

BRISTOL

BRISTOL'S origin as a town and its astonishing later growth, physical and economic, are unusual and differ in many ways from that of other pre-eminent English cities. Only the further comparative study of the development of towns, as yet in its infancy, will reveal in full the differences. Its early history is also bedevilled by the extreme scarcity of historical sources and the difficulty of obtaining archaeological evidence in so thickly inhabited an area, but its main outlines can be traced. From being a small royal stronghold or *burh* on the north bank of the Avon in the late Saxon period it passed after the Conquest into the hands of powerful feudatories. By the mid-twelfth century, when the Earl of Gloucester, sometimes called Earl of Bristol, was its lord it had become in contemporary opinion 'a celebrated city' and one of the richest in the kingdom. So rich and strong was it with its new Norman castle that after 1183 when John, then Count of Mortain obtained the Gloucester Earldom by marriage, the Crown never relinquished its lordship of the Castle or the town. Henceforward Bristol remained a favoured royal borough and royal pressure assisted it to extend its sway over the wealthy baronial lands south of the Avon, particularly the fees of the Lords of Berkeley and of the Knights Templars. King John's charter of 1188 began the process of unification by including the fees within the 'liberties of Bristol' and with the charter of 1331 the process was virtually completed. So it was that in 1373 Bristol was able to obtain for itself the distinction, as yet unknown outside London, of being created a County with jurisdictional rights over seven hundred and fifty-five acres.

Although Bristol escaped very largely the severe depression suffered by many important towns in the fifteenth century, it had lost its lead over Norwich at least by the opening decades of the next century. Nevertheless, its elevation to the status of a City and a Bishopric by Henry VIII was a testimony to its continued importance. Not, however, until the second half of the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth was it to begin to enjoy once again the prosperity and pre-eminence of its earlier days. Then it was not only acclaimed as the first city in the kingdom after London, but it had become a regional capital with a position in the west comparable to London's in the east. Its trading connexions spread from Iceland to the Mediterranean, from Africa to the American continent and the West Indies; it was an *entrepôt* for the exchange of goods from the Channel to the Trent, and an industrial town before the Age of the Industrial Revolution.¹

The successive phases of its physical growth were equally complex and dramatic. Here again the deficiency of our knowledge of the medieval town makes the picture incomplete in detail though the general lines of growth are reasonably clear. The Saxon *burh* on its rocky mound of about twenty acres was encircled by the waters of the Frome and the Avon except on the eastern approach from Barton. Here on the site of a Saxon suburb the Norman Castle was built soon after the Conquest. In the next century and a half there is no doubt that suburban growth was

rapid. Some of this very probably was a natural consequence of the attraction of Bristol's markets and fairs and of the presence of rich religious houses, but much (more in all likelihood than is known with certainty) was deliberately planned as independent settlements with their own market and burgesses by the feudal landowners – notably the Earls of Gloucester, the Lords of Berkeley and the Knights Templars, all in the vanguard of town-founding elsewhere. On the Earl's land to the east and north-east of the Castle, the early lay-out of the streets, as crudely depicted in the first Elizabethan plan of the town, has all the signs of overall planning – indications that are confirmed in the case of the Broadmead area by the chance survival of a charter mentioning the 'new borough of the meadow'. South of the Avon the regular plan, taken in conjunction with the written evidence indicates piecemeal but controlled development in the twelfth century along and between the three roads fanning out southwards from the Bridge. In the 1240s came the great public works which gave the royal borough a new deep harbour and quays, a new stone bridge, and an enlargement of the walled area. At the same time the feudal fees on the south bank were enclosed by a wall. So it was that by 1300, if not earlier, the main street pattern of Bristol as it was to be described by William of Worcester in the 1470s was already fixed.²

Little or no extension of the built-up area, apart from probable (but largely unrecorded) cottage building on waste land within and without the walls, particularly in the eastern suburb outside Lawford's Gate, seems to have been made until the mid-seventeenth century, when more regularized expansion began in several directions, especially to the north on St Michael's Hill. It was the next century, however, that saw the really spectacular advances into the outskirts, to Hotwells, and even to the village of Clifton. The residential squares, terraces and streets then planned which spread beyond the city's official limits have made Georgian and Regency Bristol famous. The clue to the city's growth is not far to seek: it lay both initially and later in its exceptional natural advantages. Unlike York or Exeter, Canterbury or Winchester or other ancient outstanding cities Bristol owed little to Rome, to the church, or to the Saxon administrative system: it was never a Roman city, nor was it the site of an ancient bishopric as was Worcester in whose diocese it originally lay, nor of a famous Benedictine Abbey, nor was it an early Saxon shire town. On the contrary it owed almost everything to its geographical situation and to the geological structure of its neighbourhood. It was, as an eighteenth-century observer neatly put it, destined by nature for trade, for commerce, and for manufacture.

In the first place, the value of Bristol's position at the junction of the Severn Estuary, with its exceptional tidal force, and a network of rivers cannot be over-emphasized. From Paleolithic times when there were settlements on the Lower Avon to the pre-Roman Iron Age, the Bristol Channel, the Severn and the Avon dominated settlement and trade. Towards the end of the Neolithic period axeheads of greenstone, prob-

¹ See below pp. 3–6 and Appendix III (c) etc.; *Charters* (1) 78, 146–65, (2) 40–41; and map 5; 'Original Documents' in *BGAS* lvi (1934), 171–2; *Cal. Chart. R* ii, 82, *Charters* (2), 24 (Earl of Bristol and honour of).

² See map 3. Wm Smith's plan (BM Sloane MS 2596, f. 77) is reproduced in S. J. Jones, *The Growth of Bristol* (Institute of British Geographers, Publ. no. 11 (1946), 67). The area of the walled town N. of the Avon, including the Castle in c.1300 was c.60 acres and that of the fees S. of the Avon was c.70: *cf. inf.* Col. W. H. Johns.

ably from the stone-axe factory sites of Cornwall, required mainly for woodland clearance, had been traded up the Severn Estuary and the Avon; and later came that momentous event when the 'blue stones' from the Prescelly Hills in Pembrokeshire were perhaps transported up the Channel and the Avon and Frome rivers on their way to Stonehenge. During the pre-Roman Iron Age, the Avon Gorge by which the site of medieval Bristol was approached was guarded by the hill-forts on the carboniferous limestone hills of Stokeleigh and Burwalls on the west and Clifton on the east.³

From medieval times to the eighteenth century it was precisely this same favourable position at the junction of the Channel and a network of rivers that ensured Bristol's economic growth. It was by the Bristol Avon and the Channel that contact was made with the Viking colonies in Ireland and that Bristol came to dominate the Irish and South Wales trade, to penetrate the European markets and later the American continent, which her wealth and commercial experience as well made her peculiarly suited to exploit. It was the Severn, the Wye, the Bristol and Warwickshire Avons that encouraged the town's great inland trade with the Midlands: fifteenth-century petitions to Parliament stress the importance of the port's river trade with all manner of burghs in Gloucestershire, and Worcestershire, the Marches, and Wales; in the sixteenth century the City Council declared that the up-country creeks from Berkeley to Worcester had belonged to it time out of mind and that the chief source of grain and victuals was by the Severn as far as Shrewsbury; and so too in the seventeenth century, after the Restoration, the serious efforts made to improve navigation encouraged still more active trade on the whole river network.⁴

It was precisely again the advantageous situation of the port that made Bristol at various periods in her history so strategically and politically important. It explains why the Conqueror entrusted the defence of the place to the Bishop of Coutances, one of his most powerful supporters; and later, after the death of Robert FitzHamon, Lord of Glamorgan, to another mighty baron, Robert, Earl of Gloucester; why it became under the Earl the centre of the resistance of the Empress Matilda to Stephen and why a chronicler could call the war between them the 'war of Bristol'. Under John the Castle was made a royal administrative centre for Irish affairs and began its function as a royal military headquarters in times of strife. During the political troubles of Henry III's reign the king stayed there and made it the centre of his party in the West; in the struggles of Edward II's reign it played once again a prominent role, and finally in the Civil War of the seventeenth century both Parliamentarians and Royalists strove for its mastery, for it was the key to Wales, Ireland, and foreign parts.⁵

The town's second great geographical advantage was its position between contrasting areas rich in agricultural, mineral and industrial products. These encouraged the growth of Bristol's own manufactures and of its function as a market for the exchange of goods between the Midlands, Wales, and the West of England. In this its road system, with all its drawbacks, must always have been an adjunct to its waterways from the time when the *burh* was a frontier town on the borders of Wessex and Mercia. The old Roman road from *Abona* (Sea Mills) to Bath ran close by, in fact through the suburbs of modern Bristol; the pattern of the

town's early streets inside its defences clearly indicates the importance of the east-west route and the north-south one intersecting at a central Carfax. In the thirteenth century there is written evidence that the roads to the assize towns of Gloucester and Ilchester, to Cirencester by way of the new towns of Chipping Sodbury and Tetbury, to Oxford and London, to name but a few, were well used. There was the usual deterioration in the late Middle Ages, but at least by the second half of the seventeenth century great improvements were being made. The first scientific survey of the English road system, Ogilby's road map, shows eight routes linking Bristol with all the principal towns in the Midlands and the South and West of England. Vast improvements followed with the start in 1726 of the series of Turnpike Acts which greatly facilitated the comfort and speed of travel.⁶

A third incomparable advantage was the geological structure of the area of the County of the City and of its region which was exceptionally varied. The central zone of the city, drained by the Frome, rests on Keuper Marls and New Red Sandstone of the Triassic series; to the west rises the Millstone Grit of Brandon Hill and the Carboniferous Limestone of Durdham Downs, while to the east there is more Millstone Grit and the western portion of the Coal Measure series. Both the city and its region are rich in mineral resources. From the earliest times its sandstone and limestone rock and its minerals were quarried and mined. It was lead that brought the Romans to the neighbourhood; and in the early Middle Ages it is known that it was being worked on the Gloucestershire land of St Augustine's Abbey. Stone from quarries on Durdham Downs, Brislington, Dundry and elsewhere in the region was used locally and exported; there were also abundant supplies of coal, copper ore, and zinc close at hand. Other advantages were the surrounding forests, especially Kingswood, which provided the raw material for tanning and ship-building; the rivers rich in salmon and a variety of other fish; the clear water and warm mineral springs. From its hinterland, too, came some of the world's finest fleeces for export and for the town's cloth manufacture. So when the cloth industry declined Bristol, because of its many natural assets, was easily able to develop other long-established industries – soap-making of fine quality as there was abundant soft water, and ship-building, and to introduce new ones, such as sugar-refining, glass- and china-making, as well as heavy industries of all kinds (including the exploitation of its own coal fields). All these were to bring it world fame.⁷

ORIGINS

Bristol's history goes back only to the late Saxon period. Despite the many traces of occupation in the immediate neighbourhood from Paleolithic times onwards, no decisive evidence, documentary or archaeological, has yet been found for the existence of a settlement on the central site of Bristol itself before the eleventh century. The first definite clue is the existence of a number of silver pennies with the mint mark *Bricgstow* – the Anglo-Saxon name from which the modern form Bristol

³ See below pp. 19, 22 and maps 3, 4. I am indebted to Mr L. V. Grinsell for the above summary of Bristol's pre-history; see also his *Prehistoric Bristol: the pre-history of the Lower Bristol Avon* (BBHA, 1969); *Guide Cat. to the S. Western Prehistoric Collections* (City Museum, 1968) and to the *Romano-British Collection*; for a Roman 3rd-century settlement, possibly part of a villa complex, excavated on the Grey Friars' site outside the walls see M. W. Ponsford in *Bristol Arch. Research Group*, 4 no. 8 (1973). The tidal force of the Avon was also of course a great advantage for most of the port's history.

⁴ *Rot. Parl.* ii, 312a, 372a; iii, 475b, 665b; iv, 332b, 351a, 379b; *Close R.* 1237–42, 378; Lat. i, 45; T. S. Willan, *River Navigation in England 1600–1750* (1936), 37–8, 120–3 etc.

⁵ See below *passim*.

⁶ See map 1. For information on turnpikes the Editors are indebted to Miss E. Ralph and Mr R. Dunning, Editor of the Somersetshire *VCH*. For the Roman roads see I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (1955), 126; for medieval boroughs and market-towns see H. P. R. Finberg, *Gloucestershire Studies* (1957), 63; *VCH Som.* ii, 288; M. Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages* (1967); R. A. Donkin in the *New Hist. Geography*, ed. H. C. Darby (1973), 124 etc. For communications see *ibid.* 374 and R. H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society* . . . (1966), 172; Gough Map c. 1360, ed. E. J. S. Parsons as *The Map of Great Britain* . . . (1958); OS *Seventeenth-Century Britain* (1930); J. Ogilby, *Itinerarium Angliae*, 1675; J. Cary, *New and Correct Eng. Atlas*, 1793. For the active trade along the medieval roads see below pp. 6, 9. The numerous religious houses in the region that had house property in the town provides indirect evidence for their use of the Bristol market etc.; trade was encouraged by grants to them of quittance of toll. For Defoe's comment see below p. 22.

⁷ For the geology of Bristol and the region see S. J. Jones, *op. cit.* 58–9; M. L. K. Curtis *et al.* in *BAC*, 3 sqq. For early mining etc. see G. B. Grundy, *Saxon Charters . . . of Glouc.* (1935), 227 (lead mines at Stoke Bishop, 883 A.D.); *Close R.* 1237–42, 226–7; *ibid.* 1247–51, 526; *BAC*, 269 etc.

is derived.⁸ The pennies were struck by six different moneyers. All belong to Cnut's first issue, which has been ascribed to the years 1017–1023, but all appear to have been struck when this issue was well under way.⁹ It would seem, then, that there was an active mint at Bristol round about 1020, and that it was of recent origin. And since the minting of coins was not allowed except in a *burh*, Bristol presumably then had the status of a *burh* and was probably possessed of a market and some degree of trade.¹⁰ Surviving written records contain no mention of Bristol until 1051, when it makes its first appearance in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as a port that was evidently used by sea-going ships sailing to and from Ireland. In that year, the Chronicle relates, Harold and his brother Leofwine, banished by Edward the Confessor, went to Bristol and took ship there for Ireland. Later it tells how Harold made Bristol his base for a naval expedition round the coast of Wales. By 1067 Bristol was clearly a strongly fortified *burh*, for in that year its citizens (*burhwaru*) successfully resisted a determined assault by an invading force from Ireland, under Harold's sons, which attempted, but in vain, to storm the defences. The Domesday Survey suggests that in 1086 it was economically flourishing, and reveals also that it was situated within the royal manor of Barton (*in Bertune apud Bristou*), but as a distinct entity with its own community of burgesses (*burgenses*) who answered for it to the king.¹¹

The site occupied by this burgess community was a superb one, strategically and commercially. At the extreme west tip of the manor of Barton, Bristol lay at the junction of the Avon and the Frome, between the two rivers, on a headland round which the Frome wound its way before joining the Avon. Within the loop thus formed at the confluence of the two rivers the original *burh* stood, on a well-drained rocky mound of New Red Marls, some twenty acres in extent, rising to thirty or forty feet above the surrounding marsh and woods, almost completely encircled as by a natural moat.¹² Thus easily defended from attacks by land it was also protected from attacks by sea by the long narrow gorge through which the Avon made its way to the Bristol Channel. Yet, far as it was from the open sea, it enjoyed exceptionally high tides owing to the sudden contraction of the Severn where the Avon joins it, and by these tides, which rose sometimes over forty feet, ships were swiftly carried up into Bristol's sheltered harbour. Moreover it lay at the lowest point at which the Avon could conveniently and profitably be bridged, and thus it commanded an important river crossing.

Exactly how and when Bristol began will probably never be known. But at least it is clear that it first emerged as a place of some consequence soon after the year 1000, and that it grew very rapidly in the first century thereafter. Its emergence at that point of time need cause no surprise, for it undoubtedly reflects both the remarkable development of the West of England during the golden age of the West Saxon monarchy in the

late tenth century and the startling new opportunities for overseas trade created by the growth of Scandinavian sea-power; this reached its furthest limits in about the year 1000, when the Vikings established a foothold on the shores of the New World and their trade routes stretched eastwards to the shores of the Caspian Sea. Amongst the wealthiest of all the Scandinavian trading centres were those they had founded round the coasts of Ireland, notably at Limerick, Waterford and Dublin. These carried on an active commerce with France, with the Norse colonies strung out along the coasts of Scotland, with the Orkney and Shetland Isles, with Iceland, with the Scandinavian homelands, and thence with Eastern Europe and the Orient. Clearly there was need of a port, safe and commodious, which would link them also with the prosperous West of England. This Bristol was admirably fitted to do.¹³

For the first century or so of its existence, in the late Saxon and Norman period, Bristol's overseas trade would seem to have been directed mainly west and north, towards Ireland and the Viking realms beyond. Thus William of Malmesbury, describing the vale of Gloucester, which he knew well, in a book finished in 1125, wrote that there was in that vale 'a most celebrated place called Bristol, with a port into which came ships from Ireland and Norway and other overseas lands.' During this period her merchants made their wealth in large part through the slave trade. For slaves were then one of the most profitable articles of exchange between northern Europe and the Moslem world, and they were also in demand in the Christian west. Every important centre of Viking trade had its slave market, and Bristol was no exception. There might be seen long rows of men, women and children, roped together, bought up 'from all over England for sale in Ireland.' It was this 'long-established' traffic, as William of Malmesbury describes it, which the saintly Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester (1062–1095), dared to attack, spending two or three months at a time in Bristol and preaching against it there every Sunday. Yet the trade continued into the twelfth century, and as late as 1170 English slaves were still to be found in Ireland.¹⁴

THE NORMAN TOWN

By the end of the Norman period Bristol had grown far beyond the bounds of the original Saxon *burh*. Dominating the town was the Castle, which for two centuries gave added importance to Bristol as a major military stronghold. Its early history is obscure. In its original form it may well have been the work of the warrior bishop Geoffrey of Coutances, who at the time of the Domesday Survey held a position in Bristol that entitled him to receive what seems likely to have been a third of the royal revenues due from the town. When Geoffrey joined the baronial revolt against William Rufus in 1088 it was already in existence, and it became one of the rebels' headquarters. From it Geoffrey's troops sallied forth to burn Bath, once leading city on the river Avon, and to raid royal manors in Somerset and Wiltshire.¹⁵ This '*castrum fortissimum*', as Symeon of Durham described it when writing about the rebellion, was of the typical early Norman motte and bailey type. It was built on the isthmus between the Avon and the Frome immediately to the east of the Saxon *burh*, thus guarding the only land entry into the town, like, as has been said, to a stopper in a bottle. The motte itself was raised on a rocky sandstone eminence at the point where the two rivers came very close to one another; it was surrounded by a deep ditch, and was doubtless crowned by a tower, and if at first this was merely a wooden structure, as

⁸ The origin of the name *Brigstow* is uncertain. *Stow* meaning place is used mostly of places where people assemble but also, especially on the Celtic border, of holy places or churches. The Old English *brycg* meaning bridge is not common as a first element; it is cognate with Old Norse *brygga* meaning quay or jetty, as in Filey Brigg.

⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Coins* (1961), ed. R. H. M. Dolley, 149; and see Dolley in *British Numismatic Jnl* xxviii (1958), 92–9, *Numismatic Chron.* 6th ser. xx (1960), 191–3, and Dolley, *The Hiberno-Norse Coins in the British Museum* (1966), 122 sqq. Dolley (*ex inf.* 1971) is of the opinion that earlier coins with the mint mark BRIC cannot with any confidence be ascribed to Bristol and that the Bristol mint opened c. 1020.

¹⁰ H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (1962), 122, 132–3.

¹¹ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. D. Whitelock (1961), 120, 136, 148 (Bristol occurs only in the D version of the Chronicle); *Dom. Bk* i, 163. For the best account of the early development of Bristol and for an interpretation of the Domesday valuation of Bristol, see Cronne in *Charters* (2), 21–2.

¹² For evidence of a late Saxon town on this site see below but the precise position of the Saxon *burh* and the line of its defences has yet to be determined.

¹³ The coin evidence clearly reflects the growing importance of Bristol and the West of England in Anglo-Irish trade from the early 11th century, and the comparative decline in the importance of Chester: see Dolley in *Numismatic Chron.* and *Hiberno-Norse Coins*, as above n. 9.

¹⁴ Wm of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (RS), 291; *Vita Wulfstani*, ed. R. R. Darlington (Camd. Soc. 3rd ser. xl (1928)), 42–4; *Annales de Margam* in *Annales Monastici* (RS) i, II (sub 1124); Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera* (RS) v, 258.

¹⁵ *Dom. Bk* i, 163; *Charters* (2), 21; Florence of Worcester, *Chronicon*, ed. B. Thorpe, ii, 24; *Anglo-Saxon Chron.* ed. Whitelock, 166.

was usual, there are indications that before long it was of stone.¹⁶

After, or possibly before, Geoffrey's death in 1093, the Castle and lordship of Bristol passed into the hands of that '*riche, gentil, et noble baron*' Robert FitzHamon, one of the few barons who had remained faithful to William Rufus.¹⁷ Conqueror of Glamorgan, lord of vast estates in Gloucestershire and elsewhere, and princely benefactor of Tewkesbury Abbey, which he virtually refounded, FitzHamon was one of the mightiest magnates of the time. After his death in 1107 his daughter and heiress Mabel was married to Robert, bastard son of Henry I; Robert thereupon succeeded to this great inheritance and was created Earl of Gloucester by Henry. Once again Bristol had as its feudal lord one of the most powerful, and one of the most enlightened, men in the land. Statesman and warrior, though he is said to have declared that he served Venus more willingly than Mars, and patron of learning and the church, Robert 'greatly adorned his lordship', as even his enemies recognized, 'restoring peace and quietness everywhere'.¹⁸ Bristol Castle became his principal residence in England, and probably the administrative headquarters of his honour, and he proceeded completely to transform it, so that he came to be regarded as its real builder.¹⁹ The motte with its tower was demolished, and in its place there rose a massive square keep, built with Caen stone – 'the flower of all the keeps of England' as it was called by a thirteenth-century chronicler.²⁰ In the civil war that broke out when Robert, in 1138, renounced his allegiance to Stephen to champion the cause of Matilda and her infant son Henry, Bristol Castle became the headquarters of Matilda's supporters in the west and their most impregnable stronghold. So formidable was it that Stephen, laying siege to it, withdrew in despair. There he himself was once held captive, and there the young Henry was brought, when nine years old, to spend some fourteen months under his uncle's guardianship. Thus throughout the anarchy Bristol remained secure, thanks to its splendid defences natural and artificial, while the soldiery of the Castle and of the opposing forces looted and ravaged the surrounding country with impunity. For the townsfolk business must have been brisk indeed as they catered for the needs of the throng of people living in the Castle precincts – from the greatest in the land down to servants, labourers, and bands of mercenaries. Bristol was now unquestionably one of the principal cities of the realm. So impressed with it was the author of the *Gesta Stephani* (a contemporary of Earl Robert) that he broke off from his chronicle of Stephen's doings to describe the town as he saw it then, at the close of the Norman period. 'Bristol', he began, 'is almost the richest city of all in the country, receiving merchandise by sailing-ships from lands near and far. It lies in the most fertile

part of England and is by its very situation the most strongly fortified of all its cities'.²¹

The centre and focal point of the town itself was the original *burh* up on the headland, surrounded by a wall. No reliable evidence is at present available as to when this wall was built, and how much of it was of stone in Norman times, but its course is easily recognizable since the line of the wall was substantially preserved in the streets which it once skirted. The area within this early wall was divided into four quarters by the intersection of the four main streets – High Street, Broad Street, Wynch Street, and Corn Street. These terminated in the four main gateways: St Nicholas' Gate, St John's Gate, Old Gate ('Aldgate'), and St Leonard's Gate. It was a tiny area, scarcely more than three hundred yards across, very much the same size at that time as Bath. An outer town wall was later built on the north of the town, perhaps by Robert of Gloucester, to enclose the low-lying ground there between the headland and the Frome. This ran from New Gate to Frome Gate, closely following the Frome the whole way, and thus making doubly secure the water defences on that side. From Frome Gate it seems most likely that it took a sharp turn south to join the old wall near St John's Gate.²² Thence the old wall itself ran closely above an original course of the Frome, which circled south-east round the headland until it reached the Avon: between the Frome and the wall, at the foot of the ramparts, lay a street which from St Giles' to St Leonard's Gate was called Pyle Street, or 'le Pylle' – a name which suggests that the Frome was here navigable, at least for small boats.²³ Bridges on each side of the town spanned the Avon and the Frome, and on these there was 'constant traffic to and fro'. Much the biggest must have been that over the Avon, commonly called 'Bristol Bridge'; it and its successor on the same site remained the one and only bridge across the river into Somerset until the nineteenth century. The Frome, on the contrary, was already crossed by several bridges by the later Middle Ages. Undoubtedly the most important of these, and perhaps the only one in Norman times, was Frome Bridge, by Frome Gate; this was strongly fortified.²⁴ Fifteenth-century tradition puts Bristol's first quay on the Avon above the bridge. If in fact it was there in Norman times ships must usually have loaded and discharged their cargoes downstream into lighters, for few of them could have made the passage of the bridge. Perhaps, however, quays were already built below the bridge before the early thirteenth century, when they are recorded there on both banks of the Avon.²⁵

Within the town shops and dwelling houses must usually have been timber structures; stone houses certainly existed in Bristol by the reign

¹⁶ Symeon of Durham, *Hist. Regum* (RS), ii, 215; and see below Appendix III (c) by M. W. Ponsford.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Gaimar, *History of the English* (RS) i, 271. Geoffrey of Coutances seems to have been included in the general pardon after the revolt of 1088, and may therefore have continued to hold the Castle until his death, but this is uncertain.

¹⁸ Gaimar, *Hist.* ii, 203; *Gesta Stephani*, ed K. R. Potter (1955), 8; Wm of Malmesbury *Hist. Novella*, ed. Potter (1955), 1, and *Gesta Regum*, dedication; Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium* (Camd. Soc. 1st ser. 1 (1850)), 205; A. Morey and C. N. L. Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and his Letters* (1965), 116–7, 142–3.

¹⁹ See e.g. LRB i, 207 where he is spoken of in 1318 as '*fundator . . . castri Bristollie*'.

²⁰ *History of the King's Works*, ed. H. M. Colvin, ii (1963), 577 sqq; Robert of Gloucester, *Chronicle* (RS) ii, 636 and below, Appendix III (c). Bristol Castle was certainly Robert's principal residence from 1142–6, and he died and was buried there in 1147. There is no certain proof that it was his *caput honoris*. For its position in the time of his son William see R. B. Patterson, *Earldom of Gloucester Charters* (1973), 4 and n.2, 28–9, no. 188 and n.; F. M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism* (1932), 68–9, 266 and 2nd edn (1961), 70, 267.

²¹ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. Potter, 37–8, 44, 75; Gervase of Canterbury, *Chronicles* (RS) i, 125. Henry came to England at the close of 1142: *EHR* xlvii (1932), 447 sqq.; cf. *ibid.* lxi (1946), 81.

²² See map 2. Seyer (i, 271–2) thought it most probable that it ended at St Giles' Gate; Wm Worcester makes no mention of the wall beyond Frome Gate. The stone foundations of the Pithay portion of this outer wall were found in 1897: *BGAS* xlviii, 255 sqq. So far excavations have led to a provisional 13th-century date being given, on admittedly slender evidence, to the remains of the walls in Wine St and between St Nicholas and St Leonard Gates: *Med. Arch.* ii (1958), 197, and cf. Marshall in *BGAS* lxx, 30–34.

²³ J. W. Sherborne (*The Port of Bristol*, BBHA (1965) pp. 5–6 and map) gives good reasons for preferring Wm of Worcester's opinion about the original course of the Frome to that of Seyer. See below map 7 and for 'le Pylle' *Wm Worc.* 153 [Dallaway's version has been used since it is more accessible than J. Nasmith's edn 1778].

²⁴ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. Potter, 44. The bridge over the Avon was described simply as 'Bristol bridge' (*pons de Bristollo*) in a royal charter, 1164–70, and in a charter of Robert FitzHarding: *Charters* (1), 4–5 and (2), 33. For other bridges over the Frome see *Wm Worc.* 57, 142.

²⁵ *Wm Worc.* 60, 124; Sherborne, *op. cit.* 4. The basis of the 15th-century tradition may have been a mistaken belief that 'port', as in St Mary-le-Port, signified harbour, whereas in Saxon and early Norman times it merely denoted a place where trade was carried on.

of Henry II, but they were exceptional enough to be worthy of remark and no doubt stood out prominently among their fellows.²⁶ Still more prominent, however, must have been the churches. Like every Norman town of any consequence Bristol was liberally supplied with places of worship. Immediately to the east of the original *burh*, probably just outside its enclosing wall, stood St Peter's church. In late Norman times it had the reputation of being the oldest of Bristol's churches, and it may thus have been the church referred to in Domesday Book as existing in 1086.²⁷ Within the walls there were certainly four, and perhaps five, churches. Three, all unquestionably Norman, stood at the crossroads in the centre of the town: Christ Church (or Holy Trinity), whose original fabric dates back to Norman, if not to Saxon times; All Saints, whose massive Norman pillars may still be seen, and St Ewen's, now destroyed, which Earl Robert gave (1125–1147) to Thurstan the priest of Bristol. St Werburgh's nearby, now also demolished, was perhaps Norman.²⁸ In the south-east corner of the town stood St Mary-le-Port, which seems originally to have been a late Saxon or early Norman building, extended and perhaps rebuilt in the late Norman period.²⁹ Its various names – St Mary-le-Port, St Mary *in Foro*, and St Mary *in Burgo*, suggest a special association with the early borough and its trading centre. The street which runs alongside it and was called after it certainly existed in late Saxon times, though then, it seems, as an unpaved hollow-way; late Saxon as well as early Norman pottery has been found there, and near to it are traces of iron-smelting and leather-working and of late Saxon or early Norman wooden buildings. At its east end excavation has revealed traces of a ditch running across the line of the street and below the eleventh-century road; this may prove to be part of the defences of the late Saxon town.³⁰ It is impossible now to say which, if any, of these churches existed before the Norman Conquest, but it seems probable that in any event, as in the case of St Mary-le-Port, there was extensive rebuilding in late Norman times under those two great patrons of the church, Robert FitzHamon and Robert of Gloucester. The churches of St Nicholas, St Leonard, St John, and St Lawrence that crowned the four principal gateways of the town in the later Middle Ages, and that of St Giles over St Giles' Gate at the bottom of Small Street, may all have had their Norman, or even Saxon, predecessors, for gate churches elsewhere prove often to have been Saxon features. Certainly St Nicholas and St Leonard were there by 1154, and St John's by 1174.³¹ St John's still survives, with its tower and spire marking the gate, and its narrow nave standing along the town wall. The four quarters into which the town was divided by the four main streets were probably already organized during the Norman period into the four ancient wards, called respectively after the church of St Mary-le-Port and the three churches at the Carfax – Christ Church, All Saints, and St Ewen's.

While the Norman town remained firmly centred on this area within the walls it was by no means thus narrowly confined. Outside the defences, north, south, east and west, land had been occupied for building. East of the Castle lay a district known at least by Earl Robert's time as the *Feria*.³² Here, from the east gate of the Castle, on the main road to London, ran a wide street – the Market – which in fifteenth-century and later records is called the 'Old Market'; probably from the first it had been designed as an open market with space for booths and stalls, like many another broad market street in the new towns that were being laid out in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At least one burgage is recorded here in the twelfth century,³³ and it may well be that the establishment of a market was accompanied by the establishment of burgage holdings and the grant of certain borough privileges, as was common practice in the new towns of the period. Before long the district had a parish church, known variously as St Philip and St James or St James *de Feria*.³⁴ Thus the Bristol *Feria* may have owed its privileges either to Robert FitzHamon or to Robert of Gloucester.³⁵ North of the Castle, too, there was settlement. There at the base of the ascent leading up to Kingsdown, in full view from his Castle, Robert of Gloucester founded, sometime before 1137, his Benedictine Priory of St James, and in the Priory church he himself was buried.³⁶ Between the Priory and the Castle lay a broad open meadow, and here a 'new borough of the meadow' (*novum burgum de prato*) was founded, with the Priory church for its parish church, probably by Earl Robert or by his son William, who succeeded him in 1147; the first actual record of it is in a charter of Earl William.³⁷ North-west of the town, on a steep hill looking down towards Frome Gate, either Robert or his son built St Michael's church, which must surely have had its parishioners.³⁸

If suburban development east and north of the ancient borough owed much to the famous family that held the Castle and the feudal lordship of Bristol, development south and west owed no less to another remarkable family, but one of very different origin and background. The Hardings of Bristol were not warrior barons, conquering new realms on the frontiers, making and unmaking kings, nor were they builders of castles or dwellers within them. The first of whom there is record was Harding, reputedly the king's reeve in Bristol, who was evidently skilled in the law, for William of Malmesbury described him as fighting with forensic rather than military arts.³⁹ Harding lived in what was perhaps an unpretentious house in Baldwin Street. There his son Robert FitzHarding was brought up, and there he too lived after his father's death (c. 1115) until, aspiring to greater things, he built himself 'a great stone house by the

²⁶ See below. Stone houses were still remarked upon later: e.g. Bickley, *Deeds*, nos. 2, 4, 12.

²⁷ *Dom. Bk* i, 163: '*ecclesia de Briston*'. St Peter's was certainly in existence by 1107 (*Regesta* ii, no. 847); a charter of Bishop Simon of Worcester (1125–1150) refers to it as being by common repute '*primitivam et principalem omnium ecclesiarum de Bristo*' (W. de G. Birch, *Jnl Brit. Arch. Assoc.* xxxi, 289–90). It was the mother church of Mangotsfield and therefore presumably the parish church of Barton manor, of which Mangotsfield was a member (*Ann. Mon.* (RS), i, 81; cf. Dugdale *Mon.* ii, 79). The fact that it did not give its name to a ward strengthens C. S. Taylor's argument that it stood outside the original fortifications (*BGAS* xxxii, 206–7; so too does recent excavation of the 12th-century wall: see below Appendix III (c)). Taylor's still valuable survey of Bristol's churches needs to be supplemented and corrected.

²⁸ N and T, ii, 171–2, 249; Dugdale, *Mon.* ii, 70, 71; Taylor, *op. cit.* 209, 211; BAO P/St. E./A/I. Fragments of Norman capitals and columns were discovered below the site of St Ewen's in 1824.

²⁹ Taylor, *op. cit.* 211; *Med. Arch.* viii (1964), 249.

³⁰ *Med. Arch.* viii, 264–5, and see *ibid.* xiv, 156 for late Saxon buildings beneath the NE. corner of the Castle area.

³¹ The five gate churches were all on the direct line of the town wall and occupied its whole width of 27–28 ft: J. F. Nicholls, *BGAS* iii, 169; *Regesta* iii, no. 128 and Dugdale, *Mon.* ii, 75.

³² Birch, *op. cit.*, nos. 174, 175, 178; Patterson (as above n. 20), no. 180. The medieval Latin *feria* could denote either a fair or a market-place. Bristol's 13th-century Constables' accounts, when recording the profits of the weekly Saturday market and the annual Michaelmas fair, consistently use *feria* for the market and *nundine* for the fair; in 12th-century documents *feria* and *nundine* seem to be used indiscriminately for a fair (see e.g. *Cart. Glos.* i, 290–94, and Patterson, where the reference is clearly to the Michaelmas fair in nos. 37 and 180 and the Whitsun fair in no. 35 rather than to a market).

³³ Patterson, *op. cit.* no. 185; *BGAS* lvi, 171, no. 7, c. 1150 (half a *burgagium*); here and in no. 8 there is also a mention of land and houses in the *feria*.

³⁴ *Cartae et alia munimenta quae ad dominium de Glamorgancia pertinent*, ed. G. L. Clark (1910), i, 40 (1107); Dugdale, *Mon.* ii, 75; *Annales Monastici* (RS), i, 123. Its close connexion with the Castle is shown by a royal charter of 1384 (BAO 5139 (12)) stating that the advowson was held by the Crown as of the Castle of Bristol.

³⁵ Both FitzHamon and Robert of Gloucester granted borough privileges elsewhere, e.g. at Cardiff, Burford, and Tewkesbury: Patterson, *op. cit.* nos. 42, 43, 46.

³⁶ Knowles and Hadcock, 52; Leland, *Itin.* iv, 153; v, 88; Dugdale, *Mon.* iv, 335; N and T, ii, 41–2. The west front of the Priory church is of fine Norman work.

³⁷ Dugdale, *Mon.* iv, 335. The Latin '*de prato*' survives in an anglicized form in Broad Mead; cf. Earl William's foundation of the new borough of Newton outside Cardiff: Patterson, *op. cit.* no. 49.

³⁸ St Michael's occurs in 1174, as in the fee of Earl William: N and T, ii, 167.

³⁹ J. Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, ed. J. Maclean (1883), i, 19–20; Charters (2), 32 n. 2.

Frome'.⁴⁰ No doubt there were other houses in this district just outside the walls, and it was near here that St Stephen's church was built, close to Pyle Street, almost certainly in Norman times.⁴¹

Robert FitzHarding was evidently a man of immense wealth, and he was a staunch supporter of Robert of Gloucester, assisting him, probably financially, in his struggle on behalf of Matilda and the young Henry. Like any wise man of the age he invested in landed property, and among the estates which he acquired were two in close proximity to his native town – the manor of Billeswick immediately west of the town, and that of Bedminster south of the Avon in the county of Somerset.⁴² In the manor of Billeswick he chose a spot on slightly rising ground not 500 paces from his father's house and there founded an Abbey for Augustinian canons (1140–1148) that quite outdid in splendour Earl Robert's Priory of St James. Henry II once recalled that he had helped the Abbey in his early youth (*initio inventutis mee*), and perhaps when in Bristol as a boy he may have watched the builders at work upon it.⁴³ Certainly he must have been well acquainted with FitzHarding, who from the first had joined Robert of Gloucester in championing his cause, and before he had been a year on the throne he rewarded him for his services by granting him the forfeited lands of Roger of Berkeley. The building of the Abbey, which continued for many years, must have stimulated development in the vicinity, but much of the land nearby was marsh and actual evidence of new settlement in Norman times is slight. More promising as a development area was FitzHarding's other acquisition, across the bridge over the Avon. The eastern part of this area had been granted by Robert of Gloucester to the Order of the Knights Templars, founded in 1118; it came to be known as Temple Fee, and the Bristol Temple in time became the administrative centre of the Order's many lands in the West of England. There the Templars in due course built their own church and living quarters and rented out plots to others.⁴⁴ The western part became known as Redcliff Fee, and here there was good harbourage along the Avon on Redcliff Back. Further south, on Redcliff Hill, stood the church of St Mary Redcliff; its foundation goes back certainly as far as 1158, and most probably earlier, and at least by the end of the Norman period there must have been a considerable population in the area.⁴⁵ Redcliff Fee was in fact to prove so vigorous a growing point as almost to overshadow the ancient borough on the other side of the bridge.

THE LATE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

By the mid-twelfth century profound changes were coming over the economy of Europe. The great days of Viking enterprise were at an end; no more was heard of the far-off lands across the Atlantic; slavery and the slave-trade were fast disappearing in western Europe. But as Bristol was deprived of one of its chief sources of gain new and even more promising opportunities were opening the way to an immense expansion of its commerce, internal and external, and hence to an expansion of the city itself unparalleled until the eighteenth century. The economy of western Europe generally was entering upon a period of rapid growth as population increased, more and more land was brought under cultivation, and

manufactures were intensively developed. In Bristol's hinterland, far into the Midlands, new settlements were planted in hitherto desolate regions like the Forest of Arden. Local exchanges multiplied as numbers of little market towns were created where peasants as well as landlords could dispose of their surplus produce and buy what they needed. Sheep-farming was in full swing on the Cotswolds and on the Welsh Marches, fostered particularly by the new Cistercian monasteries founded in large numbers around the middle of the century.⁴⁶ Inter-regional trade was so quickened that increasingly certain areas tended to specialize in what could most profitably be produced there, as England specialized in the production of raw wool, Picardy in the production of woad, Aquitaine in viticulture, and Flanders in the manufacture of woollens, made largely from English wool: indeed woollen cloth from Flanders and north-east France, and to a lesser degree from England, now took the place of slaves in the traffic between north and south Europe.

Political circumstances, too, proved particularly favourable to Bristol. Henry II's marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine brought to England an overseas empire that included some of the most famous wine-producing districts of Europe, and by the thirteenth century Gascon wines had virtually captured the English market. Bordeaux replaced Rouen as the paramount wine port of Europe, and forged those close and friendly links with Bristol that have lasted into modern times.⁴⁷ Bristol now dominated the wine trade of the west of England. Thence wine was despatched far inland up the Severn and its tributaries, along the coasts of Wales and the shores of south-west England, to Ireland, and occasionally even by road to London.⁴⁸ King John, who ordered vast quantities of wine and was a discriminating purchaser, did not hesitate to deal with Bristol if good quality wines of some favoured Bordeaux merchant were to be had there; on one occasion he bought there for his own use no less than a hundred and twenty tuns (thirty thousand gallons) imported by Gascon merchants. Great churchmen and noblemen were also purchasers on a lavish scale. In one year alone, for instance, a hundred and seventeen tuns were brought to Bristol from Gascony for the Bishop of Worcester.⁴⁹ Large quantities of salt were also now coming to Bristol from salterns on the west coast of France.⁵⁰ Beyond Gascony new and fruitful contacts were being made with lands still further south in the Iberian peninsula. Bristol also had links with northern France and the Low Countries, and among the foreign traders regularly visiting the city, at least from the time of Henry II, were merchants from Amiens, Corbie and Nesle, which sold there the celebrated Picardy woad which had virtually a monopoly in the supply of this most essential dyestuff throughout England as well as in Flanders.⁵¹ Meanwhile new opportunities were also opening up in the west, for the English conquest of the greater part of Ireland in the later twelfth century had

⁴⁰ Smyth, *op. cit.* i, 14, 22, 35.

⁴¹ St Stephen's seems to have preceded St Leonard's, which was certainly founded by 1154: *Regesta* iii, no. 128; *The Great Chartulary of Glastonbury*, ed. Dom. A. Watkin, i, pp. lxii, 155, no. 230 (Somerset Rec. Soc. 59, 1947).

⁴² The manor of Bedminster was granted to him by Henry II with other confiscated lands of Roger of Berkeley: *Charters* (2) 32, n. 1; cf. Smyth, *op. cit.* i, 34.

⁴³ Knowles and Hadcock, 138; *Regesta* iii, xlvi and nos. 126 (1153), 996; cf. Smyth, *op. cit.* i, 35. The foundation cannot have been much later than 1148 in the light of Henry II's statement, made in 1153 when he was aged 20.

⁴⁴ *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century*, ed. B. A. Lees (1935), cxxxi–cxxxii, 58 sqq.

⁴⁵ *Charters* (2), 33.

⁴⁶ E.g. Kingswood and Tintern, which grew some of the finest wool anywhere in Europe. Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. A. Evans (1936), 261, and see W. Cunningham, *Growth of English Industry and Commerce* (5th edn 1910), 632; E. Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* (1941), 13–15, 22–23. For market towns in the Cotswolds and West Midlands see Hilton, *A Medieval Society*, 172.

⁴⁷ Y. Renouard in *Rev. Historique de Bordeaux et du département de la Gironde*, i (1952), 5 sqq., and *ibid.* vi (1957), 97 sqq.; *Histoire de Bordeaux*, ed. Ch. Higounet, iii (1965), chap. ii, *passim*; M. K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (1971), 71; Carus-Wilson (4), 265 sqq.

⁴⁸ James, *op. cit.* 180–81; *Cal. Close* 1227–31, 74, 497, 499; *ibid.* 1231–34, 545, 211, 245; *ibid.* 1256–59, 69; *Cal. Pat.* 1225–32, 504; and *Cal. Close and Pat.*, *passim* for imports at Bristol.

⁴⁹ *Cal. Pat.* 1247–58, 556 (1257); cf. Carus-Wilson (4), 268. The Bishop no longer troubled to cultivate his own vineyards.

⁵⁰ E.g. from Oléron, *Cal. Pat.* 1232–47, 311. Cf. *ibid.* 1225–32, 41, and see A. R. Bridbury, *England and the Salt Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (1955), 44, and *passim*.

⁵¹ Carus-Wilson (3), 94 sqq.; *Cal. Pat.* 1225–32, 43; *Charters* (2), 62–4; for links with the Low Countries see e.g. *Cal. Pat.* 1266–72, 469; *ibid.* 1216–25, 114; and *Cal. Close* 1247–51, 304 for wool bought by Flemish merchants in Ireland and Wales and brought to Bristol.