

Building a Healthier City: public health in Bath from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries

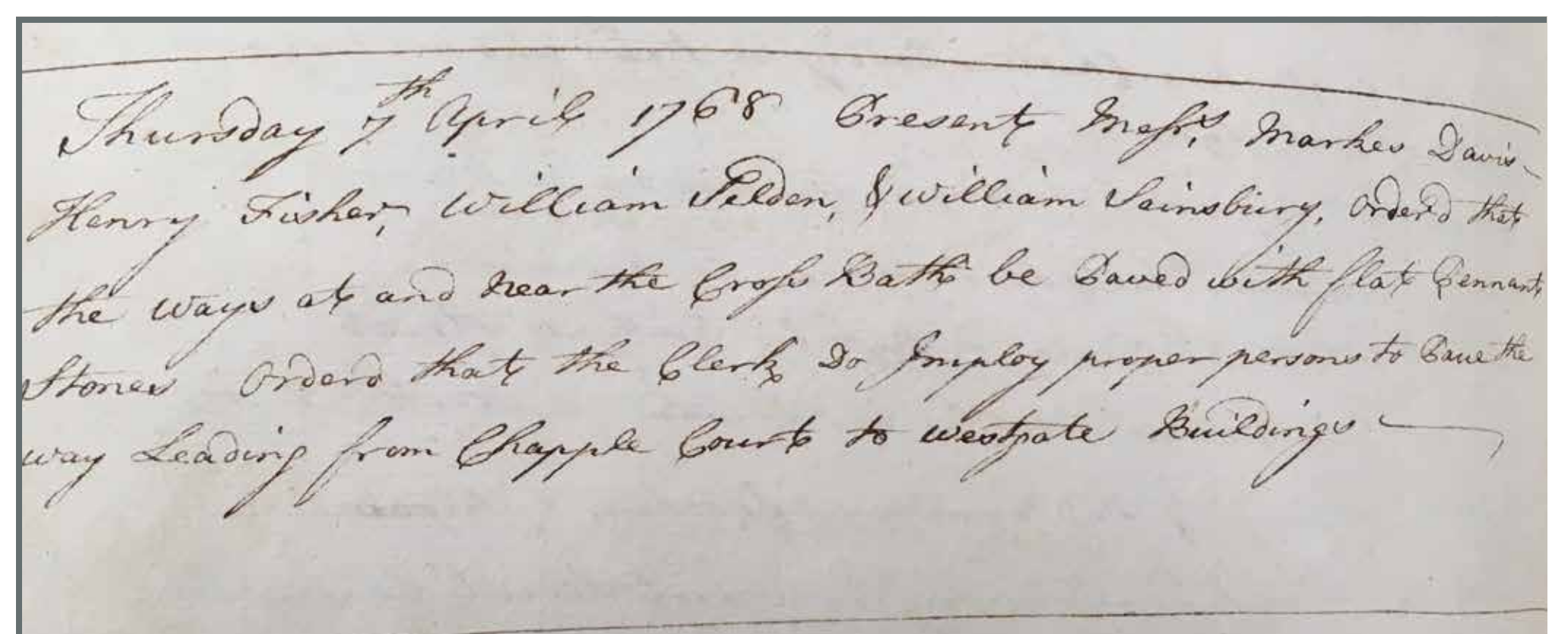
A project funded by the Wellcome Trust to catalogue and conserve records held by Bath Record Office

Records of the Bath Commissioners, 1766-1851

Providing amenities such as paved streets, street lighting, rubbish removal and a night watch was an important issue in fashionable eighteenth-century Bath.

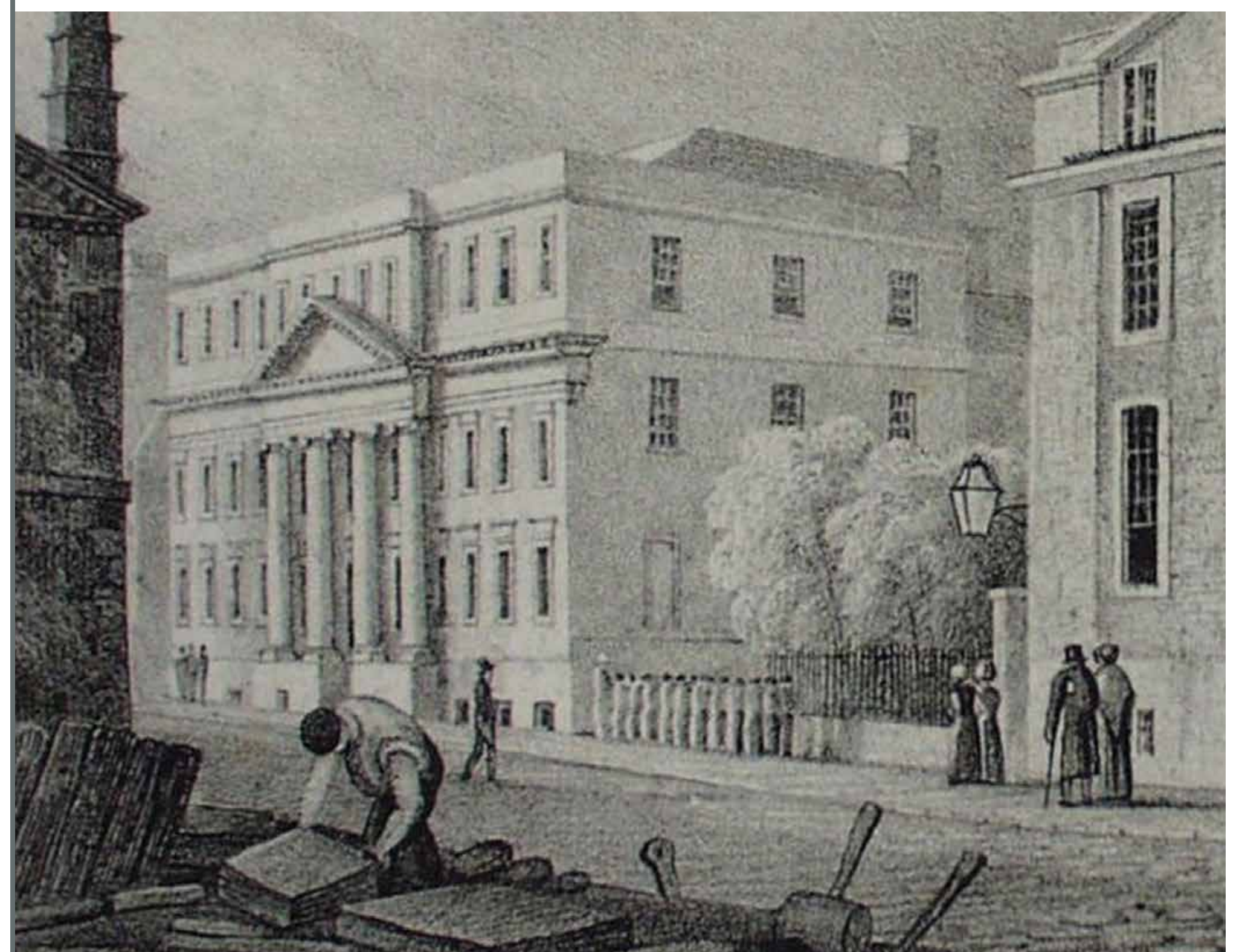
To make the necessary improvements, the Corporation set up special Commissions. The Commissioners had powers to raise money, carry out work and enforce improvements.

Many streets were narrow and dirty or blocked by protruding signs and steps. This detail from a print in the Victoria Art Gallery shows Slippery Lane, leading down to the river. (Ref. 1933.780)



This is page from the Commissioners' minutes for April 1768 ordering pennant stones to be laid by the Cross Bath (Ref. BC/22/2/1)

Here we can see paving stones being laid (detail from an engraving in the Victoria Art Gallery, ref. 1933.661).



Major works were carried out to improve the city for its fashionable visitors



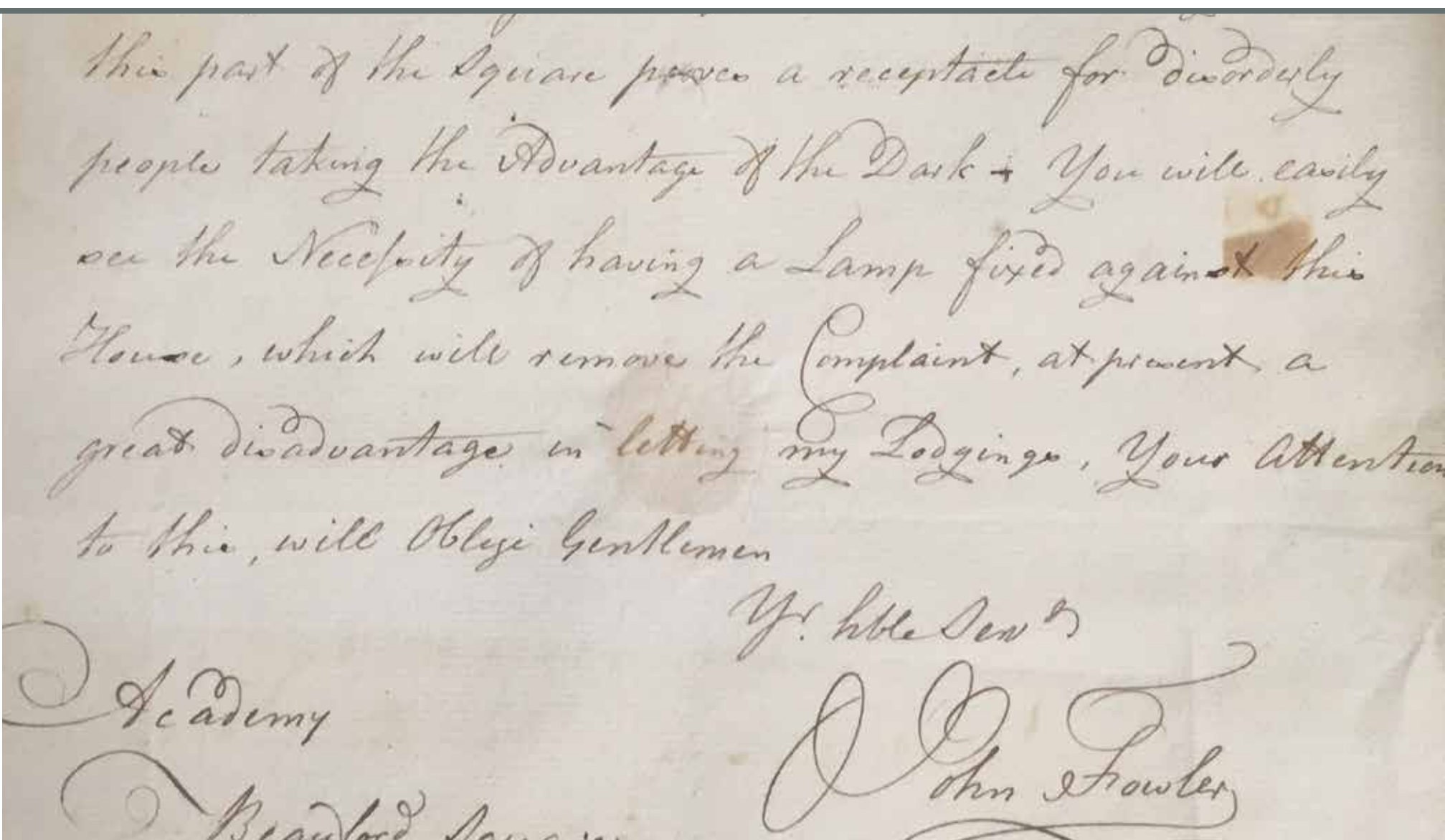
The Pump Rooms were rebuilt and streets widened to make access easier for carriages and sedan chairs.

This picture by Robert Woodruffe shows the new Pump Rooms and the transformed approach to the baths in 1828. (ref: Victoria Art Gallery, 1926.63),

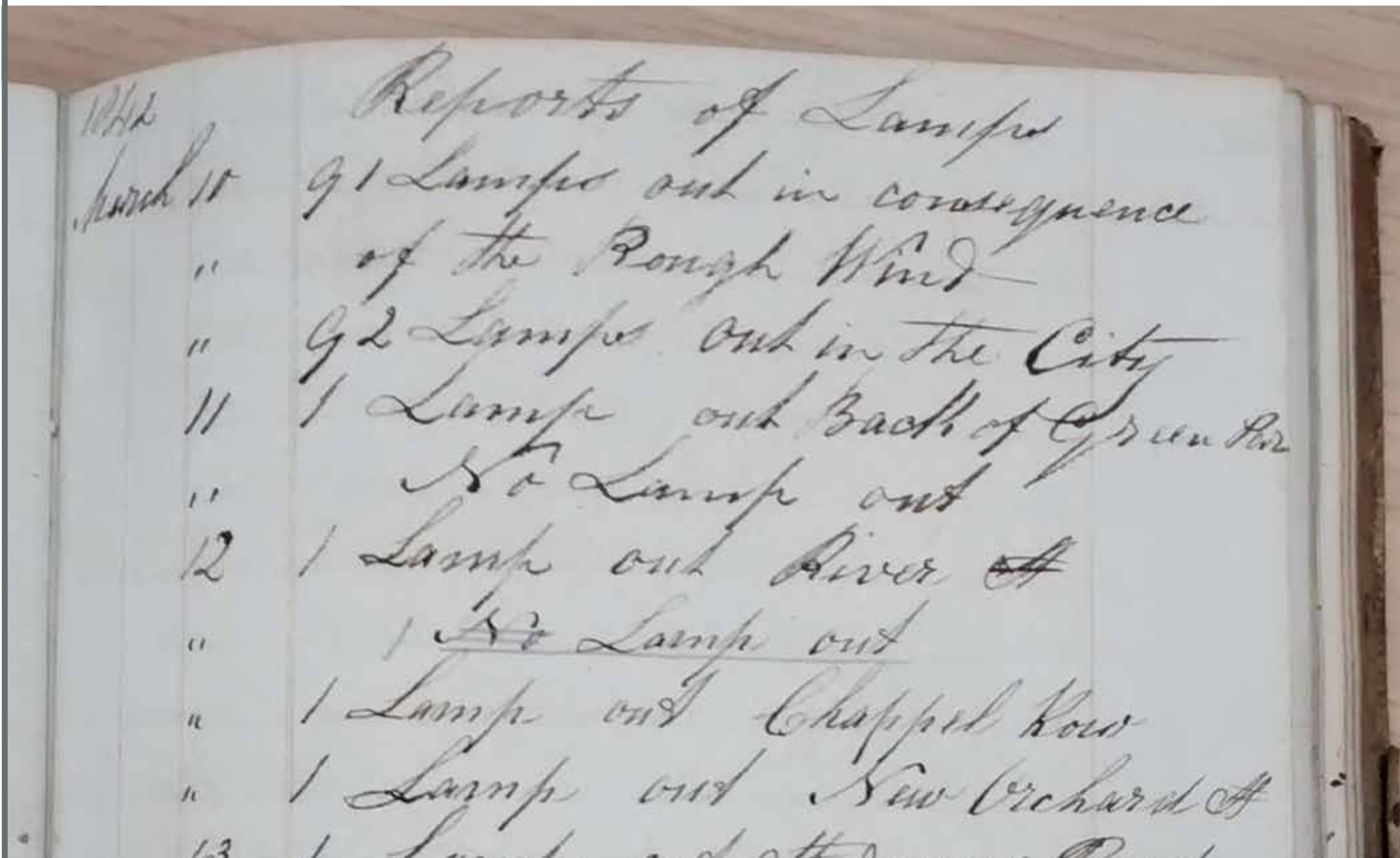
The Commissioners were also responsible for public safety

Lamps made dark streets safer at night. The Commissioners decided where the lamps should be placed. In this letter the owner of a house in Beauford Square is asking for a lamp on his house.

He complains that ‘disorderly people taking advantage of the Dark’ are stopping him letting lodgings in the house (ref. BC/22/2/8/2).



Reports were made on the state of the lamps each night. Usually only a small number of lamps were out, but on a windy night in March 1842, 92 lamps were extinguished. (Ref. BC/22/2/7/1)



Night watchmen helped to ensure the safety of the City and its residents. This is a watchman’s truncheon, found among the Commissioners’ records. (Ref. BC/22/2/13)

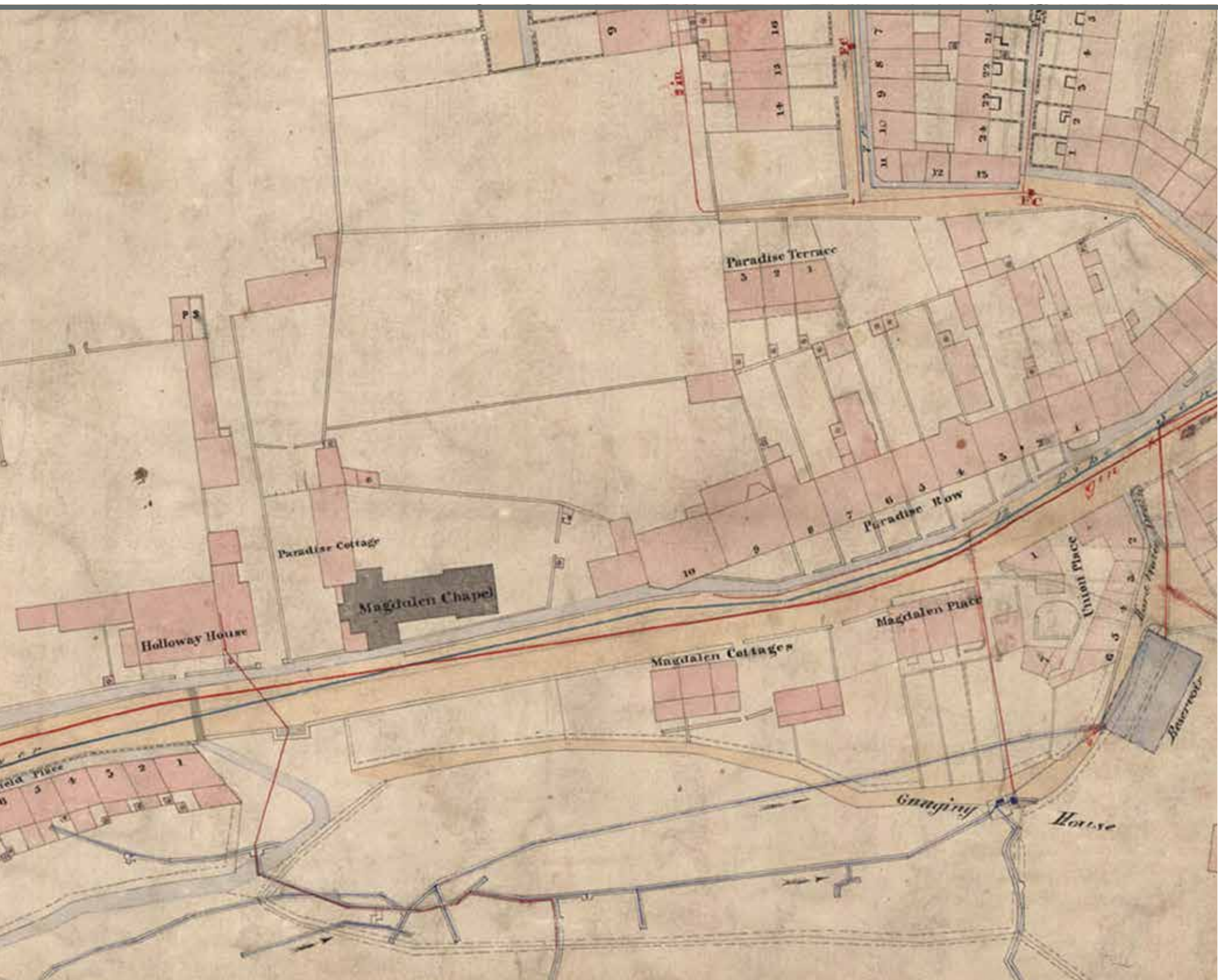


Records of Water Supply and Sewers, mid 1700s to 1974

Piped water and efficient sewers are vital for public health. The centre of Bath was supplied with piped water from at least the thirteenth century.

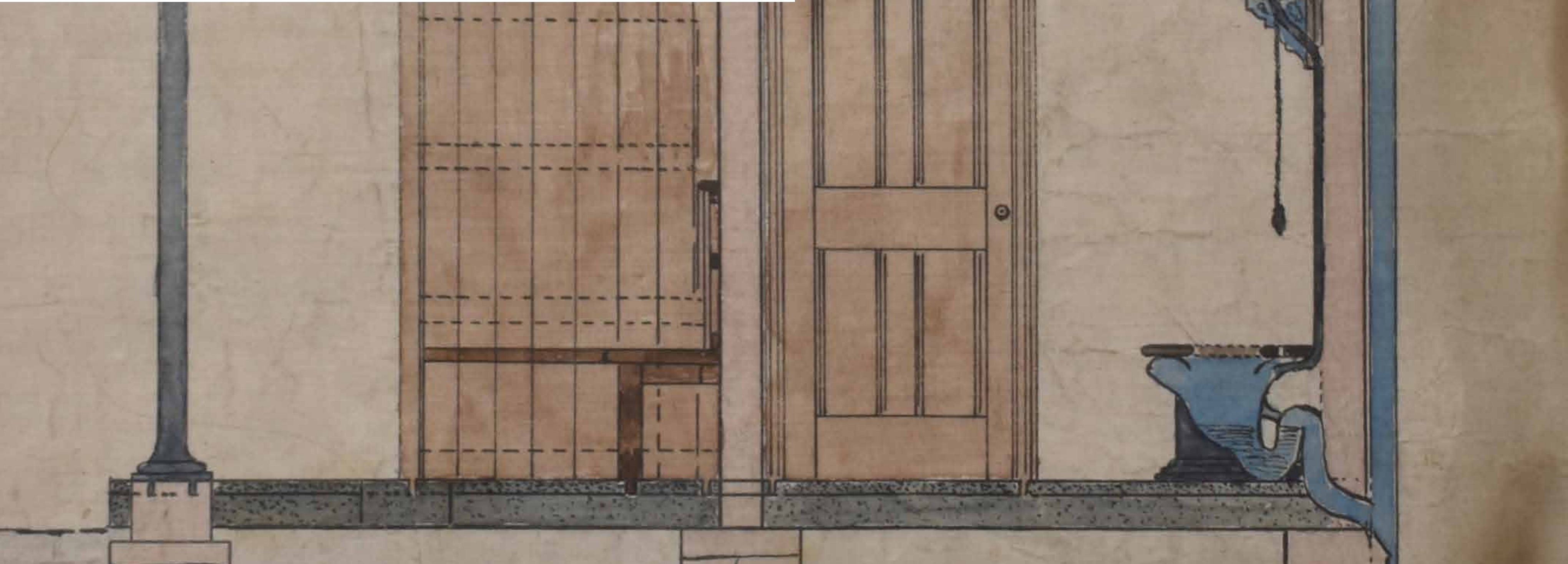
Water rent books record the houses which were supplied with piped water and payments made. This page from the volume for 1804 shows the entry for ‘Mr Austin’, Jane Austen’s father. The family lived at Green Park. (Ref. BC/7/1/11/1/29)

Green Park Buildings,							
The No.	Owners.	Occupies.	Rent per Annum.	No. of Quarters (due Midsummer, 1804)	What Sum.	When Received.	Sum Received.
Brought Forward.			£. s. d.		£. s. d.		£. s. d.
632 1	Wm Phillips	Mr. Hughes	2 5	4	2 5	30 Jan'y	1 2 6
633 2	do	Mr. Hughes	2 5	4	2 5	31 Jan'y	1 2 6
634 3	Wm Phillips	Mr. Austin	2 5	4	2 5	30 Jan'y	11 5
635 4	do	Mr. H. Manby	2 5	4	2 5		
636 5	Wm Phillips	Mr. Mansfield	2 5	6	3 7 6	1 Feb'y	2 5



This map of part of Holloway shows the springs running down from Beechen Cliff, a ‘reservoir’ (holding tank), and a ‘gauging house’ to measure the flow of water from the springs, as well as water mains and sewers. The map was drawn up in 1852, but the lines of the sewers may have been added slightly later. (Ref. Cotterell sheet 36)

By the end of the nineteenth century, the sewerage system was extensive, and regulations ensured that new buildings had water closets outside or inside. (Detail from a plan from 1917, ref. BC/16 rolled plans)



Carry out your own research in the Record Office

We welcome all who want to use the local studies and archive material we hold. Come and visit us!



"The joy I have had with doing my family history... having not that much formal education...I have realised over time how much more confident I have become...You would not believe there are so many things to come out of starting that first step, so glad I did."

A researcher at Bath Record Office.

Volunteer in the Record Office

Record Office staff are supported by a team of volunteers – find out more on our website or contact us for details.

"Working as a volunteer... makes me feel I am still using my professional expertise for the benefit of other people, so adds to a sense of well-being as does just getting out and mixing with people in a work environment."

"If it wasn't for my volunteering role in the Record Office I might be a lonely old woman but I have made good friends and it is a really friendly environment."

"Every week I learn something new and amazing.....It is such a rewarding feeling to make a tiny contribution to the city where I and my family live and work."

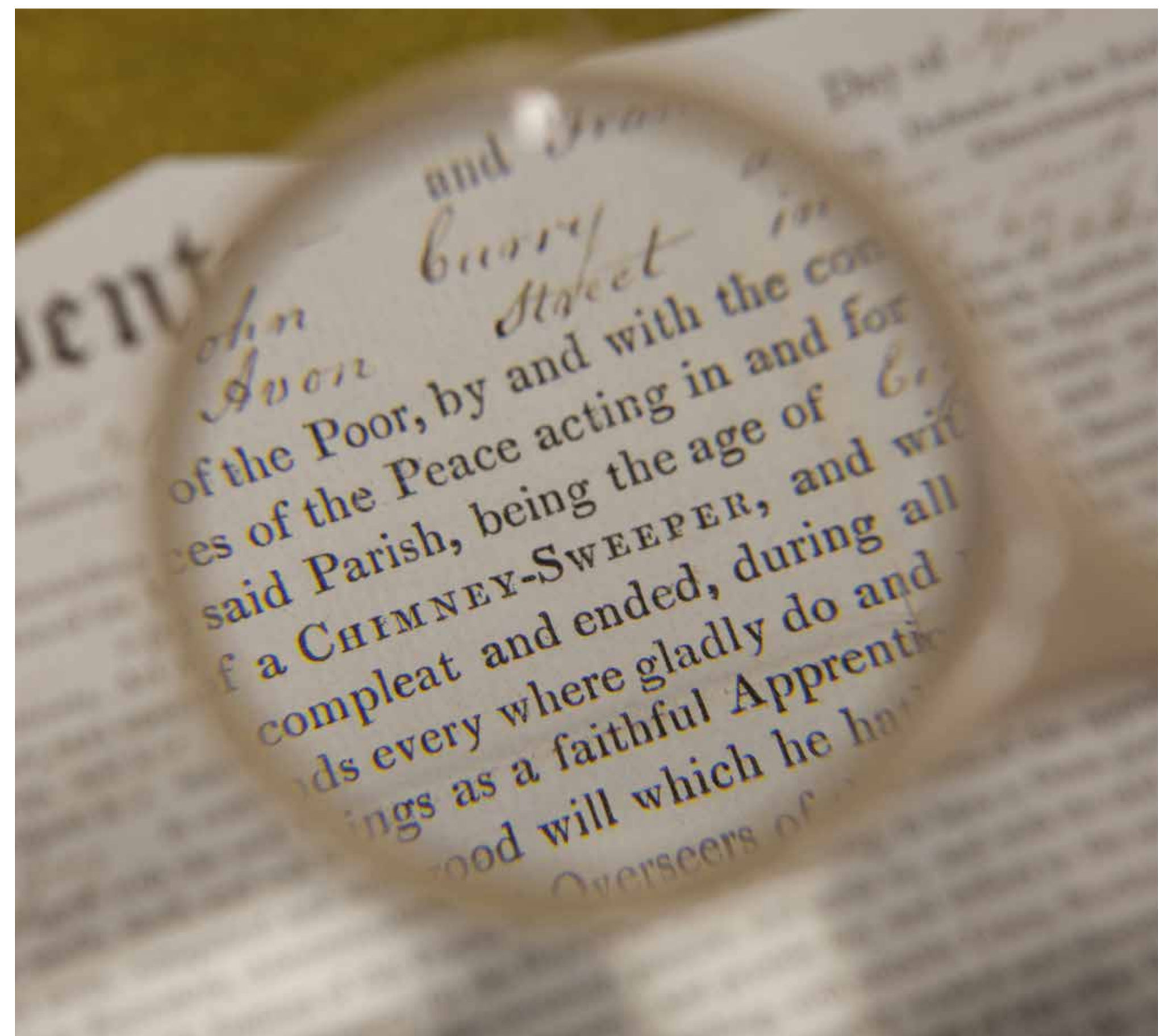


Trace your family history

We can help you with your research whether your family lived in Bath or elsewhere

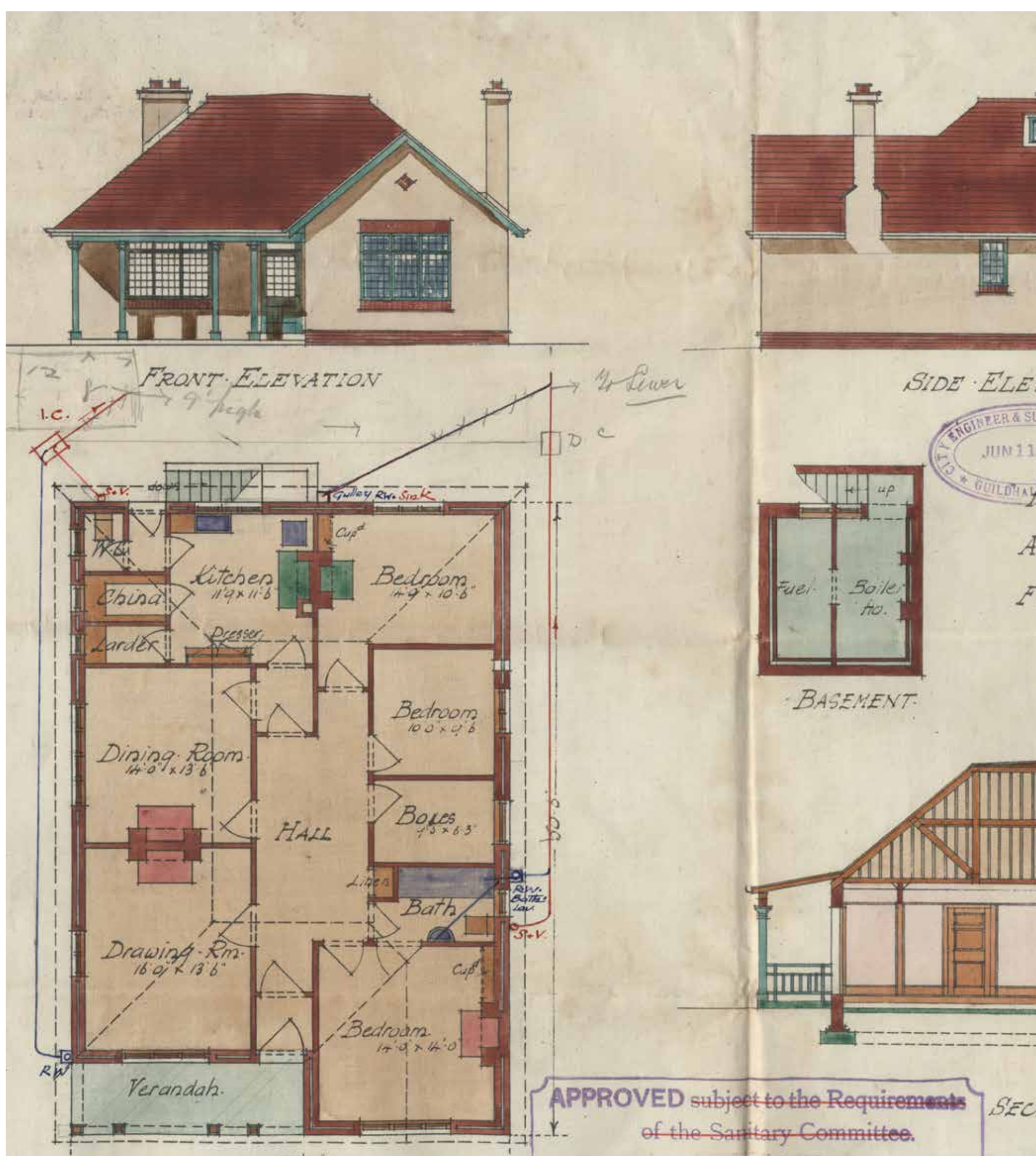


We offer free access to online family history resources. Staff are on hand to give expert advice if needed.



We hold many original records which tell us about people who lived in Bath.
(Apprenticeship indenture, parish of St James)

Explore house history



Use maps, building plans and photographs to find out when a house was built and research its architectural history. (Building control plan no. 2659, 1924)



Discover who lived in a house from title deeds, street directories, rate books, electoral registers and census returns.



Title deed, Union Street 1820, ref. 0102A/171

Research Local History

We hold a vast amount of material for anyone interested in the history of the area, including maps, images, newspapers and printed books, as well as the archives of the city council and of local organisations and individuals.

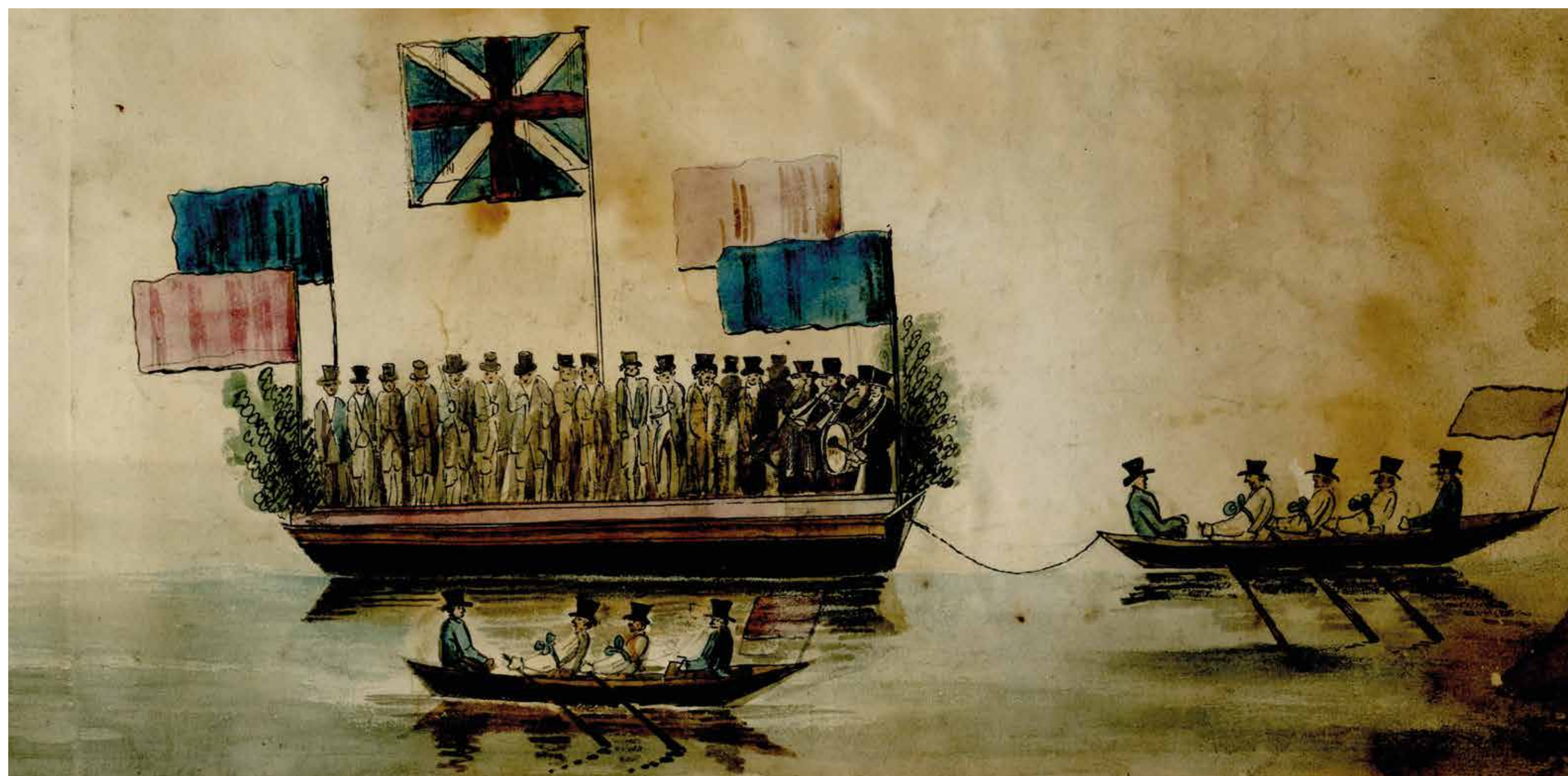
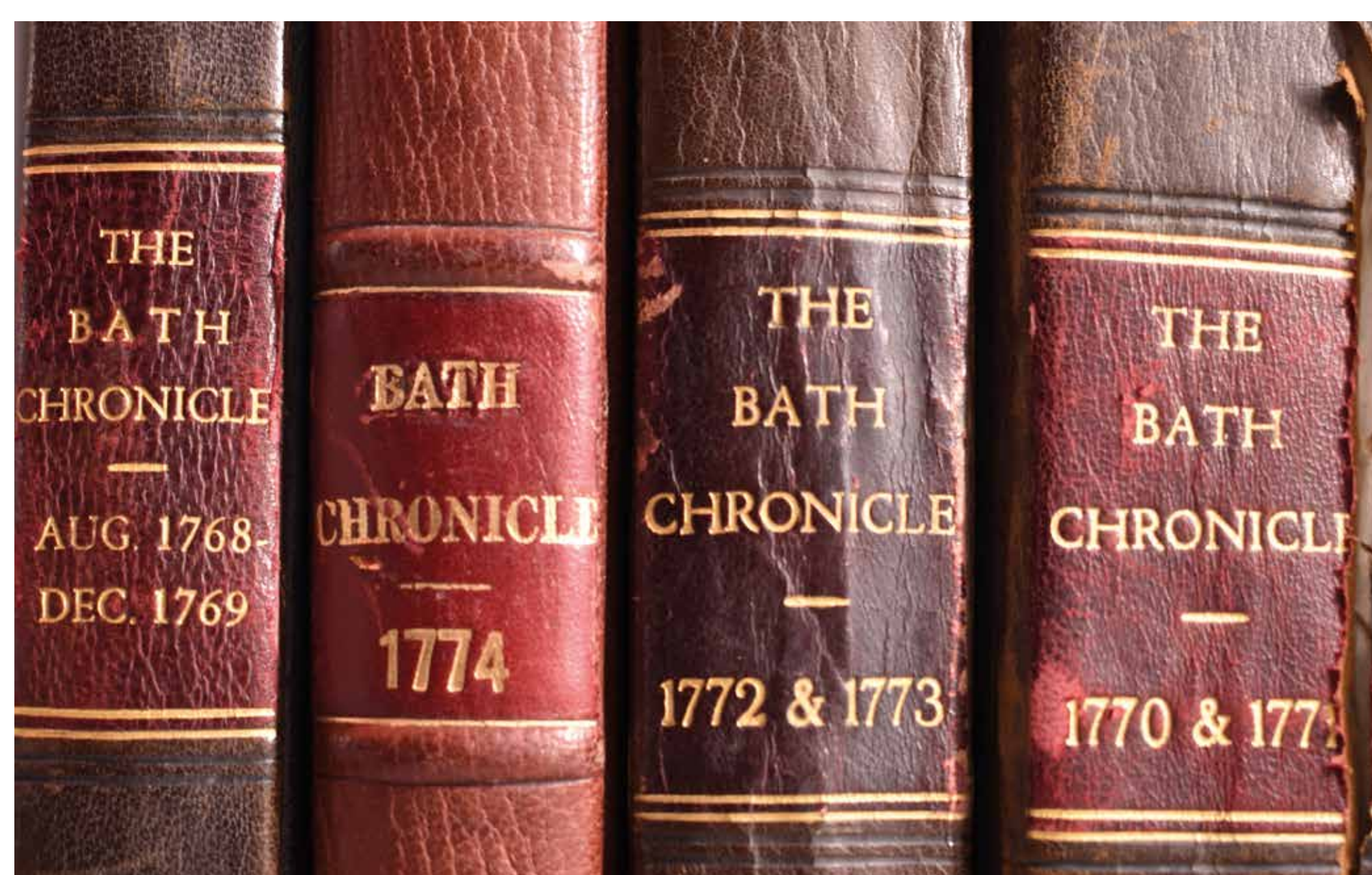


Illustration from the Regulations for beating the bounds of Bathwick parish, 1832. It was traditional to walk (or row!) round parish boundaries once a year. (ref. 0951)

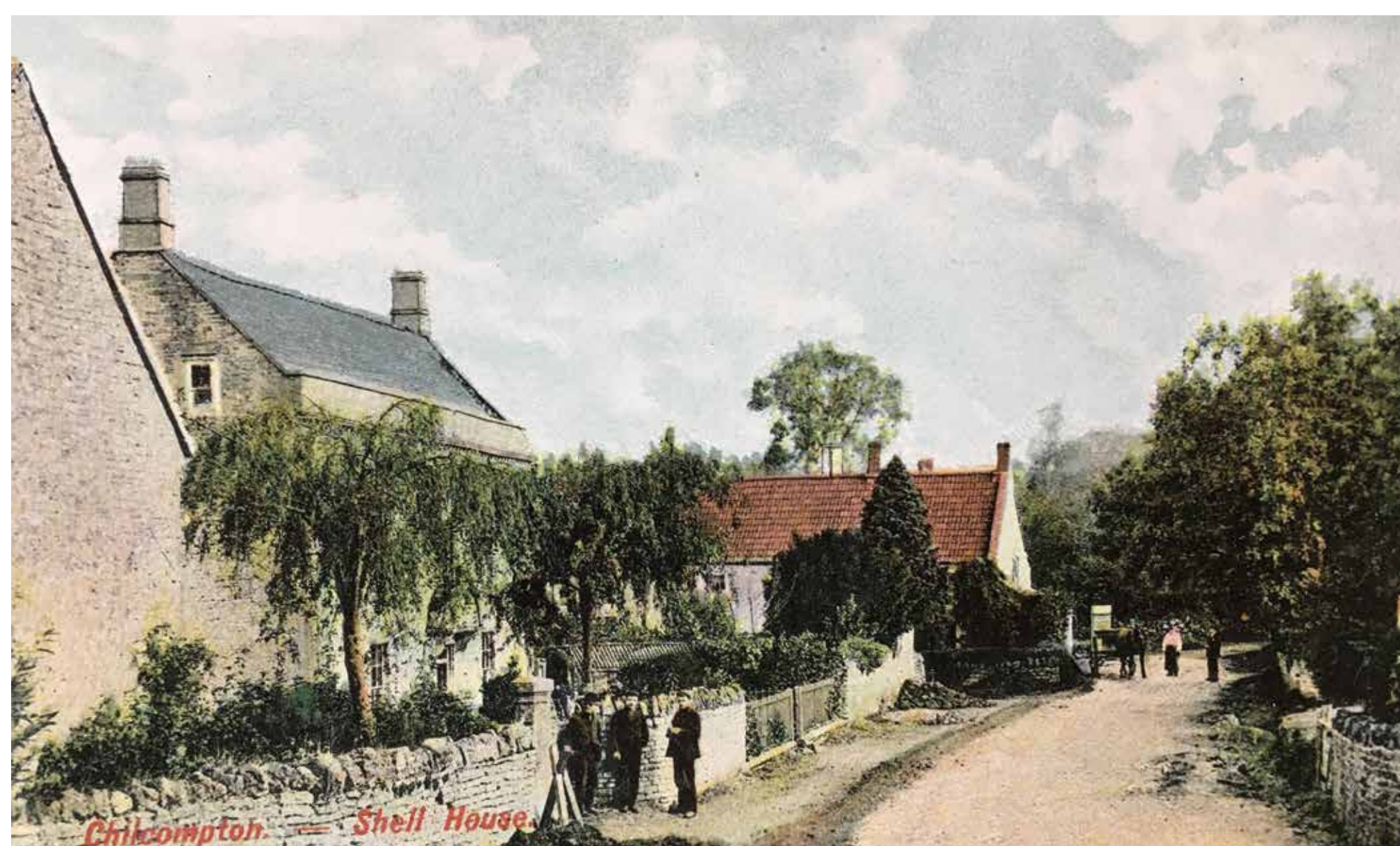


Plan of Bath, part of Speed's map of Somerset, 1676 (ref. 0596)

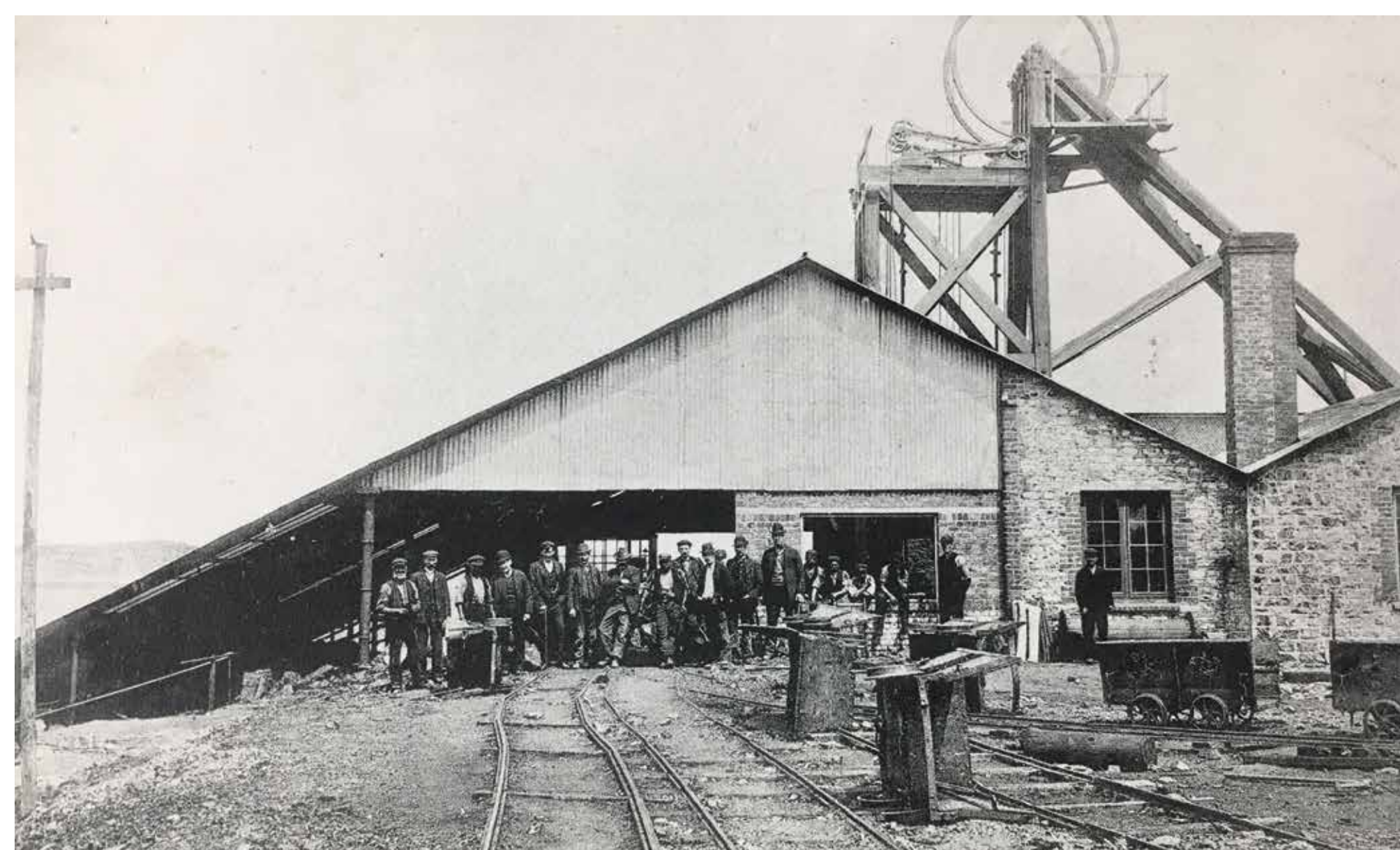


Bound copies of the Bath Chronicle newspaper, 1768-1771, Local Studies collection

Postcards from the Boodle scrapbook collection (Local Studies Collection)



Chilcompton, early twentieth century



Norton Hill Colliery, early twentieth century