

## **Queen Square: A Brief History**

### **Prior to 1650**

The site was occupied by Town Marsh, lying outside the city wall. It was used for refuse tipping, practice of weaponry, and hanging pirates. Some attempt was made to provide a public park with tree planting, but by 1610 a committee was appointed to repair and maintain the marsh. A bowling green was constructed in 1622. The few buildings at this time related to use of the marshland.

### **1650-1700**

Development of the area commenced with construction of houses on King and Prince Streets. There was gradual regulation of uses of the marsh and various 'nuisances' were removed.

### **1701 -1730**

Residential development of the square commenced with approval in 1699 allowing Dr. John Read to build a house on the south side of the site; a number of other wealthy citizens also desired to build residences on the Marsh - in 1700 the scheme is described as 'the Square now in building'. Building materials and heights were regulated by the Corporation. 1702 the new development was called Queen Square in honor of Queen Anne. By 1710 building work was almost complete, James Millerds plan of that date showed buildings surrounding a central square of grass lined by two rows of trees and fenced with timber post and rails.

Further tree planting appears to have taken place by 1716, and possibly later, and it is probable that cross paths were added at some point in this period.

### **1731 -1830**

Emulating London squares, a decision was made to place a statue in the centre of the Square; King William III selected as subject, Michael Rysbrack the artist. Statue erected 1736.

More planting took place to enhance the setting of the statue, though this was likely to have been replacement of trees rather than new planting. J. Rocques map 1750 shows three rows of trees around the perimeter, with further trees lining the principal cross walks leading to the statue; diagonal walks, not tree lined occupied each quarter of the site.

1776 a radical reshaping of the Square removed the trees in the cross walks. Residents complained that the Square was becoming too shady. The diagonal footpaths were also altered to the pattern seen today. At some point around this date the perimeter trees were reduced to two rows.

During subsequent years a programme of tree replacements took place and gas lights were introduced in 1819.

Ashmead's map of 1829 shows the Square pretty much as it appears today.

### **1831-1936**

The Bristol riots of 1831 destroyed many of the original buildings within the Square; these had been very prestigious and were occupied by wealthy Bristol merchants. They had expensive brick facades and large front forecourts surrounded by fine boundary walls and railings. The damage sustained during the riots was not repaired for a number of years, during which time the maintenance of the Square was largely abandoned. It was not until 1838 that a petition from residents forced the City Council to restore the Square to its former appearance.

Iron railings were added to the perimeter of the Square and bollards guarded entrances, possibly as a response to abuses of the Square.

Further developments at the end of this period included the addition of public seating and the masonry work around the statue.

### **1936-1999**

The architectural unity of the Square was destroyed in 1936 when the Corporation constructed the dual carriageway 'Redcliffe Way' diagonally across the Square demolishing the buildings at its NW and SE corners. The visual decline of the Square was also assisted by the use of the perimeter of the Square and forecourts for parking.

In 1979 publication of the Bristol City Docks Local Plan identified potential improvements to the Square relating to the restriction of parking.

The Draft City Centre Local Plan 1990 identified Queen Square as a major historic public open space and promoted the need to improve the Square with the closure of the bisecting road and re-routing of traffic.

A successful bid was made to the Heritage Lottery in 1998, to restore the Square to the Ashmead layout of 1829. The restoration work has been phased between 1999 and 2005, and at time of writing the work is nearing completion, with the exception of the Prince Street roundabout scheme.

### **1999-2006**

The restoration and enhancement project was started in September 1999

Phase I Restoration of the Square was completed in July 2000

Phases II and III, Reinstatement of the cobbled streets and Forecourts will be complete in June 2003

Phase IV The Entrance Space is programmed to be completed July 2005