

Economic Activity

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In the immediate post-war period the economic strategy of Gloucestershire County Council was guided by the aims of safeguarding the aircraft industry workforce and encouraging the provision of jobs in the smaller towns and the Forest of Dean. There was consequently little provision for industrial development in Cheltenham, where the arrival of GCHQ, UCCA and Eagle Star increased the proportion of white-collar employment. There was also an emphasis on the town's development as a retail and tourism hub. At the end of the 20th century 28% of the town's economic output derived from the financial and business sectors, 20% from public administration, 18% from manufacturing, and 20% from distribution, hotels and catering. Its particular strengths were in tourism, shopping, education, construction and manufacturing.¹

Manufacturing

In 1946 a report by the county's former chief planning officer foresaw Cheltenham's future development as 'an industrial centre of no small importance'.² However, as a result of its failure to acquire county borough status³, Cheltenham was obliged to follow the G.C.C. moratorium on new industrial development within the town.⁴ A 1947 survey of small, local firms found a majority in favour of moving to purpose-built, out-of-town facilities⁵, which of necessity would predominantly be built beyond the borough boundaries. In response to this the council purchased land across the borough border at the Runnings, Swindon for factory development.⁶ As the aircraft industry entered a recession, Cheltenham attempted to attract more industry to the town.⁷ In this the borough was hampered by lacking the freedom to attract new factories enjoyed by Gloucester.⁸ By the time the town gained more autonomy following local government reorganization in 1974, most of the manufacturing development was in the surrounding parishes.⁹

After the Second World War Dowty Equipment Ltd supplied hydraulic equipment to various fields through a number of subsidiary companies.¹⁰ The Arle factory, which had around 1,500 employees in 1952, concentrated on prototype and development projects on aircraft undercarriages, pumps and other components for hydraulic systems.¹¹ In 1967 the Dowty

¹ CBC Online, Local Plan Second Review (July 2006).

² Gordon E. Payne, *A Physical, Social and Economic Survey and Plan* (Gloucester, [1946])

³ See *Local Government*.

⁴ GA, JF7.59GS.

⁵ GA, K193/1.

⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 7 June 1949.

⁷ GA, B526/47394GS.

⁸ GA, K149/41; *Glos. Echo*, 12 Oct. 1965.

⁹ G.C.C. Planning Dept., *Industrial Estates in Gloucestershire* (c. 1984), 11-13.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 24 Nov. 1953; *Tewkesbury Register*, 15 May 1954.

¹¹ 'Visits to Works', *Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers* (1952).

Group acquired Gloster Engineering (Cheltenham), a company employing over 50 specialist toolmakers.¹² During the 1980s the Dowty Group reduced its workforce, but continued to employ 7,000 people in the Cheltenham area.¹³ In 1991 defence cuts resulted in a loss of 300 jobs at the Dowty Fuel Systems plant in Cheltenham.¹⁴ The acquisition of Dowty Group by TI in 1992 resulted in the closure of the Arle Court headquarters with the loss of 70 jobs.¹⁵ The closure of the fuel systems plant in Cheltenham, which had 380 employees, was announced the following year.¹⁶

In the immediate post-war period Maple-Martyn were engaged in the production of internal woodwork for pre-fabricated houses, before returning to the furnishing of of cruise ships. They also obtained the contract for fitting out the Southampton Passenger Terminal Ocean Dock.¹⁷ H.H. Martyn, which continued as a separate subsidiary of Maple-Martyn, remained nationally important as the suppliers of ornamental metalwork,¹⁸ but the demise of Britain's ship building industry led to the company's closure in 1971.¹⁹

In 1947 Walker Crosweiler employed around 150 people at its Whaddon factory.²⁰ The company manufactured thermostatic mixing valves, gas and air flow, pressure and vacuum recorders to the steel, gas, cement, pottery and similar industries with much of its output being exported.²¹ In the early 1960s it developed a mixer shower control, which worked with British plumbing²² and by 1968 claimed 70% of the home shower market.²³ In 1975 the company was acquired by Reed Building Products²⁴ and subsequently, following a management buyout, became Caradon Mira.²⁵ In 1988 Caradon Mira employed 750 people at Whaddon, Kingsditch and in Gloucester, including 50 researchers in its R & D department.²⁶ In 2001 Mira, then employing 600 people, was acquired by the US company Kohler.²⁷ In 2020 Kohler-Mira UK continued to be based in Whaddon.²⁸

¹² *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 Sept. 1967.

¹³ *The Times*, 30 June 1988.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 12 Apr. 1991.

¹⁵ *Financial Times*, 4 July 1992.

¹⁶ *Sandwell Evening Mail*, 2 Dec. 1993.

¹⁷ *Nottingham Journal*, 31 Mar. 1947; *Glos. Echo*, 26 Jan. 1950.

¹⁸ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 18 Mar. 1950; *Western Mail*, 8 Aug. 1955; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 Oct. 1967.

¹⁹ GA, D5922/4/4; *Glos. Echo*, 1 Feb. 2018.

²⁰ *The Times*, 11 Nov. 1947.

²¹ *The Times*, 17 & 21 Aug. 1961.

²² *The Times*, 8 July 1965.

²³ *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1968.

²⁴ *The Times*, 1 July 1975.

²⁵ *The Times*, 22 June 1987.

²⁶ *Financial Times*, 12 July 1988; GA, PR7.8GS.

²⁷ *Western Daily Press*, 23 July 2001.

²⁸ <http://www.kohlermira.co.uk/>.

During the Second World War the brewing industry had been relying on reserve stocks, which were exhausted by the end of the hostilities, while labour, hops, bottles and crates were in short supply. Demand exceeded production. In 1945 the Cheltenham Original Brewery merged with the Hereford and Tredegar Brewery,²⁹ changing its name to the Cheltenham & Hereford Breweries in 1947 and moving some production from Hereford to Cheltenham.³⁰ In 1955 a hostile takeover attempt was thwarted by the intervention of Whitbread, which acquired a substantial amount of preference capital.³¹ In 1959 Whitbread encouraged the merger between the company and Stroud Brewery, in which it also had an interest, the resultant company becoming West Country Brewery Holdings.³² In anticipation of the expansion of the Cheltenham brewery onto the adjoining grammar school site, the Stroud brewery was sold to Whitbread in 1963.³³ In 1964 West Country Brewery Holdings was acquired by Whitbread.³⁴ With the creation of Whitbread-Flowers in 1968, the Flowers brewery in Stratford-on-Avon was closed, with some of its production moving to Cheltenham.³⁵ In 1977 a strike among fork-lift drivers in Stroud, who refused to load a privately-owned lorry, spread to warehousemen and production workers at Cheltenham.³⁶ The company closed its distribution depot in Cheltenham in 1980, with the loss of 47 jobs.³⁷ The brewery, which produced 500,000 barrels a year, was put up for sale in January 1998, but closed in October having failed to secure a buyer.³⁸ In 2000 Whitbread announced the closure of its regional headquarters in St Margaret's Road with the loss of 150 jobs.³⁹

In the post-war period industry increasingly moved away from the centre of the town. The Tungum Company, which produced components for aircraft cooling and fuel systems from a non-ferrous alloy⁴⁰ had a 'modern factory near the town centre' at the Royal Oak Works, Lower High Street and a sales office at Brandon House, Painswick Road.⁴¹ They later moved to a 4a. site at the White House, Kingsmead Road, Arle.⁴² Tungum sold the site in 2006 and moved their business to Tewkesbury.⁴³ The precision engineering company Delapena, originally based at the Zona Works in Russell Place⁴⁴, subsequently moved to the former

²⁹ *Glos. Echo*, 7 Dec. 1945.

³⁰ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 20 Sept. 1947.

³¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 Dec. 1955.

³² *Birmingham Daily Post*, 31 Jan. 1959.

³³ GA, D4322/1; *Birmingham Post*, 3 July 1963.

³⁴ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 June 1964.

³⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 8 July 1968.

³⁶ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 July 1977.

³⁷ *Glos. Echo*, 24 Jan. 2015.

³⁸ *The Independent*, 7 Jan. & 24 Oct. 1998.

³⁹ *Western Daily Press*, 20 Jan. 2000.

⁴⁰ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 22 July 1950.

⁴¹ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 5 June 1948; *Tewkesbury Register*, 10 Nov. 1951

⁴² *Glos. Echo*, 9 July 1955; *New Scientist* 8 (197), (1960), 521.

⁴³ *Glos. Echo*, 6 June 2008.

Andy's Candy's site further along the Tewkesbury Road⁴⁵ and later to its current Runnings Road site, where it employed 35 people in 2012.⁴⁶ United Chemists (Ucal) continued to manufacture pharmaceuticals at its site off the London Road, until a number of serious fires in the 1960s led to concerns about the restricted access for fire engines and the danger to surrounding houses. The company was taken over by MacCarthy Pharmaceuticals in 1972 and production in Cheltenham stopped soon after.⁴⁷

Commerce, Offices and Service Industries

The Cheltenham and Gloucestershire building society was a major employer in the centre of the town for more than four decades after the Second World War. In 1947 the Cheltenham and Gloucestershire (C&G) Building Society had assets of over £10 million and reserves in excess of £1 million.⁴⁸ The society acquired a number of properties adjoining its existing headquarters in Clarence Street⁴⁹ in order to develop Cheltenham House, officially opened in 1972.⁵⁰ Having failed to reach a satisfactory agreement over a council-owned site in Cheltenham for a further expansion of its headquarters, the society acquired a greenfield site at Barnwood on the outskirts of Gloucester in 1987 and moved from the town two years later.⁵¹

As the county council's policies limited the industrial development of Cheltenham, the council sought to attract commercial companies. Eagle Star insurance began the gradual move of its head office and computer centre to Cheltenham in 1965 and by the time its new building was officially opened in 1968, the company employed around 1,000 staff in the town.⁵² Eagle Star House was extended in 1981, and the company subsequently acquired a 10 a. site at Arle for further expansion. Following the opening of a new computer centre at Arle in 1988, the company employed 1,250 people in Cheltenham.⁵³ As its expansion continued, in 1990 Eagle Star acquired The Grange and surrounding parkland in Bishop's Cleeve.⁵⁴ In 1995 the introduction of a new computer system led to a substantial reduction in back office staff in Cheltenham.⁵⁵ In 1998 Eagle Star became part of Zurich Financial Services Group.⁵⁶ Following significant losses, the company began cutting jobs in

⁴⁴ *Gloucestershire County Handbook* (1956), 54-5.

⁴⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 Dec. 1958; *Glos. Echo*, 18 Nov. 2015.

⁴⁶ GA, PR7.8GS; *Bristol Post*, 3 July 2012.

⁴⁷ *The Times*, 10 Nov. & 9 Dec. 1972; *Glos. Echo*, 25 May 2011.

⁴⁸ *Glouc. Journal*, 22 Feb. 1947.

⁴⁹ GA, D4322.

⁵⁰ Historic England, 1466801 .

⁵¹ *Financial Times*, 7 Sep. 1987 & 26 Nov. 1993.

⁵² Isabel Syed, *Eagle Star: A Guide to its History and Archives* (Cheltenham, 1997), 39, 63, 70.

⁵³ Syed, *Eagle Star*, 21, 39; *Financial Times*, 12 July 1988.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 17 Mar. 1990.

⁵⁵ *The Independent*, 8 July 1995.

⁵⁶ *The Times*, 12 June 1999.

Cheltenham in 2001,⁵⁷ transferring its data processing to Switzerland, reducing the workforce in Cheltenham to 1,500.⁵⁸ Eagle Star House (by then renamed Eagle Tower) was sold in 2003, after which its office space was let to multiple companies.⁵⁹

In the 1970s other financial companies followed Eagle Star to Cheltenham. In 1972 Endsleigh Insurance moved from Southampton Row, London to new offices in Ambrose Street.⁶⁰ In 1994 plans for a new headquarters building in Little Shurdington were delayed by the discovery of a colony of great crested newts on the site.⁶¹ The firm left Cheltenham on completion of the new building in 1997.⁶² In 1973 Chelsea Building Society acquired the 23,500 sq. ft. of offices and storage space provided by Thirlestaine Hall as its headquarters.⁶³ The company employed 700 people in the town, when it merged with Yorkshire Building Society in 2010.⁶⁴ Following the merger, Thirlestaine Hall was sold and the remaining staff were moved to a site in Charlton Kings.⁶⁵

In the mid-1970s the supply of office accommodation outran demand, leading to around 200,00 sq. ft. standing empty by 1977. Following a campaign by the council and local estate agents to promote the town as a business centre, Gulf Oil (G.B.) relocated in 1978 from Hammersmith to The Quadrangle on the corner of Imperial Square.⁶⁶ In 1993 Gulf Oil moved to a new purpose-built headquarters overlooking the racecourse.⁶⁷ In 1997 the company was sold to Shell and its Cheltenham office closed a year later with the loss of 200 jobs.⁶⁸ In 1979 the printing technology company Linotype-Paul, which had acquired the lease of a factory on the Kingsditch trading estate the previous year, moved its UK headquarters to Chelham House, Bath Road, which had provided a temporary headquarters for the Central Electricity Generating Board 1971-76.⁶⁹ Chelham House was demolished for housing in 1999.⁷⁰

Two national housebuilders established their headquarters in Cheltenham. Westbury Homes, formed in 1964, moved from Hucclecote on the outskirts of Gloucester to a listed building in Lansdown Road, where it employed 450 people in 1988.⁷¹ The company was

⁵⁷ *Financial Times*, 19 Apr. 2001.

⁵⁸ *Western Daily Press*, 19 July 2003.

⁵⁹ *Western Daily Press*, 27 Feb. 2008.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 7 Apr. 1972.

⁶¹ *Aberdeen Press & Journal*, 17 June 1994.

⁶² Verey & Brooks, *Glos.* II, 670.

⁶³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 22 Mar. 1973.

⁶⁴ *Western Daily Press*, 1 Apr. 2010.

⁶⁵ *Glos. Echo*, 19 Feb. 2011 & 8 May 2012.

⁶⁶ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 Feb. 1978.

⁶⁷ Verey & Brooks, *Glos.* II, 290.

⁶⁸ *Glos. Echo*, 6 June 2008.

⁶⁹ *New Scientist* 84 (1979), 722; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 15 Apr. 1976, 20 Oct. 1977 & 8 Feb. 1979.

⁷⁰ CBC Online, Employment Land Review (2007), Appendix 4.

⁷¹ *Financial Times*, 12 July 1988; Companies House, 00822538; *Historic England*, 1104386.

acquired by York-based Persimmon Homes in 2006.⁷² Bovis Homes acquired the Cheltenham builders Herbert W. Tily and Son in 1968, which formed the nucleus of its expansion in the South West.⁷³ The company subsequently moved its administrative headquarters to Cheltenham, moving from Albion House to The Quadrangle, Winchcombe Street and Lansdown Road before leaving the town for Bishops Cleeve in 1999.⁷⁴

In 1988 Astec Communications, a mobile telecommunications company formed in 1986, established its headquarters at Selby Lodge, Cambray Place.⁷⁵ By 1994 the company had 50,000 mobile phone customers⁷⁶ and was employing 60 people.⁷⁷ In 1996 the company made a loss and in January 1997 was taken over by Vodafone Group, who moved the office to Newbury.⁷⁸ By April 1996 the educational publishers Stanley Thornes had moved from Leckhampton to Ellenborough House, Wellington Street.⁷⁹ In 2000 its parent company merged it with Thomas Nelson to create Nelson Thornes, based at Delta House, Bath Road.⁸⁰ The company employed 160 staff in Cheltenham, when it was acquired by Oxford University Press in 2013.⁸¹ The company was absorbed into OUP and quit Cheltenham in 2015.⁸²

Government Offices

In early 1950, a large Ministry of Pensions unit vacated the wartime government offices at Benhall, and an advance party of Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) staff arrived directly after. GCHQ's move, from its immediate post-war home at Eastcote (Middx), had been agreed in principle in late 1948. It formed part of a wider plan, driven by Cold War fears of air attack, to disperse government offices to safer locations. Cheltenham, situated within a region already favoured by the dispersal planners, was selected because Benhall was very well served with GPO landlines (a legacy of its wartime use by a large US Army logistics headquarters), fortuitously combined with the impending departure of the Pensions staff.⁸³ Empty wartime offices were also taken up by GCHQ at a second government site, at Oakley, which had enough space for the erection (1952-4) of a large new headquarters building and other facilities.⁸⁴ The town saw the move as 'an important step forward, for 1,800 permanent civil servants will be gradually transplanted here from London, men and

⁷² *Birmingham Post*, 27 June 2006.

⁷³ *The Times*, 16 Jan. 1968.

⁷⁴ *Financial Times*, 12 July 1988; *Glos. Echo*, 19 May 2015.

⁷⁵ *Newcastle Journal*, 20 Jan. 1988; Companies House, 02023193.

⁷⁶ *Newcastle Journal*, 17 May 1994.

⁷⁷ Companies House, Annual Accounts for YE 30 June 1994.

⁷⁸ Companies House, Annual Accounts for YE 30 June 1996.

⁷⁹ *The Times*, 25 Apr. 1996.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 13 July 2000.

⁸¹ *Glos. Echo*, 30 Sep. 2013.

⁸² *Bristol Post*, 23 Apr. 2014.

⁸³ Peter Freeman, *How GCHQ Came To Cheltenham* (2002), 10-16.

⁸⁴ Freeman, *How GCHQ Came To Cheltenham*, 15, 26.

women of the kind that the town desires to absorb.⁸⁵ Taking on many local recruits (900 by 1953)⁸⁶ as technical trainees and apprentices, as well as in clerical and executive grades, the 'Foreign Office' (as GCHQ was generally known locally) soon became Cheltenham's largest employer.⁸⁷ Within the county as a whole, only the NHS employed more, and by 2014 the workforce had grown to around 5,300 people.⁸⁸

In 1968 the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) moved to Rodney House with 29 of its 82 London staff.⁸⁹ The Polytechnics Central Admissions System (PCAS) was set up in 1985 within the same five-storey building, providing 58,000 sq.ft of office space.⁹⁰ New offices in Fulton House were officially opened in 1990.⁹¹ The two bodies amalgamated to form UCAS in 1993.⁹² When UCAS moved out of the town centre in 1999 to the former Gulf Oil premises on New Barn Road, Prestbury, its vacated offices were taken over by the financial software company Marlborough Stirling.⁹³

Retail, Tourism and Hospitality

Throughout the post-war period retail, tourism and hospitality have been important to Cheltenham's economy. The town proclaimed itself as the 'shopping centre of the West', the 'Gateway to the Cotswolds', and the 'halfway house' on the road from London to Wales.⁹⁴ Although the opening of the M4 in 1971 reduced its significance for traffic heading to Wales, it continued to offer the widest selection of hotels for tourists to the Cotswolds.⁹⁵ The town has also marketed itself as a conference centre and festival town.⁹⁶

Cavendish House remained a dominant presence on the Promenade, becoming part of the House of Fraser group in 1970.⁹⁷ Other Cheltenham department stores, such as Shirer and Lance's in the Colonnade, Drake's in Winchcombe Street and E.L. Ward on the corner of North Street,⁹⁸ closed between 1967 and 1979.⁹⁹ In 1951 the London fashion retailer Peter

⁸⁵ *Gloucestershire Echo*, 15 Feb 1950.

⁸⁶ Freeman, *How GCHQ Came To Cheltenham*, 30.

⁸⁷ Freeman, *How GCHQ Came To Cheltenham*, 33-34.

⁸⁸ Sunday Times, 21 Sep. 2014.

⁸⁹ *UCAS News* 33 (Spring 2011).

⁹⁰ *Staffs. Sentinel*, 4 Feb. 1986; Michael Harloe et al., *Place, Policy and Politics* (1990), 107.

⁹¹ *The Times*, 20 Mar. 1990.

⁹² *The Independent*, 9 Feb. 1993.

⁹³ *Birmingham Post*, 26 Apr. 1999.

⁹⁴ *Glos. Echo*, 1 Feb. 1947; *Cheltenham Spa Official Guide* (1960s), 15, 28, 33.

⁹⁵ Heart of England Tourist Board, *The Cotswolds* (c.1985).

⁹⁶ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 2 Sep. 1950; *Glos. Countryside*, 9 (10) (1957), 260; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20 Jan. 1973; CBC, *Visit Cheltenham The Festival Town* (2019).

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 4 Dec. 1962 & 9 July 1970.

⁹⁸ GA, D4322/1; PR22.33GS.

⁹⁹ *Glos. Echo*, 11 July 2015.

Robinson opened a branch in Cheltenham,¹⁰⁰ introducing the novelty of self-service to fashion retail.¹⁰¹ In the 1970s the slow development of multi-storey car parking and pedestrianization threatened the town's status as a regional shopping centre.¹⁰²

Following the opening of the Regent Arcade and Montpellier Courtyard in the 1980s, Cheltenham regained its status as an important regional retail centre.¹⁰³ Regent Arcade provided 78 shops, anchored by BHS and Mothercare stores, and parking for 540 cars.¹⁰⁴ It created a shopping route between the east end of the High Street and the Promenade and was linked to Cavendish House by a bridge at first floor level.¹⁰⁵ The Beechwood Arcade, opened in 1991 north of the High Street to the east of the Regent Arcade, was anchored by a branch of Debenhams.¹⁰⁶ Hoopers, a department store specialising in designer labels, occupied the former Promenade post office building between 1987 and 2003.¹⁰⁷ Liberty's, the London department store, also had a branch in the Promenade for almost a decade from 1988.¹⁰⁸ Both the Regent and Beechwood arcades were designed as tourist attractions as well as retail hubs. The glass-roofed atrium of the Regent Arcade was dominated by the Wishing Fish Clock designed by local artist Kit Williams,¹⁰⁹ while the Beechwood Arcade offered a modern-day Winter Garden.¹¹⁰ The tourist attractions of the town were supplemented by the opening of the Gallery of Fashion at the Pittville Pump Room and the Gustav Holst Birthplace museum in Clarence Road.¹¹¹

In 1998 the town introduced the short-lived 'Noddy train' shuttle service to link its shopping areas in a bid to counteract the attractions of the Cribbs Causeway shopping mall outside Bristol.¹¹² Other efforts to encourage out of area shoppers was the introduction of a German-style Christmas market in wooden huts in the Promenade in 2005¹¹³ and a £1million refurbishment of Cavendish House in 2009.¹¹⁴ The arrival of Waitrose on the St James site and the redevelopment of the Lower High street further dispersed the town's shopping

¹⁰⁰ *Yorks. Post*, 5 Dec. 1951.

¹⁰¹ Hulton Archive, HL8787, 21 Nov. 1951; *The People*, 23 Aug. 1953.

¹⁰² *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 Dec. 1975.

¹⁰³ *The Times*, 30 June 1988.

¹⁰⁴ *Glos. Echo*, 21 Nov. 2019.

¹⁰⁵ *Financial Times*, 15 Mar. 1985.

¹⁰⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 25 Feb. 2011.

¹⁰⁷ *Cheltenham Bicentenary Commemorative Programme* (1988), back cover; *Western Daily Press*, 21 May 2003.

¹⁰⁸ *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1988; *The Independent*, 13 June 1996.

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 18 June 1994.

¹¹⁰ *Western Daily Press*, 28 Aug. 1999; Mowl, *Cheltenham Betrayed*, 69.

¹¹¹ Heart of England Tourist Board, *The Cotswolds*, 33.

¹¹² *Western Daily Press*, 15 June 1999.

¹¹³ *Glos. Echo*, 8 Nov. 2008.

¹¹⁴ *Glos. Echo*, 11 Nov. 2009.

areas.¹¹⁵ The town's retail sector weathered the effects of the 2008 banking crisis¹¹⁶, and in 2014 Cheltenham was ranked among the top 50 UK shopping destinations.¹¹⁷ In 2013 the museum and art gallery, rebranded as The Wilson, reopened after a £6 million refurbishment and expansion.¹¹⁸ The town also had an increasing reputation as a 'foodie capital' with a wide range of restaurants.¹¹⁹

Within the confines of the borough boundaries there was limited potential for out-of-town retail development. There was some development to the west of the town. The building supplies company Sharpe and Fisher moved from Pittville Street to Gloucester Road in the 1970s.¹²⁰ From its Cheltenham head office the company developed a network of 38 branches, before being taken over by Travis Perkins in 1999.¹²¹ Texas Homecare opened a distinctive round building on the old gasometer site in Gloucester Road in the 1980s, before moving to the Northern Relief Road in the 1990s.¹²² A Tesco superstore opened on the former gasworks site alongside the Tewkesbury Road in 1994.¹²³ The council consistently objected to the development of large-scale retail in neighbouring parishes (under different councils), worried by the likely adverse effect on town centre shops.¹²⁴ In the 21st century the relocation of aerospace companies allowed out-of-town retail development at The Reddings, which expanded onto adjoining greenbelt land.¹²⁵

The Cheltenham Business Improvement District was established in 2016, covering the central retail and entertainment area of the High Street, Promenade, Montpellier and Brewery Quarter.¹²⁶ In 2016 tourism employed 3,607 people in Cheltenham and was worth over £150 million to the town,¹²⁷ but visitor numbers were declining.¹²⁸ Marketing Cheltenham, a council backed initiative, was launched in 2017 to further promote tourism beyond the niche markets of the sporting and cultural festivals.¹²⁹ Following the collapse of the department store BHS, redevelopment plans for the Regent Arcade involved a mixed development with reduced retail space.¹³⁰ The Beechwood Arcade closed and was

¹¹⁵ *Western Daily Press*, 14 Sep. 2000.

¹¹⁶ *Western Daily Press*, 2 July 2011.

¹¹⁷ *Glos. Echo*, 29 Sep. 2014.

¹¹⁸ *The Times*, 2 Nov. 2013.

¹¹⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, 21 Feb. 2012; *Glos. Echo*, 7 Sep. 2017; *Cotswold Life*, 22 Aug. 2019.

¹²⁰ GA, D4322/1; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 May 1979.

¹²¹ *Birmingham Post*, 26 Oct. 1999.

¹²² GA, K884/1/19; Timothy Mowl, *Cheltenham Betrayed* (Tiverton, 1995), 54.

¹²³ *Construction News*, 29 Apr. 1993; *The Grocer*, 26 Sep. 2019.

¹²⁴ GA, K193/111; DC13/1, 127-8; DC28/1, 1098; DC39/2, 33.

¹²⁵ *Glos. Echo*, 7 Apr. 2009 & 16 Jan. 2010.

¹²⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 30 Apr. 2016.

¹²⁷ *Western Daily Press*, 26 Jan. 2018.

¹²⁸ *Glos. Echo*, 28 Dec. 2016.

¹²⁹ *Western Daily Press*, 27 Nov. 2017.

¹³⁰ *Glos. Echo*, 18 Oct. 2018.

demolished, being replaced by a 115,000 sq. ft John Lewis department store.¹³¹ Following the takeover of House of Fraser by Sports Direct in 2018, an agreement with the landlord secured the short-term future of Cavendish House.¹³² High rents and business rates resulted in the closure of a number of long-established shops even before the advent of Covid-19 in 2020.¹³³

The development of the town as a festival and conference centre depended on the availability of sufficient hotel accommodation. In 1946 Cheltenham had 9 licensed hotels, compared with 12 in Bath and 16 in Harrogate.¹³⁴ Twelve hotels advertised in the programme of the Contemporary Literature Festival in 1949,¹³⁵ while there were 29 hotels and guest houses in the 1960s official town guide.¹³⁶ There was disappointment that the music festival, while attracting a good, regional audience, did not become a 'holiday' festival like Edinburgh or Salzburg.¹³⁷ In 1950 the Spa and Entertainments Officer wanted more hotel accommodation in the town, as the maximum number of delegates that could be accommodated was 600, reduced to 400 in the summer tourist season. Larger conferences had over 1,000 delegates.¹³⁸ Local hoteliers conversely wanted conferences limited to the winter, when occupancy rates were low.¹³⁹ In the 1960s the plans for the redevelopment of the town centre included a conference centre and hotel on the Plough site.¹⁴⁰ In 1973 the Golden Valley hotel, Gloucester Road, the first new hotel to be built in Cheltenham for 40 years, provided conference facilities and accommodation for 200 guests.¹⁴¹ The high value of residential land led a number of smaller hotels and guest houses to close, but in 2006 the town's hotel sector retained a capacity of around 2,500 beds.¹⁴² In the 1970s the possibility of building a concert hall on the St James's station site was investigated, but rejected, although the provision of an entertainments centre/concert hall, enhancing the facilities long offered by the Town Hall, remained a long-term aspiration.¹⁴³ In 1999 there were rival proposals for a conference centre on the Whitbread site on the High Street and at the racecourse in Prestbury,¹⁴⁴ with the Centaur centre opening at the racecourse in 2004.¹⁴⁵

¹³¹ *Glos. Echo*, 25 Oct. 2018.

¹³² *Glos. Echo*, 13 Dec. 2018.

¹³³ *Glos. Echo*, 16 Apr. 2020.

¹³⁴ *Glos. Echo*, 8 Mar. 1946.

¹³⁵ GA, PQ7.8.

¹³⁶ *Cheltenham Spa Official Guide* (c 1960), 57-89.

¹³⁷ Frank Howes, *The Cheltenham Festival* (1965), 35.

¹³⁸ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 2 Sep. 1950.

¹³⁹ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 4 Nov. 1950.

¹⁴⁰ *Birmingham Post*, 1 July 1966.

¹⁴¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 Mar. 1973.

¹⁴² CBC Online, *Local Plan Second Review* (2006), 80.

¹⁴³ GA, PF4.79, 66, 93.

¹⁴⁴ *Western Daily Press*, 7 July 1999.

¹⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, 15 Mar. 2004.

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