

Georgian Street Improvements

From 1700, Bath grew from a small market and spa town into a fashionable health resort for the aristocracy and gentry - the tenth largest city in pre-industrial England. The provision of amenities such as paved streets, street lighting, rubbish removal and watching (policing) was an important issue. Visitors needed a safe and attractive urban environment to travel through and socialise in.



Extract from map of Bath, 1735 by John Wood (ref: Bath Record Office, Bath & North and East Somerset Council, 596/1/6), showing the contrast between the layout of the old and new town.

By 1760, there were three surgeons and nine apothecaries. On 20th December 1765, the Council:

“Resolved That ... in order to render the several Streets more Commodious, for Enlarging the Pump Room and for Widening the Way from the lower end of Stall Street to Saw Close & for opening a way from the Upper part of the town to the lower part thereof The Corporation should have a power of Compelling the Sale of ... houses...”

“Resolved ... to obtain a new [act] ... to have the streets paved by a Pound Rate, to be cleaned by a daily Scavenger, & to have the power of directing all matters relative to the paving cleansing enlightening & watching (policing) the streets vested in the Magistrates ...”

“Resolved ... that the Magistrates shall have power to prevent narrow wheel Waggons being drawn upon any part of the Streets with more than four Horses or Narrow Wheel Carts with more than three horses... to prevent Carriages of any kind or Stones or Materials for Buildings to remain in the Streets etc. beyond a limited time & to oblige all Signs to be fixed flatly against the Houses & to remove (if possible) all Sheds and penthouses as they Occasion ... Water falling into the Streets ...”

As a result of these decisions, the first Bath Improvement Act was passed in 1766: dangerous pavements were made good, with cellars boarded over and gates installed; streets were pitched, paved and cleaned; lighting was vastly improved; hanging signs were banned; streets were kept clear of building materials for ease of movement; and a night watch was established. This nascent public health strategy made Bath a cleaner, healthier city and provided the foundations for ground-breaking nineteenth-century reforms.

North Parade, 1804 by J C Nattes (ref: Bath Record Office, Bath and North East Somerset Council, Hunt Vol.2. Page 54 IOB 617).



In the 1780s, the Council committed to further modernisation. On 31st January 1788, it:

*“Resolved that a short petition shall be prepared ... stating ... the intention of the Corporation to apply to Parliament ... to enable them to **improve the Baths and Pumproom of this City and the Avenues and Streets leading thereto for the Benefit of the Public** and to take down many houses for that purpose and to lay open some new Streets and to secure the Baths from any Accidental or Malicious Injury ...”*

The resulting act (The Bath Improvement Act 1789 (29 Geo. III c.73)) was:

*“An Act for **protecting and securing the Hot Baths and Springs**, within the City of Bath, from Injury by Incroachments and Annoyances; for **enlarging or rebuilding the present Pump Rooms** there; for **widening certain Streets, Lanes, and Publick Passages**, and for **making certain Streets and Passages**, to render the Approaches to the said Hot Baths, Springs, and Pump rooms, **more safe and commodious.**”*

*“Within the City of Bath ... are ... several **Baths and Hot Springs** ... by long Use and established Experience ... found to **be extremely efficacious in restoring to health** great Numbers of Persons...”*

*“And ... **several of the Streets** ... leading to the ... Baths and Springs ... to which the numerous Invalids are obliged to resort in Chairs and Carriages, for drinking the said Waters, and bathing ... **are at present so narrow and confined that they cannot be passed without great Inconvenience and Danger.**”*



Pump Room from Stall Street, 1828 by Robert Woodruffe (ref: Victoria Art Gallery, Bath & North East Somerset Council, 1926.63), showing the rebuilt Pump Room and transformed public approach to the baths. Acts of 1793 and 1801 expanded street improvement works to Bathwick and Walcot.

Knowledge of the improvements is growing thanks to Bath Record Office's £138,000 Wellcome Trust-

funded project, *Building a Healthier City*: <https://www.batharchives.co.uk/building-healthier-city-funded-wellcome-trust>. Archivists are cataloguing the records and publishing information about them, while a conservator is packaging and repairing items so they can be preserved and made available to researchers.

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