

**THE 'VIEW OF THE ENTRANCE TO THE LOWER ST. JAMES'S ARCADE, BRISTOL' AND  
THE 'INTERIOR OF THE UPPER ST. JAMES'S ARCADE'  
MADGE DRESSER, UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF ENGLAND**

These two delightful prints portraying the Upper and Lower St. James's Arcades in Broadmead seem particularly appropriate for inclusion, in this issue of *The Regional Historian*, since they are from the Braikenridge Collection the subject of Sheena Stoddard's new book reviewed here. They celebrate too the luxurious properties of glass - a subject discussed in Sue Gordon's article on the Bristol glass industry.



**Interior of the Upper St James Arcade Bristol, Braikenridge Collection, by  
permission of Bristol Central Library**

The St. James's Upper Arcade, drawn by S. Hague in the early 1820's was situated, somewhere between where the present House of Fraser and Debenhams Department stores now stand, and was destroyed during the Blitz. The Lower Arcade, drawn during the same period by the better-known local artist, Edward Cashin, still remains, a graceful survivor in a largely brutalised precinct. Both men were probably commissioned by George Weare Braikenridge to record what were at the time new developments. The accompanying piece of anonymous verse celebrates 'BRISTOLIA'S fam'd ARCADES' and along with the drawings themselves, vividly documents the social aspirations and divisions in early nineteenth century provincial society.

The drawing of the entrance to the lower arcade demonstrates the various social groups to be found on the city's streets-the well-dressed bourgeoisie, the disabled soldier, the porter and, is that a Jewish peddler hawking his wares by the arcade steps?



**South Entrance to the St James Arcade, Bristol**

Such a social mix brought its tensions as the poem implies—for it was only *inside* the ‘long lofty canopy of glass’ that ‘‘dear charming WOMAN!’ and ‘the spruce Adonis’ could ‘walk secure’ and unfrightened, safe from the

‘...pollution from the contact close  
Of sooty SWEEP—or brawny Porter, who,  
Replete with insolence, rush often by  
Unceremonious, rudely jostling those  
Who pass them....

The poem documents too that the changing city with its ‘rapid mail-coach[es] , ‘swift rattling chaise[s], and high pil’d coal carts’ also posed a constant threat to the ‘expensive suits’ and fashionable garb of the well-heeled consumer.

Inside the Arcades, by contrast, ‘art and elegance conspicuous shine’. The interior of the Upper Arcade is shown to be a relatively un-crowded and socially exclusive place. There, in mirrors placed between each shop expressly for the purpose, people of quality could check that no particle of ‘dirt or mire’ had sullied ‘their raiment neat’. Refinement, luxury and social exclusion are conflated in these drawings and doggerel, not only with the pure lines of the new glass arcades, but with civic patriotism. Readers are enjoined to remember (and thereby honour) those entrepreneurs who ‘liberal loos’d ...Their purse-strings’ to provide, these translucent shrines to retail, for an increasingly genteel and numerous middle class and who thereby helped to create a new type of urban space.

.  
.



