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**The Council for the Preservation of Ancient Bristol**

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## THE COUNCIL FOR THE PRESERVATION OF ANCIENT BRISTOL

*Observations submitted to the Bristol Replanning Advisory  
Committee, January 1942*

THE Council for the Preservation of Ancient Bristol (CPAB) is a representative body, and includes in its constituent members three Committees of the Bristol Corporation. The representatives of these Committees and co-opted members include several of the Corporation Officials who are members of the Conference of Officers appointed by the Corporation, and it would therefore appear to be inadvisable for the Council to express opinions on matters relating to replanning which are outside its own sphere. The latter includes the scheduling of objects in the City considered of particular interest, which, while not too rigidly defined, comprise churches and other ecclesiastical buildings, and buildings and monuments of architectural or historic, artistic or literary, interest ; and the taking of such action as may be possible for the purpose of saving any object which is considered of sufficient interest, from destruction, mutilation or decay.

Shortly before the outbreak of war, the Council prepared a schedule of buildings in the central portion of the City of archaeological and architectural distinction, in accordance with the recommendations of H.M. Office of Works (Department of Ancient and Historic Buildings). Many of these buildings were already mutilated and decayed, but now unfortunately the majority have been irreparably damaged or destroyed ; and this applies to many of the best and most interesting examples, such as St. Peter's Hospital and the old houses in Mary-le-Port Street, as well as several of the most interesting of the

City churches. In the large area of greatest devastation little is left, except the remains of Bristol Castle, which were incorporated in Messrs Boots' building and are already scheduled as an ancient monument by the Office of Works ; the shells of the burnt-out City churches, and small fragments of St. Peter's Hospital. While endorsing the hope that this and similar spaces will be laid out in well-planned streets, with buildings worthy of the City, it must be realized that such buildings can only compare with those erected under similar circumstances in most of the cities which have suffered in a like degree ; and that they cannot have the interest to the student and visitor who have found in Bristol so much that formed a link between its present and its past. It is more than ever important, therefore, that every exertion should be made to save what still remains, that we may be spared reproach for inviting visitors to an ancient and historic City from which nearly everything old or historic has vanished. Too often 'progress' is an excuse for self-interest or ignorance, or lack of public interest which frequently awakens too late.

In the replanning of the devastated areas the Council expresses the hope that as far as possible the old street names will be retained, and where buildings which have been landmarks in the City have stood, their sites should be legibly recorded. It is hoped also that the towers of the destroyed churches, which in most cases have escaped serious injury, should be retained and incorporated in any replanning scheme ; also that memorials in the churches which will not be restored should be carefully preserved. It is understood that these matters are receiving the consideration of a special Diocesan Committee. Particular attention is called to the Crypt of St. Nicholas, which is of great interest.

Until the possibility of further damage by enemy action has been finally averted, it is impossible to say what ancient buildings will remain to us ; but the Council

calls attention to the remarkable collection of buildings in King Street, including the half-timbered block containing the Llandoger Trow dating back to 1664; a number of specimens of the houses of citizens in the early 17th century; St. Nicholas' Almshouses; the sadly mutilated Merchants' Almshouses; the Old Library, (1740); the fine façade of the Coopers' hall built from designs by William Halfpenny in 1744; the Theatre Royal with its interior dating from 1764; and good examples of houses of 18th century date. Several of these buildings have been damaged, but all are capable of restoration. The street is adjacent to what will be one of the main entrances to the City, and owing to its width there is ample room for visitors to park their cars. Carefully restored, and with some of the most objectionable warehouse blocks removed, it would constitute a street almost unique in the big commercial cities of the Country, and an object of the greatest possible interest to the historian, architect, student and visitor. The Council urge that all possible steps should be taken to preserve the buildings mentioned, and suggest that if at any future date it was found necessary to remove from its present site any building in the City of particular architectural or antiquarian interest, such building might be re-erected in the place of some of the warehouses in King Street which have been damaged. The Council also venture to express the hope that should it not be possible for the Merchant Venturers' Society to re-erect their Hall on its present site, a new Hall in harmony with the street might be built in King Street in place of some of the buildings which now disfigure it.

This Memorandum states the views expressed at a Meeting of the Council held in December 1941. Since then the sale by auction on January 28th of the Theatre Royal has been announced. The signatories express the view that the preservation of this building, which is one of the oldest theatres in the Kingdom, and which was

stated by Garrick when it was opened in 1766, to be the most complete for its dimensions in Europe, is a matter not only of local but of national importance, and one which will receive the strongest support from the CPAB. It is therefore urged that every effort should be made for its acquisition by the Corporation ; or, should this be found to be impossible, then for its preservation by some other means.

GEORGE H. OATLEY, *President*  
WILFRID LEIGHTON, *Chairman*.  
E. FAWCETT, *Vice-Chairman*.  
H. W. MAXWELL, *Secretary*.