

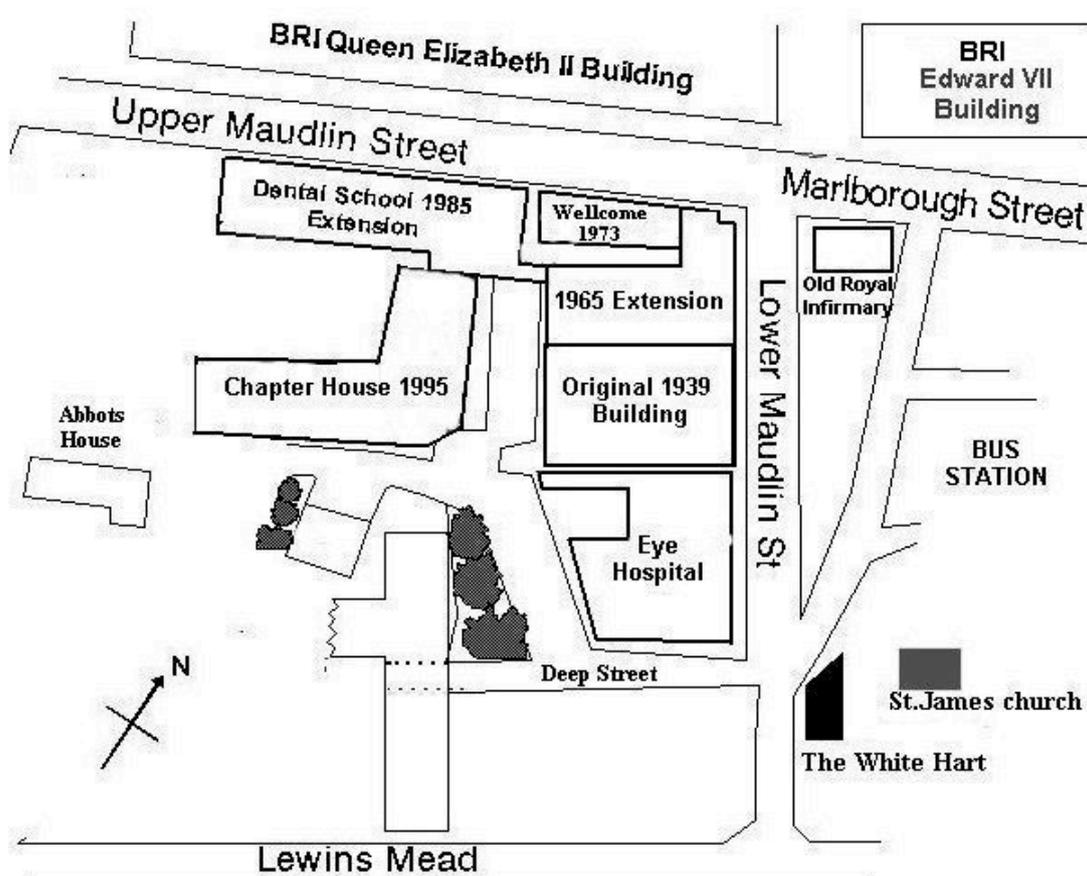
THE BRISTOL DENTAL SCHOOL SITE

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This is a shortened version of a chapter in the publication “The History of the Bristol Dental School and its site (2012)”

The teaching of dentistry in Bristol can be said to have begun in 1874 when the Bristol General Hospital established a post of Surgeon Dentist to which Thomas Cooke Parson was appointed but it was not until 1939 that the University Bristol Dental School and Hospital opened its doors on Lower Maudlin Street.

Figure 1. The present site of the University of Bristol Dental School and Hospital.

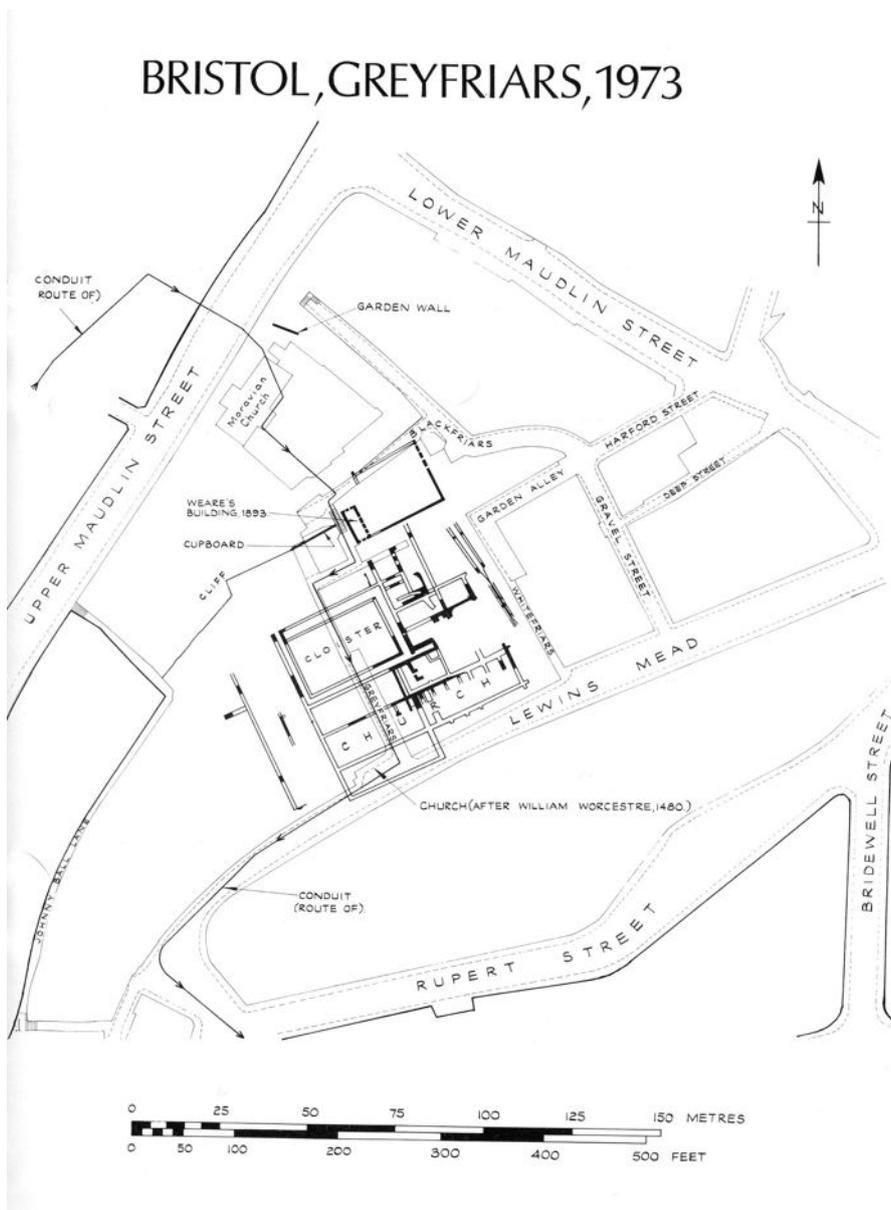


The present dental school lies on what had originally been a flat area above a steep bank overlooking the River Frome as it flowed from the moat of the mediaeval castle through a marshy valley on its way to join the River Avon to the southwest of the city. Excavations in 1973 revealed that below the present site of the 1985 extension to the school (Figure 1) there had been one of the earliest sites of Romano-British occupation to be discovered in Bristol. This could not be fully excavated as it continued beneath the road of Upper Maudlin Street but was dated by finds on the site to the 2nd – 4th centuries AD¹.

¹ Ponsford MW. Excavations at Greyfriars Bristol. City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. Bristol, 1975.

These excavations had been undertaken when the site to the south of Upper Maudlin Street became scheduled for redevelopment and was directed at investigating the mediaeval buildings of the religious foundation of Greyfriars (Friars Minor/ Franciscans) which was known to exist there from earlier accounts². The order of Greyfriars first came to Bristol in about 1230 AD and took their name from the plain un-dyed woollen robes they wore. Around 1250 AD a site for the order was found below the present dental school, beside Lewin's Mead ³, possibly on land given by the Benedictine Priory of St James which had been built by Robert Earl of Gloucester in 1138. All of these religious establishments stood outside the city which at that time was walled and protected to the south by a marshy area at the junction of the rivers Avon and Frome.

Figure 2. The plan of Greyfriars, as revealed by the 1973 excavation, showing the line of the All Saints conduit (Copyright and courtesy of Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives).



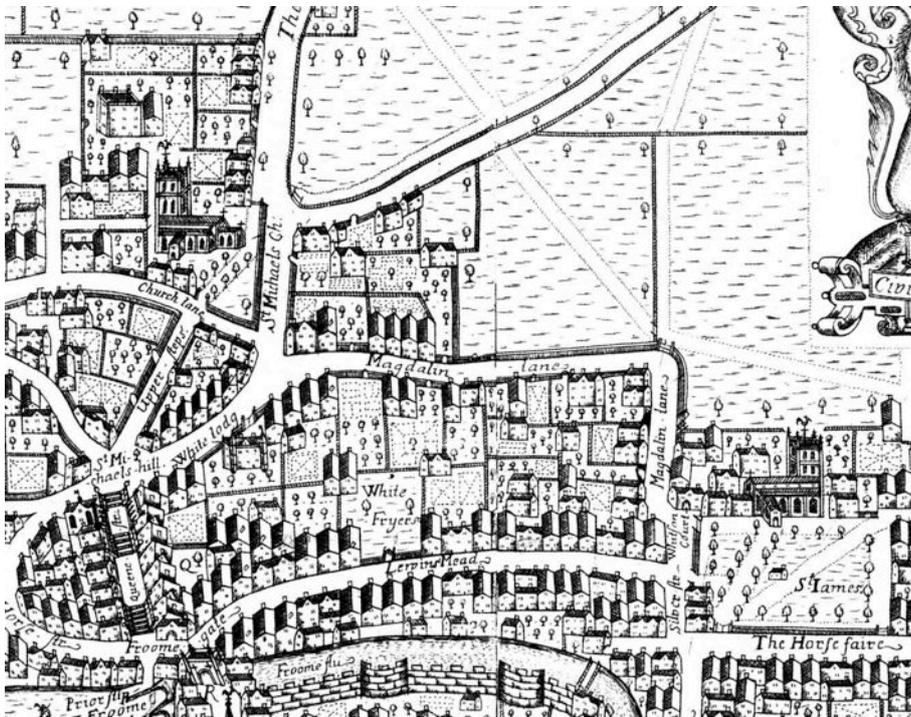
The Greyfriars precinct was described by William Worcestre writing in 1478 as lying on the north side of Lewin's mead with "walls and gardens extending up the hill". It would appear that the site was bounded St James Priory (now Lower Maudlin Street) on the east, Upper Maudlin Street on the north, Johnny Ball Lane on the west and Lewin's Mead to the south. The friary was rebuilt extensively at the end of the 14th century. Excavations in 1973, and Williams measurements of 1478 and 1480 suggest a church of overall length about 52 metres with a tower 4 metres square. There was a chapter house of 14 metres by 8 metres, (later extended to 22 metres x 8 metres) a cloister of 17 metres by 25 metres as well as the usual monastic dorter,

frater, kitchens etc

² Weare GE: Collectanea Relating to the Friars Minor of Bristol, W. Bennett. Bristol 1893

³ Lewin's Mead probably takes its name from the chamberlain of Robert 2nd Earl of Gloucester

Figure. 3 A section of William Millerd's map of 1673 showing Lewin's Mead and Magdalin Lane which would later become Upper and Lower Maudlin Streets. The open area above St James church would later become the site of Bristol Infirmary. The city walls on the far side of the Frome are also clearly seen.



Like all other Bristol religious houses the friary continued until the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538. Included among these was the small priory of St Mary Magdalene near the bottom of St Michael's Hill⁴. The road leading to this had become Magdalin Lane by the late 17th century and Maudlin Lane a century later (Figure 3).

A feature of all Bristol monastic establishments was the construction of reliable water supplies for themselves and for the public and several of these have lasted into modern times⁵.

The most well known is the outlet of the St. John Conduit built in 1376 AD as an extension of a pre-existing conduit. This still brings water from the top of Park Street to its outlet on the north wall of the church of St John on the Wall, Nelson Street and continued to function after the city's water mains were damaged during the Second World War. The Greyfriars supply ran in a conduit from Bedford Place, Kingsdown below the site of the present Queens Building of the Royal Infirmary) to their precinct (See Figures 1 and 6). Following the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century, the whole estate was sold to then Mayor and Corporation. The water supply was subsequently taken over by All Saints Parish. Part of this conduit was preserved until recent times below Upper Maudlin Street. When the site was redeveloped in 1995 the 17th century stone which marked its course was re-sited in the south east wall of the Chapter House above the line of its course.

Knowledge of the subsequent use of the Greyfriars site is incomplete. It is known that clay pipes were manufactured in the area in the 17th and 18th centuries and it seems there was also warehousing and light industry. Traces of a mediaeval building were discovered during demolition in Johnny Ball Lane in 1989. The present appropriately named Abbots House, marked in Figure 1, built to house the Bristol Royal Infirmary charity "Above and Beyond", contains a small oval window incorporated from this earlier building.

The Moravians

The Moravians came to Bristol in the mid-18th century. They claimed descent from a Bohemian religious group which had reformed under the patronage of Count von

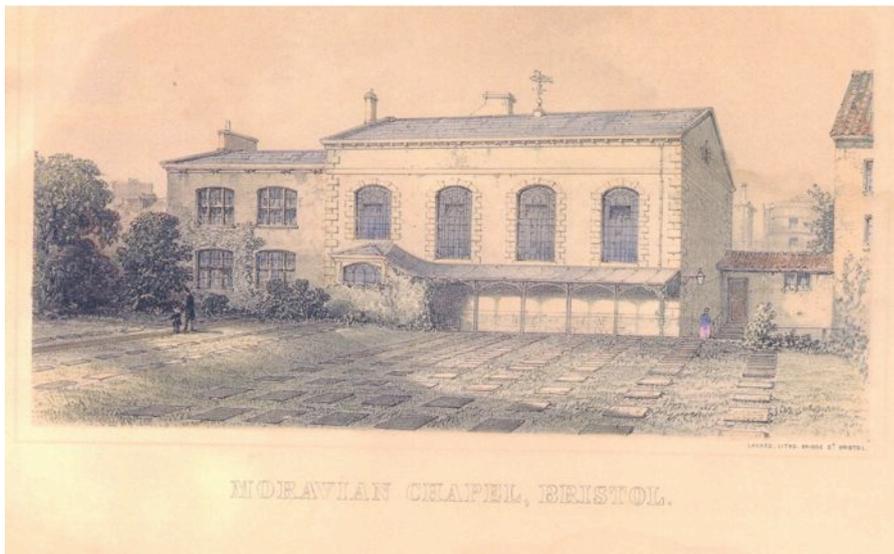
4 Little B. The Story of Bristol. The Redcliffe Press. Bristol, 1991, p 27.

5 Watson S. Secret Underground Bristol. Bristol Junior Chamber. Bristol, 1991, pp 104-119.

Zinzendorf. Unlike other non-conformist groups they had no quarrel with the Church of England but wished to promote a more actively committed Christian life. Although a group had first worshipped together in Bristol as early as 1746 it was not until a visit by Count von Zinzendorf himself in 1755 that the congregation as such became established. In 1757 the Moravians left their temporary dwellings in the Temple area of the city and moved to the more respectable site on Upper Maudlin Street. According to Dresser ⁶, the Bristol Moravians, or more correctly “The Unity of the Brethren”, never numbered more than 200. They shared much in common with the Quakers and Wesleyans but the Bristol Moravians were generally less affluent than Unitarian or Quakers in the city but had fewer poor and unskilled members than the Wesleyans. The most prominent of the Moravian congregation were mainly small manufacturers but at least one, Samuel Fripp, was a partner of Fry, Fripp and Company who were engaged in exporting soap.

Sexual segregation was the cornerstone of their church’s organisation. Their congregation was divided into “choirs” ⁷ of single sisters, single brothers, married couples, widows, and widowers. Single sisters and for a short while single brothers had a communal living and working space⁸. The sect also practised “oeconomy” where girls were taught an occupation. For these reasons, shortly after acquiring their site on Upper Maudlin Street, the Moravians entered into protracted negotiations to purchase an adjoining estate. This allowed their later premises to include a sisters house and a brethren house for unmarried men and women.

Figure 4. This 19th century rear view of the chapel shows the first school and hall on the left and the passage leading to the Minister’s House on the extreme right. In the foreground there are now a large number of graves with the gravestones laid flat and all the same size as was the Moravian custom.



Very little is known of the inner furnishings of the chapel but the records of John Smith and Son’s, the well known Bristol Organ builders show that it had an instrument from its earliest days⁹. The first was subsequently sold to the Moravian chapel at Gracehill, N. Ireland in 1781 for £30. It was replaced in 1829 by another, again built by the same company.

There were close links between this community and the Bristol Moravians. Gracehill was founded as a Moravian settlement in 1765. A plaque on the church wall commemorates John Cennick (1718–1755) the first Moravian evangelist in mid- Antrim who had arrived in

6 Dresser M. Sisters and brethren: power propriety and gender among the Bristol Moravians 1746-1833. *Social History* 1996; 21: 304-329.

7 This was presumably the mediaeval use of the word choir meaning “company”

8 Dresser M In *Historic churches and church life in Bristol*. Joseph Bettey (ed) Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society Bristol 2001, p 137.

9 Whaley B. *John Smith and Sons of Bristol : Worklist*. British Institute of Organ Studies Reporter 1999, 23 (See <http://www.npor.org.uk/Reporter/oct99/e1099.htm>).

Ballymena on 9th August 1746 from Kingswood in Bristol, where he had established a Moravian chapel 5 years earlier.

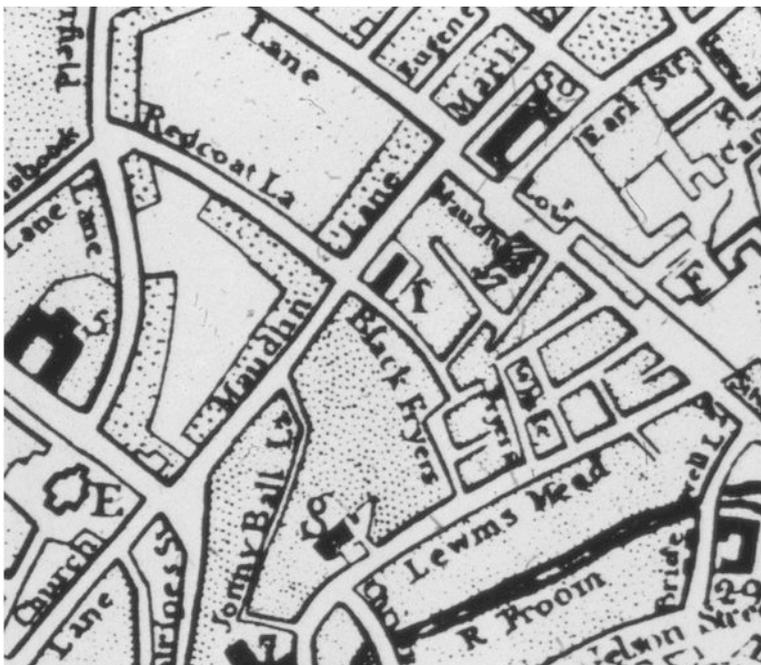
The Bristol chapel was long involved in the anti-slavery movement. On 4th April 1759 an African *prince* called *Gonglass* visited the Moravian chapel in Maudlin Street and spoke in French to the minister there. It has been suggested he was probably one of the sons of the powerful African slave trader John Currantee of Anamaboe, in present-day Ghana.

Like so many non conformists the Moravians had their own school adjacent to the chapel and by 1870 there was a separate larger Sunday and girls' school building. This is probably because the Moravians had from their earliest days separated the sexes and by 1828, 68% of their congregation were women⁶. The chapel and its buildings were by this time located in a relatively poor area of the city with much light industry. There was a coopeage on the corner of Lower Maudlin Street, although whether this was run by a member of the sect is unknown. The chapel was next to the Poor House until it demolished when Upper Maudlin Street was widened in the 1880s.

A member of the congregation at this time was James Fuller Eberle (1854-1939) who was married there in 1880. He had been a school fellow of George Alfred and Henry Hubert Wills¹⁰ and was to become Alderman and later Freeman of the City as well as founder and first honorary member of Clifton Rugby Club. He notably saved the Elizabethan Bristol Red Lodge from demolition and gave it to the city and held the Order of the Russian Red Cross and was an officer of the Order of the British Empire for his humanitarian work during the First World War.

Bristol had grown rapidly in the 18th century. The population was probably about 25,000 in 1700 but had risen to around 50,000 by the middle of the century. The Bristol Infirmary, later the Bristol Royal Infirmary (Old Royal Infirmary shown in Figure 1), had opened to its subscribers in 1736 built on the south side of Marlborough Street. This street is named after John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough, who played a crucial role in the war of the Spanish succession and who died in 1722. The land to the north of Maudlin Street by this time had changed from the open fields of the 17th century to formal gardens. The map of 1773 still shows Upper Maudlin Street as Maudlin Lane but its continuation, which would become Lower Maudlin Street, is at this time named Maudlin Street.

Figure 5. A map of 1815.

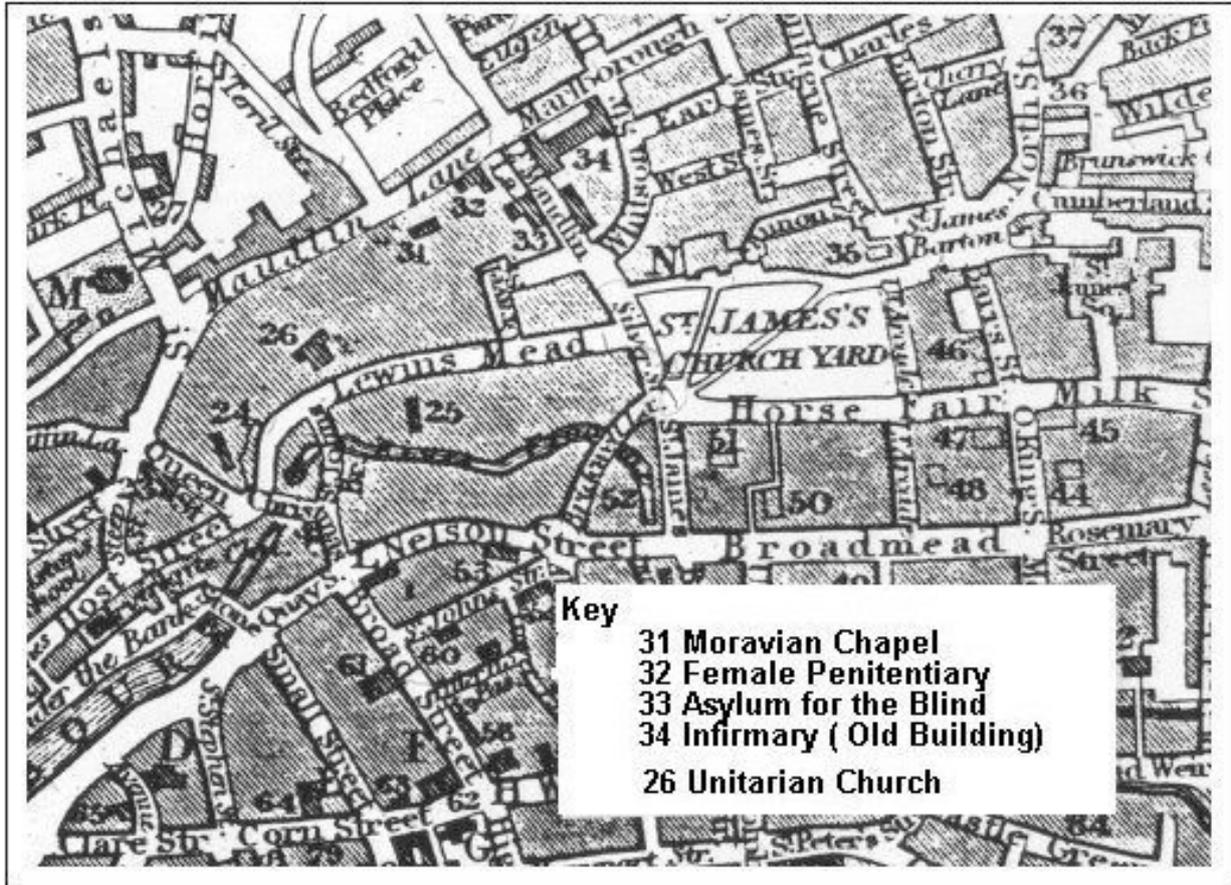


By the late 18th century, the area of Kingsdown to the north of Maudlin Street (given as Maudlin Lane in Figure 5) where formerly the King's cavalry had performed its daily drills was being developed as Bristol's first planned suburb. Up until this time this land, which had once belonged to the Benedictine priory of St James, had been appreciated as an airy, green space just beyond the crowded medieval city. Some of the roads in which these houses were built, such as Redcoat Lane, disappeared during the subsequent development of the BRI site in the 1970s. The map of

¹⁰ These were the sons of Henry Overton Wills III. It was George Alfred who in 1908 announced the donation from his father which lead to the founding of the University.

1815 also shows that there is now an asylum for the blind on the site where the Bristol Eye Hospital stands today. This is seen more clearly in Figure 6 and had been founded here to give the blind the means of earning their own living. In fact the Eye Hospital was already in existence at this time having been founded in 1810. In June of that year, Dr William Henry Goldwyer, negotiated the rental of one house, number 12 Lower Maudlin Street, from the Blind Asylum. The same building was bought in 1839 when the asylum moved to Park Street¹¹. This new building for the Bristol Asylum and School of Industry for the Blind occupied the site now taken up by the University's Wills Memorial Building and the City Museum and Art Gallery.

Figure 6. The map of 1838.



The map of 1838 also shows that a new building had appeared near the corner of Maudlin Lane and Lower Maudlin Street – a female penitentiary (marked as 32 in Figure 6). The penitentiary had been founded after a meeting on 23rd April 1801 in the vestry room of St. James' had considered "the possibility of affording an asylum to those unhappy females who have been seduced from the path of virtue and may be found desirous of returning into it". By this time the parishes of St James', St Jude's and St Michael's were identified as those having the highest number of brothels and the worst problems with prostitution in the city¹². Subscribers were sought, a plan was circulated, and a Penitentiary was set up in Upper Maudlin Street with accommodation for about forty women. They were employed in such tasks as shoe-making, needlework and laundering and were later put into service. The time spent in the penitentiary was usually one year but sometimes could be up to two years. By this time St. James church was becoming

¹¹ Saunders CJG. The United Bristol Hospitals. Part 2, Chapter 4. United Bristol Hospitals 1965.

¹² Waifs and Wanders in St Judes in The Homes of the Bristol Poor. William Lewis and Sons Bristol, 1884 (reprinted from the Bristol Mercury).

overcrowded and in 1861 the Friends and Supporters of the Penitentiary formed a Committee to erect St. James-the-Less chapel¹³. This was designed by Pope & Bindon, well known architects of the time who were responsible for many Bristol buildings including the completion of Bristol Cathedral. The chapel was sited next to the penitentiary and had a distinctive domed east-end, termed a chevet. The opening service was held on 30th November 1867.

Figure 7. The corner of Lower Maudlin Street site just prior to the building of the 1964 extension . St James the less can be seen on the extreme right just past the rear of the old penitentiary building (by kind permission of Mr J.C.Stephenson).



The map of 1884 shows other new developments. The shops shown above (Figure 7) have been built between the penitentiary and the Eye Hospital in what is now Lower Maudlin Street. The corner site of Upper and Lower Maudlin Streets has become a public house - The Prince Alfred - which would remain here until its demolition in the 1960s to make way for the 1964 dental school extension. Route 3 of the Bristol Tramways Company now runs along Upper and Lower Maudlin Street. Horse drawn trams had been introduced 10 years earlier. In 1895 Bristol would become the first city to adopt electric trams. These continued to run until the Luftwaffe's Good Friday bombing raid of 1940 destroyed the company's generating station.

The Moravian chapel closed in 1971 the closing service being held at 3.00pm on Saturday 31st July¹⁴. The church of St. James the less had also closed by this time and was being used by the Church Lads Brigade and also serving as a venereal disease clinic for the Bristol Royal Infirmary until this could be relocated when the Queen Elizabeth Building (known to many as the "Phase One Building") opened in 1973. The second extension of the Dental School also opened in this year built on the site of St James the

¹³ Records of St John Diocesan Home and of its predecessors. Bristol Record Office.

¹⁴ Central Reference Library, Bristol. Booklet reference M0005714AN.

less to provide staff offices and research laboratories for the MRC Dental Research Unit. Originally funded by the Wellcome Foundation this is still known as the Wellcome building.

A third extension to the School was opened in 1984 and was built on the site of the Moravian chapel. It provided a much-needed new operative dental techniques laboratory, an extended and modernised dental library plus a dental materials laboratory. A fourth extension, known as the Chapter House was completed in 1995. It was built on the site of the former burial ground of the Moravian Chapel. The building was officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen in June on that year and named the Chapter House.