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The Date of the First Authentic Plan of Bristol

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THE DATE OF THE FIRST AUTHENTIC PLAN OF BRISTOL.

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BEFORE speaking of the first authentic plan of our city, it will be as well, perhaps, to refer to two early conjectural ones, which are given in Barrett's "History," and in Seyer's "Memoirs," of Bristol.

In the first volume of Seyer's work is a coloured plan, or Bird's-eye view, of Bristol, copied from Ricart's "Mayor's Kalendar." Whether it was drawn by Ricart himself (for on this point he is silent) or by his friend William Wyrester, as suggested by Miss Toulmin Smith,¹ cannot now be ascertained.

The date of the original drawing would be about 1480. It is placed in Ricart's "Kalendar" immediately after his fabulous description of the building of Bristol by King Brynne or Brinnus. Seyer says this plan represents Ricart's notion of the city when so built;² but Mr. C. Pooley is of opinion that it is "intended to represent the town towards the conclusion of the Saxon era."³ Though most interesting from being the earliest conjectural representation of our city known, it cannot be considered of any historical value.

There is a small plan of Bristol in Barrett's "History," which is intended to represent the city *before* Bristol Bridge was built. Barrett does not inform us whence he obtained this plan, which, Seyer says, "seemed to bear the mark of Chatterton's pen."⁴ The High Cross is inserted, which was not erected until *after* the bridge was built, in 1247, and then certainly not in the style here

¹ Ricart's "Mayor's Kalendar," edited for the Camden Society by Miss Toulmin Smith, 1871, Int., vii., viii.

² "Mem. Bristol," I., 263. ³ "Crosses of Gloucestershire," p. 3.

⁴ "Mem. Bristol," I., 263.

delineated. On account of this anachronism, and for other reasons, Seyer suspected it was not authentic and rejected it—we must do the same.

The first undoubted authentic plan of Bristol, hitherto recorded by Bristol historians, is that known as George Hoefnagle's, published in the third volume of Braun's, or Bruin's, "*Civitates Orbis Terrarum*," printed at Cologne, in 1581. This plan is well known to most of us through the cheap *fac-simile*, issued, a few years since, by Mr. John Lavars, of this city. Hoefnagle engraved some of the plans in the noble work mentioned, but his name is not on this of "Brightstowe." Ever since the publication of Joseph Ames's "Typographical Antiquities," in 1749, this plan has invariably been attributed to Hoefnagle, but on what authority we know not.¹ Horace Walpole supposes that Hoefnagle visited England; but the Rev. James Dallaway (a competent authority and a native of Bristol) asserts that he never was in this country. Braun, who gathered his maps and plans from any originals he could get, mentions that Hoefnagle had communicated to him many of Spanish places, but does not, as far as we can find, mention his being indebted to Hoefnagle for any plans of places in England.

Assuming that Dallaway is right in his assertion, it will be asked "whence then did Braun obtain the original delineation for his plan of our city?"

In the Sloane collection in the British Museum² is a MS. volume, which has been almost overlooked, entitled: "The Particular Description of England, with the Portratures of Certaine

¹ Suspecting the date, "1575," given by Ames to Braun's plan to be erroneous, we applied to Mr. Thomas Kerslake for information on the point, who kindly replied—"George Braun's preface to the 3rd volume of his '*Civitates*' (in which the plan of 'Brightstowe' appeared) is dated 'Cologne, 1581.'" "Braun's address to the reader, in his first volume, is dated January 1st, 1575."

It may be assumed that Ames affixed the latter date to the plan of Bristol, forgetting that Braun's work was more than thirty years passing through the press, and that the plan appeared in the 3rd volume of it, printed in 1581. Ames's error has been copied by Walpole, Gough, and numerous other writers on Topography and Biography from 1749 to the present time. ² Sloane MSS., 2596.

of the Chiefest Citties and Townes, 1588. By William Smith, Rouge Dragon." This has now, for the first time, been printed, and during the last month issued to subscribers. It is edited by Messrs. H. B. Wheatley, F.S.A., and Edmund Ashbee, F.S.A. This interesting work contains 230 coats of arms in gold and colours, and 16 coloured profile sketches and bird's-eye views of towns and cities. Amongst the latter—which are well drawn and do great credit to Smith's skill—is one of Bristol, and on it is the following note :—" Measured and laid down in Platforme by me, W. Smith, at my being at Bristow, the 30 & 31 of July Ano. Dni., 1568."¹

The date on Smith's plan, 1568, is thirteen years *earlier* than that of Hoefnagle's. The two are similar though not identical; the former being the more accurate; *e.g.* Smith's has the chapel on the bridge, and an important gateway in the city-wall, neither being shown in Hoefnagle's plan. After carefully comparing them, our opinion is that Smith's plan is the original of Hoefnagle's.

There is other evidence besides that of their similarity.

We learn from the valuable Introduction to Smith's "England," that after his visit to Bristol he went to reside in Germany; kept an inn in Nuremberg; in 1580, married a German lady—Veronica Altensteig—wrote a book on German Topography, and returned to England in 1584.² The volume of Braun's "*Civitates*," containing the plan of "Brightstow," was published in Germany, during Smith's residence there. Hoefnagle left Antwerp in 1576, after its being taken by the Spaniards, and at the time Braun's 3rd volume was published lived near Smith.

Smith has not only bequeathed us a view of our city during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, but has left us, also, a short and racy description of it. He writes :—

"Bristow is one of y^e greatest and famoust Citties in England, and standeth vppon y^e River of Auon, w^e 4 myles thence falleth into the Severn; over w^e River there is a fayre Brydge of Stone, with howses on eche syde lyke London Bridge, &

¹ Sloane MS. 2596. ² Introduction, p. 6.

almost halff so long, although it have but 4 arches; so that one quarter of the Cittie standeth in Somerssetshire. But the Bristollians will be a shyre of themselves, and not accompted in any other shyre. In y^e est end of the Cittie is The Castell, w^c they confess to stand in gloucestershyre. There is no dunghill in all the Cittie, nor any Sinck y^t cometh from any howse, but all convoid vnder y^e ground; neither use they any Cartes in their streets, but all Sleades. There is in y^e Cittie 20 ffayre Churches, whereof 18 are parish Churches.”¹

Let us compare this with Braun’s description. On the back of the plan he informs us, amongst other things, that “diamonds are so abundant at St. Vincent’s rocks that you may load a ship with them;” and that “the church of St. Mary’s, commonly called *Radcle*, was the most superb in the city.” But in the geographical index, Braun adds, almost in the words of W. Smith, “that the city of Bristol is remarkably neat and elegant; carts are not used in the streets; no dirt is seen in them, but all impurities are carried off by subterraneous channels;” and that “the churches are beautiful, and the cemeteries spacious.”²

From the evidence adduced, I think it fair to infer that Braun used Smith’s MS. description of our city, as well as his plan.

There is a plan of Elizabethan Bristol in Barrett, page 57, but Barrett does not inform us whence it was copied. Seyer promised to re-produce it in his “Memoirs,” but did not. This plan, the small one published by John Speed, in 1612, and the tiny one engraved by William Hollar, in 1673, are each based on Hoefnagle’s, as Hoefnagle’s is based on that of W. Smith.

Indeed, there does not appear that there was any engraved plan of Bristol, published from independent Survey, from 1568 to 1671, when the first of James Millerd’s delightful ones was issued.

To Wm. Smith, therefore, the learned herald and topographer, we are indebted for our *first* authentic plan of Bristol, and for the second to James Millerd, Mercer, “cittizen and inhabitant

¹ Sloane MS. 2596.

² Bath and Bristol Mag., 1833, ii., 308.

thereof." Seyer's copy of Millerd's large plan, first issued in 1673, is now the property of the Bristol Museum and Library.

It is to this plan of the ingenious old Bristol mercer that the following extract from our corporation records refers : "That the thanks of this House, with a piece of plate to the value of £10, with the city arms engraved thereon, be presented to Mr. James Millerd, for his present of a map of Bristol, being the *largest, exactest,* and *handsomist* that ever was yet drawn of this city."

The praise of the Corporation was as well deserved by Millerd as their piece of plate. No map of Bristol in the 17th century is so valuable as this large one of his, which was published in 1673, on four sheets and is entitled "An Exact Delineation of the Famous City of Bristoll & suburbs thereof."