional Office of the Labour Party, c1924-1980 (ref. [38423](#))

Minutes, agendas, reports, correspondence, photographs and campaign programmes.

Avon Labour Party and the Labour Group on Avon County Council, 1973-1996 (ref. [40849](#))

Minutes, reports, correspondence, budget papers and printed material.

Stockwood Ward Labour Party (Bristol East Parliamentary Constituency), 1981-2009 (ref. [41904](#))

Minutes, agendas, reports, financial records, correspondence and printed material.

Lockleaze Labour Party, 1989-1998 (ref. [44403](#))

Minutes and agendas.

Conservative Association, 1920 - 1979 (ref. [38036](#))

Minutes, agendas, reports and printed material.

Bristol City Council Conservative Group, 1933-1995 (ref. [42428](#))

Minutes and printed material.

Bristol Liberal Club, 1886-1971 (ref. [36202](#))

Minutes, annual reports, financial records and correspondence.

Records of the West Bristol Women's Liberal Association and the Bristol Liberal Group, 1904-1950 (ref. [44277](#))

Minutes, membership list and visitors' book.

Avon Liberal Party, 1977-1995 (ref. [44071](#))

Minutes, policy papers, manifestos, correspondence newsletters.

Promotional material relating to local elections, 1975-2012 (ref. [45813](#), [44004](#))

Relating to the Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Labour and Socialist parties.

Political collections: Personal papers

Jarrit Smith, c1540s-1869 (ref. [AC/JS](#), especially items 90 to 105)

A solicitor who served as a Tory MP for Bristol from 1756 to 1758. His papers reflect his interest in naval and mercantile affairs and his role in securing the rebuilding of Bristol Bridge.

Southwell family papers, 1555-1990s (refs. [44785](#), [45317](#) and others)

Family and personal papers, including material related to the political careers of Edward Southwell Snr (1671–1730), Edward Southwell Jr (1705-1755) and particularly Edward Southwell, Baron de Clifford (1738-1777).

Richard Champion, merchant and porcelain manufacturer, 1760-1792 (ref. [38083](#))

Letter books containing Champion's correspondence with Edmund Burke and other political figures, including material on the political and economic problems of colonial America.

Richard Hart Davis, 1807-1862 (ref. [41593](#)):

Papers of the Hart Davis family include references to his role as a Bristol Tory MP and (at ref. [41593/E](#)) material related to elections in which he stood.

John Wall, socialist poet, c1835-1973 (ref. [37886](#))

Writings, correspondence, reports, printed material, newspaper cuttings, photographs and personal papers.

Councillor Jenny Smith, 1973-1990s (Labour) (ref. [41412](#), [41371](#))

Correspondence and printed election material; also papers and notes relating to the history of Bristol's Co-operative and Labour parties.

The office of Dawn Primarolo, MP for Bristol South (Labour), 1980s-2000s (ref. [45568](#))

Minutes, agendas, reports, correspondence and printed material.

Papers of Councillor Phil Gregory (Labour), 1980–1998 (ref. [42269](#))

Minutes, correspondence, budgets and member reports

Political collections: Society of Merchant Venturers

The Society's archive (1493-2003, ref. [SMV](#)) reflects the ways its members sought to influence government policy, particularly in support of Bristol's role in the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans and the wider slave economy. Members included several MPs represented in the records, including Robert Nugent (Lord Clare), Jarrit Smith, Matthew Brickdale, Richard Hart Davis and Henry Bright.

Key records include the books of proceedings (ref. [SMV/2/1](#)), letters (ref. [SMV/2/4](#)) and petitions (ref. [SMV/2/4/1/65](#)).

For transcriptions of SMV's petitions to Parliament 1698-1803, see *Politics and the Port of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* by W E Minchinton, Bristol Record Society volume 23, 1963. (ref. J/BRS/23 and [available online](#)).

Voting and elections: Democratic and electoral material

Minutes of Bristol City Council and its predecessors, 1598 to present day (ref. [M/BCC](#))

Minutes of the full council and its committees and sub committees.

Burgess books, 1557 to present day (refs. [04359](#), [04358](#))

These list the freemen of the city, who were entitled to vote in elections.

Poll books and electoral registers, 1715 to present day ([ER](#))

For further details please consult 'Guide to Bristol Poll Books and Electoral Registers' (ref. [InfoBox/31/31](#)). A version of this as a source guide is now available [online](#).

Municipal elections declaration books, 1872-1933 (ref. [04999](#))

Political representation and Bristol's elections 1700-1997 (ref. [Pamphlet/1693](#))

Includes a summary of election results.

Notes on Bristol local elections 1837-1954 (ref. [Pamphlet/915](#))

Box file of Bristol election results 1968-2007 (ref. 41960/3, partially listed collection)

Parish collections

Some parish collections contain lists of voters, including objections raised against the eligibility of individuals:

- All Saints, c1833-1865 (ref. [P.AS/OP/4](#))
- St Ewen, 1840 (ref. [P.St E/ChW/7](#))
- St Leonard's Vestry, 1852-1863 (ref. [40365/Chw/4](#))
- St Mary Redcliffe, 1837 and 1839 (ref. [P.St MR/V/8/a-c](#), [P.St MR/V/9/a-d](#)).

Voting and elections: Bristol Riots of 1831

The riots were a response to the Second Reform Bill being voted down in the House of Lords, especially a statement by Bristol's senior judge, Sir Charles Wetherell, that the people of Bristol did not support electoral reform.

Trials of people involved in the riots were dealt with by the Oxford circuit assizes in 1832. Records of the assizes are held by The National Archives (ref. [ASSI](#)), including records of a special commission on the riots (ref. [ASSI 5/152/21](#)).

Public order broadsides printed during the riots, 1831 (ref. [9731](#)).

Brice and Burges papers, 1781-1834 (ref. [43484](#))

Records of the city's solicitors in relation to legal proceedings and compensation following the riots.

Brief for the plaintiff, Charles Pinney, 18 Aug 1832 (ref. [46111](#))

The Mayor of Bristol was charged with neglect of duty during the riots and found not guilty.

'Narrative of conversations held with Christopher Davis and William Clarke', 1832 (ref. [28048/C/80/1a-b](#))

Printed pamphlet containing accounts by two men executed for their part in the riots.

Lithograph and report on the Bristol riots of 1831, 19th century (ref. [46448](#))

An illustration of key sites in the riots, with a description of events that took place.

Voting and elections: Women's suffrage and anti-suffrage

Paper by Anna Maria Priestman, 1875 (ref. [9741/3](#))

'The industrial position of women as affected by their exclusion from the suffrage', given at a meeting in Bristol of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, 1909-1911 (ref. [38415/6](#))

Newspaper cuttings on the league and the roles of Mr and Mrs Henry Caleb Trapnell of Clifton.

Records of Suffragettes held at Horfield Prison (ref. [41405](#))

Including entries in the registers of prisoners (ref. [41405/Mgt/Nm](#)) as well as papers related to force-feeding under the Cat & Mouse Act (ref. [41405/Mgt/Co/1](#)).

Records relating to the Suffragette arson attack and the revenge attack

In October 1913 the Suffragettes made an arson attack on the University of Bristol's sports pavilion, resulting in revenge attacks on the Suffragettes' headquarters on Queens Road.

- Postcards showing damage to the pavilion (ref. [43207/22/19/22](#)) and the Suffragettes' premises (ref. [43207/22/19](#), items /17 to /21)
- Newspaper clippings and photograph of the headquarters (ref. [44104/3](#), [44104/4](#))
- Letters written in response by the principal of the Merchant Venturers' Technical College (ref. [SMV/5/5/4/50](#))

- Notes by a Dr Lynch (ref. [InfoBox/37/33](#))

Trade unions and labour movements

Bristol Teachers' Association, 1871-1982 (ref. [32225](#))

Includes minute books, annual reports and year books.

Bristol Trades Council and related material, 1794-2018 (ref. [32080](#))

Administrative, financial, illustrative, historical and printed material related to the Bristol Trades Council, Trades Council Conference, Trades Union Congress, individual trades unions, Bristol Independent Labour Party and Bristol Labour Party.

Minutes of socialist and trade unionist movements in Bristol, 1889-1979 (ref. [45639](#))

Includes records of the Workers Organising Committee, the Tin [and Iron] Plate Workers Union and National Union of Sheet Metal Workers & Braziers.

Papers of the early trades union movement in Bristol, 1881-1951 (ref. [27161](#))

Includes minutes of the Dock, Wharf and Riverside Union, including for meetings attended by Ernest Bevin

Records of the Bristol Municipal Officers' Association / Bristol Branch of the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO), 1913-1932 (ref. [46126](#)) Minutes.

British Pensioners & Trade Union Action Association, 1982-2003 (ref. [42693](#))

Minutes and correspondence related to the Bristol branch.

Records of Ben Tillett (1860-1943), Trade Unionist, 1930s-1940s (ref. [45992](#))

Correspondence from Tillett to Walter Roe of Bedminster.

Business collections sometime contain material relating to dealings with trade unions. For example:

C J King and Sons (Holdings) Limited, steam tug company, 1841-1985 (ref. [40095](#))

Particularly relevant are [40095/C/18b](#), [40095/E/1-2](#), [40095/Pr](#)

Port of Bristol Authority, 1695-2009 (ref. [PBA](#))

Particularly relevant are [PBA/Corp/Co/22/2](#) (items 22-56) and [PBA/Mgt/St/4](#).

Co-operative societies

Bristol and District Co-operative Society, 1875-1994 (ref. [41233](#))

Minutes, correspondence, employee records, financial records, legal documents, printed material, film and photographs.

Records of the Women's Cooperative Movement, 1918-1967 (ref. [40209](#))

Accounts and subscription records from various branches.

Abolition of slavery: anti-slavery views

Estlin papers, 1788-1851 (ref. [17562](#))

Anti-slavery papers and prints collected by John Bishop Estlin, including a leaflet issued by the Plymouth Committee with a diagram of a ship packed with enslaved Africans, engraved by T Deeble of Bristol (ref. [17562/1](#)).

Mary Carpenter's 'Poetical Extract Book', 1836-1875 (ref. [12693/20](#))

Contains extracts by several prominent abolitionists and reformers, such as the former slave William Wells Brown, and a portrait of runaway slave Ellen Craft with an entry by her husband William Craft.

Parliamentary report on the slave trade, 1789 (ref. [08527](#))

Including the number of enslaved people transported on voyages from the African Coast to the West Indies, evidence from merchants involved in the trade, configuration of slave bunks on a ship, Bristol muster rolls and diagrams of collars and boards used to restrain enslaved people in bringing them to the ships.

Abolition of slavery: pro-slavery views

Records of the Society of Merchant Venturers, 1788-1789 (ref. [SMV/7/2/1/15](#))

Papers and petitions against the abolition of the slave trade.

Papers of Henry Bright re slavery in the West Indies, c1830-c1833 (ref. [11168/73](#))

Henry Bright was a slave trader, an MP and several times the mayor of Bristol.

Abolition of slavery: 1830 Parliamentary election

Papers related to the 1830 Parliamentary election, when the abolition of slavery in British colonies was a key issue during this election.

Sources include [8033](#), [41593/E](#) [item 20 onwards], [Postcards/149/1](#) and [13847/55](#) which all document a divisive debate.

For further sources on the abolition of slavery, see our [guide to African-Caribbean sources](#).

Racial equality: The Bristol Bus Boycott

The Bristol Bus Boycott in 1963 was the UK's the nation's first black-led campaign against racial discrimination. The campaigners successfully overturned the Bristol Omnibus Company's refusal to employ people from ethnic minorities on buses.

Records relating to the boycott are limited, but we hold personal papers about the lives of these key participants:

Paul Stephenson, 1963-2007 (ref. [42840](#))

Newspaper clippings, correspondence and photographs.

Roy Hackett, 1955–2007 (ref. [43743](#))

Papers on the West Indian Cricket Club and other community involvement, photographs

Guy Reid-Bailey, 1970s-2000s (ref. [43745](#))

Photographs

Find out more about the Bristol Bus Boycott on the [Bristol Museums' website](#).

Racial equality: Racial equality organisations

Action for Southern Africa, c1950-2001 (ref. [41242](#))

Originally the Bristol Anti-Apartheid Movement. Records include minutes, reports, correspondence, membership records, financial records, printed material, film and photographs.

Bristol Racial Equality Council, 1937-2006 (ref. [43129](#))

Includes minutes, reports, correspondence, financial records and an extensive library of publications, reports and cuttings on rights and equalities themes (ref. [43129/Lib](#)).

LGBTQ collections

For further material, see our [guide to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer history sources](#).

Early criminal prosecutions in police, court and prison records (including refs. [Pol](#), [JQS](#), [JMag](#), [JQS/GD](#)):

Male homosexual activity was illegal in the UK until 1967, while female homosexuality was legal but not socially acceptable. This means that most evidence of the lives of LGBTQ people before then comes from records of prosecutions of gay men.

Records of Charles Beaton relating to various organisations and charities, 1975-2001 (ref. [45248](#))

Includes records relating to Action Against Homophobic Hate Crimes, the Aled Richards Trust, the Avon and Somerset Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative, Bristol Council for Voluntary Service, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (Bristol) and the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Bristol Gay Centre, 1976-2013 (ref. [40765](#))

Administrative records, correspondence, financial records, minutes, and newsletters.

Bristol Gay Switchboard, 1976-2011 (ref. [45120](#))

Administrative, financial, operational, photographs and printed material.

Records related to LGBTQ groups in Bristol, 1983-2015 (ref. [44881](#))

Material gathered by an anonymous activist related to organisations including Gay West, Amicus, Bristol Gay Centre, the Aled Richards Trust, Avon Pride the Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual (LGB) Forum and OutStories Bristol.

Freedom Youth, 1995-2016 (ref. [45795](#))

Administrative, financial and illustrative material.

Other campaigns and pressure groups

The Western Temperance League, 1836-1982 (ref. [41001](#))

Records of this organisation (later the Western Alcohol and Drugs Education Service) and other local temperance leagues, including minutes, reports, financial records, printed material and photographs.

First World War: anti-conscription and conscientious objectors, c1913-1918 (ref. [32080/TC8/2](#))

Literature within the records of the Bristol Trades Council.

National Campaign for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, 1961-2001 (ref. [42112](#))

Personal files relating to the Bristol branch, including minutes, correspondence, newsletters and newspaper clippings.

Bristol Solidarity with Latin America Campaign, 1979 - 1990 (ref. [41563](#))

Minutes, correspondence, newsletters and newspaper clippings.

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN), 1979-2006 (ref. [43710](#))

Minutes, reports, correspondence, photographs and audio-visual material.

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), 1980-1984 (ref. [42847](#))

Newsletters from the Bristol branch.

Our Common Future and North South Forum groups, 1997-2006 (ref. [45648](#))

Minutes, agendas and newsletters related to campaigns on various environmental and welfare themes.

Other sources in Bristol

The University of Bristol Special Collections hold extensive political material, including records of Liberal organisations, a large collection of campaign literature and thousands of political pamphlets and books.

The Feminist Archive South (also based at the university's Special Collections) holds an extensive archive of material documenting the second wave of feminism, both nationally and internationally, c1960-2000.