

IMPROVING LAW AND DEMOCRACY

In 2018, the three great civic offices of Lord Lieutenant, Lord Mayor and directly elected mayor of Bristol were all held by people of Black African heritage. In 2022, at the proclamation of King Charles III, the posts of Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Lord Mayor and Bishop of Bristol were all held by women.

This huge shift is built upon centuries of change in building a modern city.



LEADING PROTEST AND CHANGE

Bristol has often led or been at the centre of debates, campaigns and protests, including those fighting for the abolition of transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of African people, racial justice, women’s emancipation and equality and political reform. In 1788, Bristol formed the first committee outside London to fight to abolish the slave trade.

From the forming of the first abolitionist committee outside of London in 1788 and the 1831 riots to extend voting rights, through the work of both suffragists and suffragettes to get women the vote, to the campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation, Bristolians have led change or helped make change happen.

In recent years, Bristol has forced issues of institutional and popular racism into the media spotlight. In 1963, the Bristol Bus Boycott (led by Roy Hackett, Guy Reid-Bailey, Barbara Dettering, Owen Henry, Audley Evans and Prince Brown) resulted in changes in employment practices locally and helped make the case for national race relations legislation. In 1980, following the St Pauls uprising, 16 people arrested and charged with rioting were either acquitted or the jury failed to reach a verdict.

The charter of 1373 gave Bristol and its suburbs jurisdiction independent from neighbouring authorities in Somerset and Gloucestershire, making it a county in its own right. Edmund Burke’s 1774 speech to the electors of Bristol – important in its time for arguing that an MP’s role and opinion is independent from those who elect them – was used again in the Brexit debates. By the early 20th century, Bristol had some of the first women constables (the first women employed by Bristol Constabulary were detectives; uniformed officers came later) and the first women jurors. Tony Benn successfully argued for legislation changes to allow people who inherited a title and entered the House of Lords to reject their titles and be elected again into the House of Commons. Change continues – Bristol was the only city to choose a directly elected mayor in the referendum of 2012 and then, after a public campaign, rejected this in another referendum in 2022.



Four decades later – after years of inaction – a statue of slave trader, Edward Colston was toppled in the city centre, attracting attention worldwide and fuelling growing discussions of decolonialisation. In the controversial trial that followed, those accused of toppling the statue were found not guilty. Also in 2020, climate activist Greta Thunberg marched with tens of thousands of people from Bristol through the city centre, throwing down the challenge to make future change happen.

There remains much to do – and Bristol could lead the way as it has done on these issues and more in the years since 1216.

From the revision of Magna Carta in 1216 to the trial of the Colston Four eight centuries later, Bristol has been the home of major changes in the law and democracy. Sometimes this change has come from public protest; sometimes it’s been the dedicated work of individuals and small groups over many years; sometimes MPs have led the way. Though there have been setbacks and failures, the progress made towards social justice has been strong, if long, and shows what can be achieved when good ideas, campaigns and people come together. Lifetime for Justice provides details of some of these changes and challenges us all to follow these pioneers in making future positive change happen.

LIFETIME FOR JUSTICE



During my High Sheriff year, I want to share the importance of passion and commitment that so many people have to making a difference in the legal, human rights and criminal justice arena. I am not only visiting, celebrating, thanking and shining a light on the amazing statutory services, charities and community groups that are all working day and night to keep our city and its citizens safe, secure and advocated for in times of need, but I also want to leave some legacy that goes on to make a difference beyond my year in the role.

I have committed my working life (so far) to supporting others to achieve justice and fairness when things go wrong – when they are targeted by hate; held back by discrimination or prejudice; or respond in the wrong way when facing incidents and find themselves on the wrong side of the criminal or civil justice system.

I am not alone. Bristol is made up of people going way beyond their duty to support vulnerable people in need or who are dedicating their time to activism, campaigning or lobbying for positive change. Every meaningful step towards a fairer legal system, towards improved human rights, has been pre-empted by ordinary citizens with fire in their bellies. People who have been unwavering and persistent and relentless in their quest for a fairer society. Often fuelled by their own experiences of brutal injustice, these are the people who have pledged their life to justice. They have given up a lifetime to justice.

This booklet aims to highlight and celebrate the difference that such people have made throughout history to the current day, and the change they have invoked for future generations. I hope this resource inspires and helps you, our younger citizens, pupils and students, to find out more about the brave and dedicated trailblazers and the changes they have galvanised in our civil and human rights legislation so you too can go on to be the next generation of changemakers. If you look at the world around you right now, changemaking for our people and planet is needed more than ever!

– Alex Raikes  
High Sheriff of Bristol 2022

Bristol is a city with a radical past and a long heritage of demonstration, protest and fights for justice. This pamphlet seeks to rediscover and explore this heritage, encouraging all those who read it to discover your community heritage as changemakers of the city; inspire you to play active roles in justice activism; and to consider the legal and justice sectors for your future work. Hearing and understanding these stories, people and moments help us see the past in new ways and be inspired by their actions to make our own mark on the city.

This pamphlet is accompanied by a range of digital learning resources suitable for KS3 / KS4 / KS5. Visit [www.bristolideas.co.uk/projects/lifetime-for-justice/](http://www.bristolideas.co.uk/projects/lifetime-for-justice/) for more details. It has been produced by SARF (Stand Against Racism & Inequality) and Bristol Ideas during Alex Raikes’ year as High Sheriff of Bristol, and is made possible with the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

INTRODUCTION

A LIFETIME FOR JUSTICE





Magna Carta – which showed that the king and government were not above the law – is revised in Bristol.



The Great Charter of Liberties, granted by Edward III, makes Bristol a county independent of Gloucestershire and Somerset.



Bristol Law Society is founded. It is the oldest in the country and was established before the national Law Society.



Edmund Burke's speech to the electors of Bristol defines MPs' role as independent from those who had elected them.



Riots for political reform break out in Bristol following the House of Lords rejecting the second Reform bill.



Bristol Trades Council is established to organise working people.



The Bristol and West of England Society for Women's Suffrage established. Outside of London, Bristol had the highest level of activity for the suffragists and suffragettes.



Demonstrations take place in Bristol by the Chartists campaigning for political rights for working class people.



The first female jurors in England are sworn in at the Bristol Quarter Sessions.



The Bristol Training School for Women Patrois and Police is set up by the National Union of Women Workers, funded by donations. By 1917 it is being run by Dorothy Peto.



Peerage Act allows women who inherit a title to sit in the House of Lords and people to renounce titles. Bristol MP Tony Benn leaves the Lords and takes up his place in the House of Commons again.



Bristol elects Marvin Rees, making Bristol the first major European city to have elected a mayor of Black African heritage.



Fahna Mohamed, Integrate Bristol Trustee, leads a successful petition to highlight the dangers of female genital mutilation, getting over 200,000 signatures.



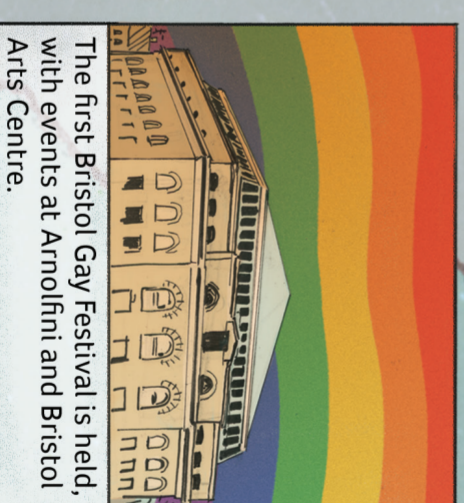
Peaches Golding becomes Bristol's High Sheriff, the first Black woman to be appointed.



A major civil rights campaign and bus boycott forces the Bristol Omnibus Company to end its colour bar and paves the way for Race Relations Acts.



Bristol is the only city to vote for a directly elected mayor in a day of referendums in ten cities.



The first Bristol Gay Festival is held, with events at Arncliffe and Bristol Arts Centre.



Ragbir Singh is appointed as Bristol's first bus conductor of colour, a month after the Omnibus Company ends its colour bar.



Tens of thousands of people attend a Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate event addressed by Greta Thunberg. Bristol's climate strikes began in February 2019.



Black Lives Matter protestors topple statue of slave trader Edward Colston. Four are later cleared of criminal damage.



The government's public order bill sees violent protests in Bristol City Centre. The bill is passed.



A referendum sees Bristol reject the post of directly elected mayor in favour of a committee system.

A LIFETIME  
FOR JUSTICE