

Castle Park

Post War

The landscape of Castle Park that we see today is essentially the product of three events; the blitz of Bristol in 1940/41, the construction of the concrete financial buildings around the corner of High Street/Wine Street and first landscaping for the park in the 1970s and the re-landscaping of the area in the early 1990s.

Before 1940, the Castle Street/Wine Street area was probably the most thriving shopping quarter of the city. During the course of three significant bombing raids on the 24th November 1940, 9th January 1941 and 11th April 1941 (the Good Friday Raid) the area was almost completely destroyed.

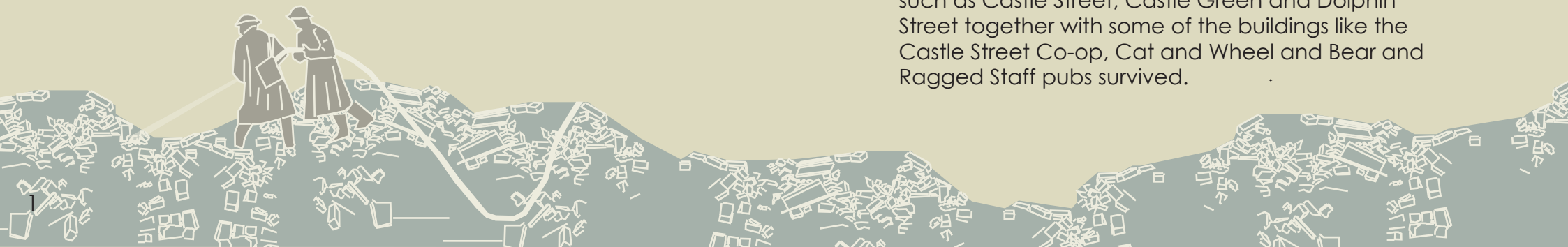


Castle Street looking from Old Market on the morning of November 25th 1940 after the heavy night of bombing that destroyed many of the buildings in the area. The photograph was taken by Jim Facey who was working as a photographer for the Bristol Evening Post. Image courtesy of Bristol Record Office, reference 41969/1/12

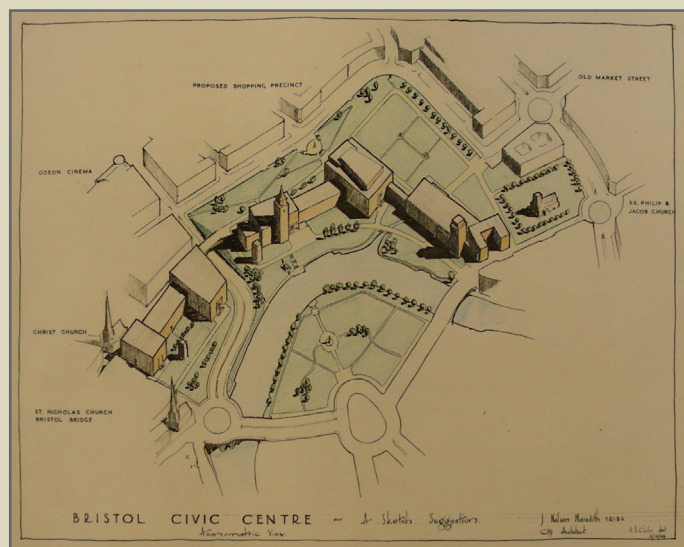
There were other bombing raids on Bristol throughout the war, but the November 1940 blitz in particular destroyed more shops and homes in the central area in one night than any other bombing raid. Much of the damage was caused by fires resulting from the incendiary bombs that were dropped. The flames from these fires and the orange glow over the centre of Bristol could be seen by people on the outskirts of Bristol during the night of the raid. St Peter's Church stands as a lasting memorial to this intense destruction; discoloured stone work shows the visible scars from the flames.



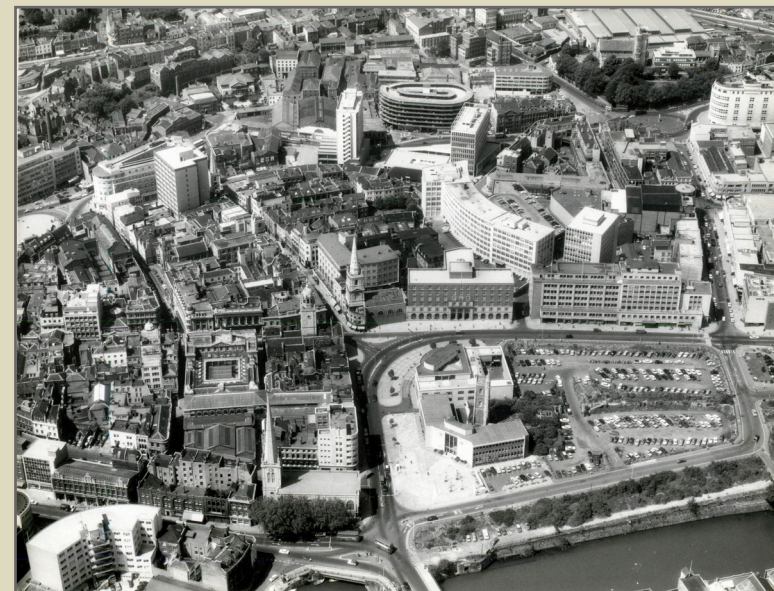
Even before the end of the war, the Corporation (City Council) were making plans for the future of the area. There were calls for the shopping area to be rebuilt as it had been before the war. The streets such as Castle Street, Castle Green and Dolphin Street together with some of the buildings like the Castle Street Co-op, Cat and Wheel and Bear and Ragged Staff pubs survived.



However, in order to provide a larger shopping area with adequate space for deliveries for large lorries it was decided to create a shopping centre to the north following compulsory purchases of the mostly undamaged buildings in Broadmead. The former Castle Street area was to become the site of new civic buildings like a city museum and council offices set in a public parkland. By the end of the 1960s, although Broadmead was progressing well there were limited funds for the new civic buildings and all that had been built were the new financial buildings including the Bank of England building on Wine Street. The rest of what is now Castle Park was given over to shoppers' car parking.



One of many proposals by the City Architect Nelson Meredith for civic buildings in the Castle Green area after the war. This plan is dated 12th October 1944 and comes from the Yellow Label Plans at Bristol Record Office



A view of the old city in 1967 showing the car parks around the new finance buildings on Wine Street and High Street. This image comes from the Albert Clarke Collection courtesy of Bristol Record Office, reference 44819/3/252/3

The buildings that had survived the wartime bombing were finally cleared from the area in the 1960s. This allowed the archaeologists from the City Museum to explore the medieval remains of the castle.

Landscaping for the park began in the 1970s creating the large retaining walls along Broadweir and Lower Castle Street and the grassed mounds at the east end of the park that were essentially formed of demolition rubble.



Aerial photograph of the area now occupied by Castle Park in 1946

Castle Park opened in 1978. The creation of the Galleries shopping centre in the 1980s led to additional funding for the park and the chance to provide a purpose-built car park so that the whole area could be given over to the landscaping. City Museum archaeologists undertook further investigation of the Castle Keep to form part of the landscape and the new enlarged Castle Park was reopened in 1991 together with bandstand and new castle style toilets.



During the re-landscaping of the park in the early 1990s, 20 artists were commissioned to create artwork for Castle Park. This was the largest public landscape and art commissioning project in the southwest. As a result artists designed benches, railings, wooden play equipment (now removed) and waste bins as well as the more noticeable works such as; *Beside the Still Waters* by Peter Randall-Page located to the east of St Peter's, *Throne* by

Rachel Fenner close to the Randall-Page work, Line From Within by Ann Christopher a tall cast bronze sculpture facing the top of Union Street, Drinking Fountain by Kate Malone close to the sallyport and Only the Dead Fish Go With the Flow by Victor Moreton towards the northeast/Cabot Circus corner of the park.



Beside the Still Waters by Peter Randall-Page. Photograph courtesy of Francis Greenacre

As well as a popular City Centre park for leisure uses particularly as a lunchtime venue in the summer months or a space for events like Bristol Pride, Castle Park has taken on a semi-formal wartime remembrance role. The ruined St Peter's Church has become an iconic city memorial for the victims

of the Bristol Blitz and commemorative plaques have been added to the church wall, World War I memorials have also been set to the paved area in front of the church and even a memorial to the Bristol citizens who lost their lives as volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. Elsewhere in the park are memorial trees including 5 D-Day trees, one for each of the Allied beaches, planted above the ferry landing stage. There will also be a Sikh memorial garden planted close to St Peter's to commemorate members of that community who lost their lives fighting for Britain in the 20th century conflicts. Since it opened in 1978, Castle Park has become a highly valued, important public space at the heart of the city.

Further information available at
www.locallearning.org.uk/castle-park/

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