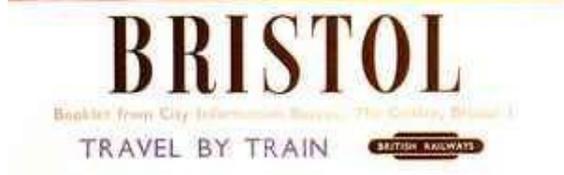
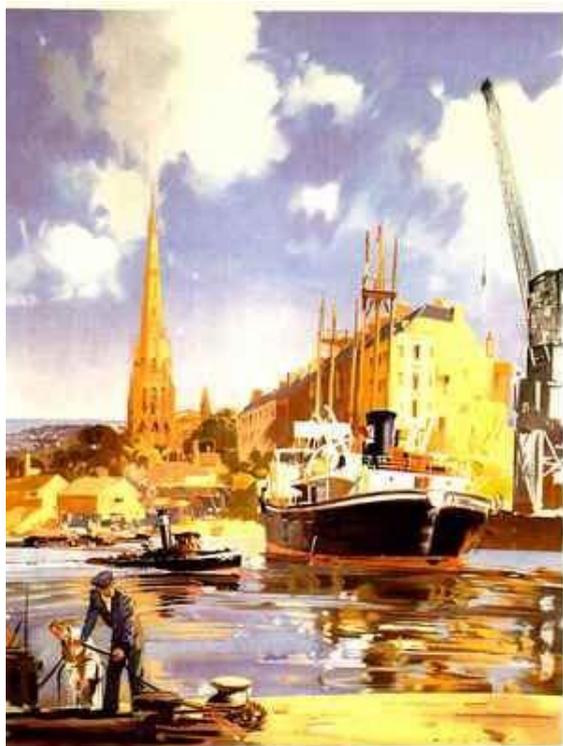


# Imperial City: Bristol in the World

A conference jointly organised by the Regional History Centre, UWE, Bristol, & M Shed, Bristol

**20 & 21 Sept 2013**

Venue: M Shed, Bristol



As Britain stood on the brink of global war in 1939, C. M. MacInnes, professor of History at the University of Bristol, published a paean to the British Empire that emphasised the contribution of locality to its historical

construction, and one locality in particular: his own. *Bristol, Gateway of Empire* so successfully linked the city's heroic contribution to the making of Britain's Imperial world that at least one local newspaper wanted copies of it given as prizes to outstanding local schoolchildren in hope that it might inspire them to emulation. 'No other city in the country, except London, has played such a part in building the British Empire', claimed the *Western Daily Press* in June 1939. 'Bristol's story is in many ways the Empire's... and the ledger was a more potent force than the flag or the missionary.'

The insistence of the *Press* that the Imperial adventures of both the city and the nation were inspired by the mutual benefits of mercantile trade rather than either political conquest or religious zealotry was certainly not new. 'For ages Bristol was the second port in the kingdom' the *Bath Chronicle* had explained in 1893. 'The Bristol merchants, Sturmye, and Canynge and Jay; these men were the forerunners if not the authors of that glorious page in England's history which tells how, bursting the ocean bounds of her island home, she opened for the world the continent of North America and thus inaugurated at once her own importance as a colonial power, and the fortunes of the vast country of which she then laid the foundation'.

We might think of Sir William Draper of Manilla Hall, Clifton, and the part he played in gaining Manilla as a British territory. But in the more recent past, we might also think of Cowlins, the Bristol engineers who won redevelopment contracts in Jamaica after the earthquake of 1907, or Watkin and partners, the Bristol architects appointed to design hospitals throughout the West Indies. Local pundits could then point with pride to the city's mercantile legacy, and a historic tradition of trade with former slave colonies

that seemingly saw no irony in the association.

In warfare too, the fortunes of the port and the nation were inextricably entwined. As the nineteenth century chronicler William Hunt was anxious to remind his readers, many of the privateers who stormed Spanish possessions in Equador in 1709 and crewed 51 Bristol ships during the Seven Years War, were 'our Bristol sailors,' whose voyages 'formed a marked feature in the life of the city'. Bristol's role in the creation and dismantling of Empire through acts of war can be traced from early times to the twentieth century.

This conference re-examines the role of Empire and the Imperial past in the Bristol region's history, from the part it played in the Imperial ambitions of earlier powers - Romans, Saxons or Normans, to the later city's own influence upon British expansion in later years. We re-consider the importance of trade narratives – of the very idea of the historic port city as 'gateway to empire' - but we also explore other factors in Britain's making as a world power, and Bristol's as a world city.

We are delighted to be working once again with M Shed too. The conference will not be restricted to academic argument – on the contrary, we are interested in perspectives from museum and heritage professionals and we are keen to consider the role of museums, cemeteries and the urban landscape in framing the Imperial past. World culture and natural science artefacts are an important part of the collections at M Shed and many other museums. The ways in which these were used by nineteenth century empire builders, no less than the ways in which their re-interpretation reflects changing attitudes to empire today, are central to our concerns.

If you would like to register to attend this event please visit the online store:

<http://store.uwe.ac.uk> – Imperial City

[steve.poole@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:steve.poole@uwe.ac.uk)

