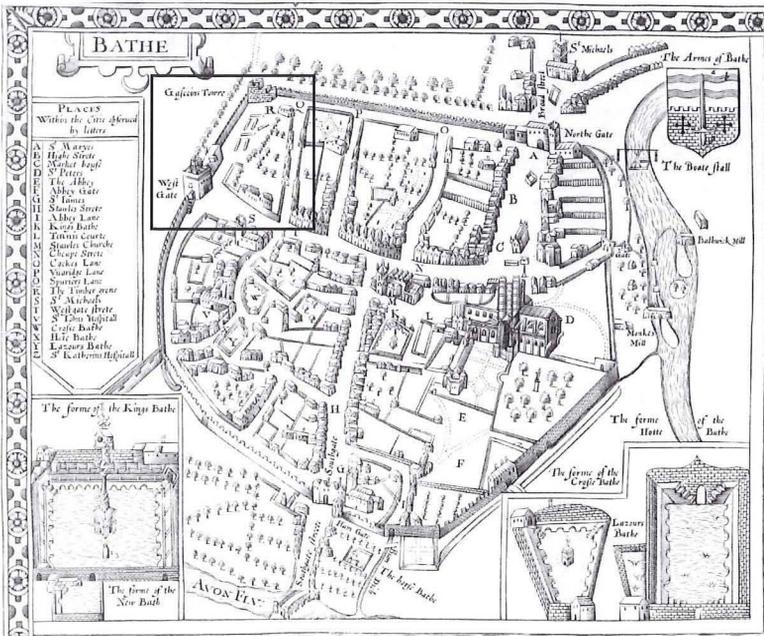


THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SAW CLOSE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES

Mike Chapman and Elizabeth Holland

The 'Saw Close' or 'Timber Green' was originally an open grassy space, used for a variety of purposes, including that of a timber yard. Its limits were determined on the north and west sides by the medieval city wall (fig.1). To the south and east its boundaries varied according to the activities of the neighbourhood. For this reason the following study takes in the north western end of Westgate Street and Bridewell Lane as well as the western end of the Upper Borough Walls, and also the Seven Dials block. It explores an area in the main one of general utility, of tradesmen, light industry, and entertainment, rather than the grand set pieces for which Bath is famous elsewhere.



1. The Saw Close area (outlined) as shown on John Speed's map of Bath, 1610. The 'Timber Green' (R) is represented by scattered baulks of timber. The building at the top of Bridewell Lane ('Spuriers Lane', Q) is probably the barn and stable which replaced the medieval dovecote.

Medieval Times

Medieval Bath was served by three main gates. Unlike the North and South gates, the West Gate had direct access into the surrounding countryside, as well as a relatively open interior area. Besides the open space of the Saw Close, the interior settlement consisted mainly of gardens and crofts associated with various houses occupying the burgage plots fronting Westgate Street (fig.1, T).¹ Concerned with the reception of travellers, animals and goods, it contained a substantial number of tradesmen and 'workmen', and although lacking any large-scale industrial or trading facilities, is not portrayed in the tax records as a poor district.

As the Saw Close was almost entirely enclosed by the city wall and the fences along the back of the neighbouring tenements, its entrances would have been easily closed off with hurdles at the West Gate and Upper Borough Walls for use as a temporary stock compound. This sector of the city wall still retained an important defensive role. A square tower or bastion known as Gascoyn's Tower was built on the north-west corner of the wall, apparently by William Gascoyne, a citizen who flourished in the late-fifteenth century. We are told by Leland in the sixteenth century that the town wall

... stondith alle, lakking but a peace about Gascoyn's-tower. In the walles at this tyme be no toures saving over the toune gates. One Gascoyne an inhabitante of the toune *in hominum memoria* made a litle peace of the walle that was in decay, as for a fine for a faught that he had committid in the cite: wherof one part as at a corner risith higher then the residew of the walle, wherby it is comunely caullid Gascoyne-tower'.²

Just inside the West Gate was the *placea*, an open area or 'square', where needy travellers were received by the Almoner of Bath Priory. In the thirteenth century the Almoner held a number of properties at this end of Westgate Street (mainly referred to as 'Westyatestrete', or similar, but also as merely 'the West Street'), one of which appears to have been a garden on the south corner facing the gate.³ On the opposite northern corner (now the site of no.21 Westgate Street, see fig.4 for street numbering), was a small plot belonging to Adam Mareschal ('Adam the Farrier'), presumably the site of a smithy.⁴ By the late sixteenth century it had acquired a garden at its northern end (now the site of the Schwartz hamburger bar). Continuing eastward (now nos.22 and 23 Westgate Street – the Beau Nash cinema), there was a 'tenement belonging to the Priory' which probably contained a house and garden.⁵ The next plot (now no.24) was also a 'Priory tenement and curtilage' leased to Robert the Fuller, the

rent being paid jointly to the Almoner and the lord of Newton St Loe near Bath.⁶ Next to this (now nos.25 and 26) was a house owned by Vincent Galopyn alias Finch, which also paid a rent to the St Loes.⁷ The last plot (now nos.27 to 29) adjoining Bridewell Lane, belonged to the Petit family and contained a house with a courtyard at the rear and a garden on the corner of the lane.⁸

The medieval name of Bridewell Lane was *Plumtreostwichene* (variously spelled). The word *twichen* is frequently found in Middle English, signifying a narrow access path or open passageway between two walls or hedges, particularly in a village or town, and is derived from the OE *Twicen* 'fork in a road'. This name seems to have disappeared in the early fourteenth century, although its alias, Plumtree Lane, survived into the early seventeenth century. It is thought that the series of medieval streets which included Plumtreostwichene, Vicaries Lane (now Parsonage Lane), Paynestwichene (Union Passage, once Cox Lane), and the High Street were all laid out together in a grid pattern during Saxon times, perhaps as part of the provision of King Alfred's Burghal Hidage.⁹ The Plum Tree (or trees) presumably provided a notable landmark in an otherwise open area of gardens and crofts, but there were some small houses and shops in the lane (one having the title 'house of the fishing stage') which are now difficult to place. Just inside the lane (now the back entrance to the Social Club in the Saw Close, see fig.6), behind the Petit's courtyard (see above), was the 'Almoner's house and tenement'.¹⁰ Like the other plots in the lane, it appears to have had a garden which reached as far as the Saw Close, running along the back of the Westgate Street tenements. At the very top of the lane (on the site of the present Blue Coat House) was a round dovecote built by one Sewall Fraunceys, in a courtyard which he had leased from the corporation in 1381.¹¹ A later deed shows that it was attached to a garden on the south side which Fraunceys also owned. This prominent structure gave rise to the new name 'Culverhouse Lane', which continued from the sixteenth through to the mid-seventeenth century.

The Saw Close Area in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century

It is at this period that better information becomes available from city accounts and other records. In 1569 there are many references to 'saweurs at Gascons Tower', and payments for 'ryddyng [cleaning out] of the sawepytt' and for '2 men for 2 dayes in squaryng of hytt', probably to do with the 'new howssen' being built in the city during that year.¹² With

the threat of a second Armada in 1596/7, target butts for musket practice by the militia were set up in many open areas of the city. There was already one just outside the West Gate in 'Butt Hayes', but on this occasion payments were also to be made for carrying stones and turves 'to make the buttes in the tyMBER cloase'.¹³ From 1608 onward there is also mention of repairs to a pound in the Saw Close, payments being made for stones and posts and 'a Locke for the pownde Dore', which may suggest a lock-up house as well as a walled compound. It appears to have been located at the southern entrance to the Saw Close, where a plot next to it was granted to a family of paviors called Bigg in 1615, in return for keeping the West Gate.¹⁴ This plot, which ran along the back of the tenements in Westgate Street, is the first indication of encroachment into the Saw Close. It eventually became the site of the present rear exit of the Beau Nash cinema.

From 1595 onward there are also regular payments to an elderly employee for cleaning out and repairing Gascoyn's Tower which had (according to John Speed's map of 1610), a flight of external steps on the east side leading up to a 'plat forme'. To provide a pleasant promenade for visitors, with views across the countryside, paved walks or causeways were laid out along the ramparts on each side of the tower, the section along the Upper Borough Walls being protected with railings and a 'whirligig' [turnstile].¹⁵ At some stage the medieval gate had been rebuilt (in 1572, according to John Wood) with lodging apartments above known as Westgate House, where both Queen Elizabeth and Ann of Denmark were said to have stayed.¹⁶ By 1591, when it was owned by a gentleman called William Price, a barn or stable had been added on the north along the inside of the city wall, together with a barton [farmyard] against the outside of the wall. Also built by 1596 was a cottage at the end of the stable – leased to the Biggs (paviors, mentioned above) in return for maintaining the paved walk along the wall between the cottage and Gascoyn's Tower.¹⁷

As everywhere, the influence of the Chapman family was strong in the area, and indeed persisted until the nineteenth century. On the north side of Westgate Street some subdivision took place. The garden at the corner of Bridewell Lane (nos.28 and 29) was leased separately in 1609 to John Sachfeilde, alderman and mayor (mentioned as a neighbour in 1603). By now the garden had been extended northward, to take in some of the ground which previously belonged to the medieval Almoner's House in Bridewell Lane. The latter had now become an Almshouse, a small irregular building (later the site of nos.3 and 4 Bridewell Lane) which now projected into Sachfeilde's garden. The back window looked out onto the garden, providing

a cause of complaint later on. This building was evidently well-known, the lane being referred to on one occasion in the 1570s as 'Almos [Almshouse] Lane'.¹⁸ Little is known about the remaining properties northward except for the 'gardaine and pigeonhouse by the burwales', presumably the medieval dovecote by the borough walls, rented by Alderman William Cavell in the 1590s.¹⁹ However, the dovecote was replaced soon after this by a barn and stable, as shown by Speed (fig.1, Q). On the map the lane is called 'Spurriers Lane' which, as John Wood later suggested, may have been the 'Habitation of Spurriers' at that time.²⁰

The late Tudor period marked the beginning of the growth of the city as a health resort, and fine town houses and lodgings, some owned by the gentry, began to appear in Westgate Street. Buildings of a lesser sort also start to appear on the Timber Green. By 1636 the Bigg family had already built a house and garden on their plot, facing into the entrance of the close, but another house and garden appeared next to it (on the site of the present *Loft* bar), belonging to John Combe, a rough mason. A space next to Combe's property, adjoining William Chapman's detached garden, was also allocated for a house, but it was decided there should be no further building against Bigg's property, and it remained a garden. All these developments involved the removal of the pound. Bigg had been given ground belonging to the pound provided he built a new one with timber and pitched it with stone. Combe was also allowed 'the tymber of the Old pound if he makes another at his own charge at the end of his house – stones being brought there by the Cittie'. Later sources show that the new pound was placed along the front of the two properties at the west.²¹ At this time there were still several sawpits in the close, with a scale of charges for each 'timber man ... for every tree which he shall lay at the sawclose', depending on freeman status, included with the profits from the 'pitchinge pence' from the markets and fairs held there.²² Gascoyn's Tower was regularly repaired and the ditch below it scoured and drained. At the beginning of the Civil War particular attention was paid to the 'plat forme' – presumably in preparation for a gun emplacement. Also during the war, the West Gate was provided with a drawbridge and breastworks, and Westgate House itself, previously assigned to Thomas Parker, carpenter, was taken over and ill-used as a 'Court of Guard' [guard-room].²³

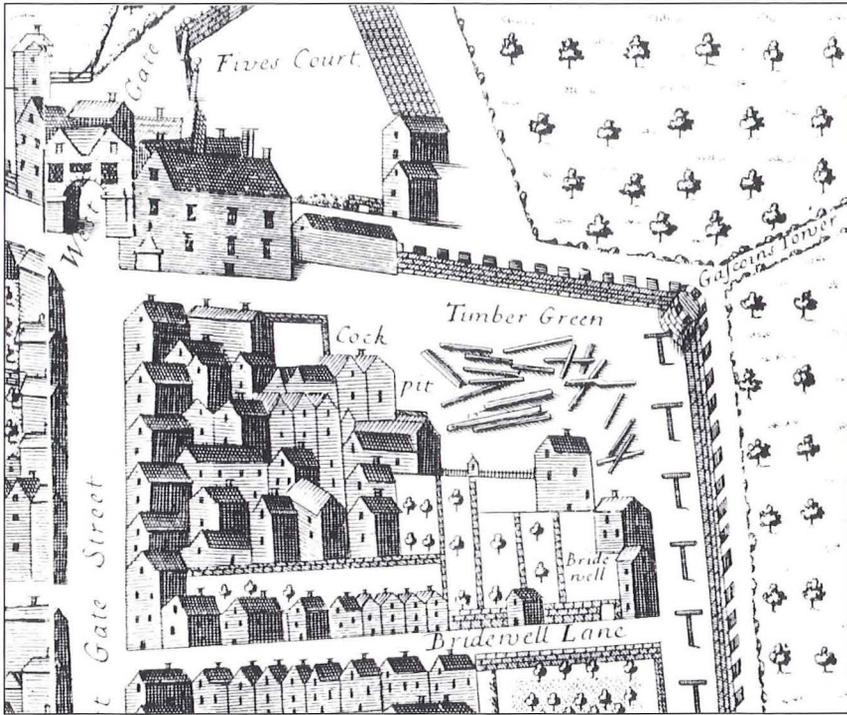
Several widows held properties at different times along Westgate Street. By the lease of 1628 Mathew Chapman's widow Agnes held the 'Holly [Holy] Lambe' (no.23), to which as a wife she may have given her name in a word play on the Latin 'Agnus Dei'. The house (no.27) and garden (nos.28 and 29) on the corner of Bridewell Lane were reunited by 1641 by

their new owner Robert Shaa.²⁴ Robert Shaa, a country gentleman whose family were related to the Hungerfords, also acquired a detached garden next to the Saw Close (originally part of the Almonry garden), as well as a tenement next to the Almshouse (later nos.5, 6 and 7 Bridewell Lane) with an access door into the Saw Close included in the lease.²⁵

Frequently referred to as 'Slaughterhouse Lane', Plumtree Lane had evidently been selected as a suitable site for abattoirs, in this instance owned by women whose husbands kept butcher's shops in Stall Street. In 1632 the barn and stable (previously the dovecote) at the top of the lane, at that time in the possession of a Robert Chambers, was relinquished for the erection of a 'Bridewell' or 'House of Correction', 'for the settinge of poore people on worke'. Chambers was paid £5 compensation, and payments were made for window bars, glazing, and the digging of a well in the back garden.²⁶ The name Bridewell Lane survives to this day.

Property Surveys of 1641 and 1685

Corporation property surveys of 1641 and 1685 make boundary outlines easier to place, especially the latter, for this can be compared with Gilmore's 1694 map of the city.²⁷ As the section of the map shows (fig.2), buildings were then starting to appear along the eastern side of the Saw Close. In 1665 a piece of 'waste ground' in the Timber Close was granted to Samuel Daw (a carpenter, and an early tenant of the Bridewell) to build a house on the west side of the Bridewell premises, shown later on Gilmore's map.²⁸ At the southern end of the close Bigg's house had by 1671 been converted to stables by a Thomas Hawkins, yeoman, with a communicating door from his house in Westgate Street (no.22). By this time Combe's house had acquired the garden on the east side, and the rent had been raised from 2s to 10s, presumably because the house had been enlarged and rebuilt.²⁹ From the 1670s this property became known as the Pound House, suggesting a rise in status. At the time of the 1685 survey it was held by a Mr John Pocock, followed in 1696 by a Mr John Arney, a surgeon.³⁰ This new house is of particular interest, as it is presumably the present grade II listed building known as the *Loft* bar. On Gilmore's map the words 'Cock Pit' appear over it. Although no other reference to a cock pit has yet been found, a room inside the Pound House (or Hawkins' stables at the rear) may well have served such a purpose. Gilmore also shows a Fives Court close by on the opposite side of the city wall, now the site of the present Seven Dials block. It is evident that this part of the city was already seen as a place of entertainment, a prominent

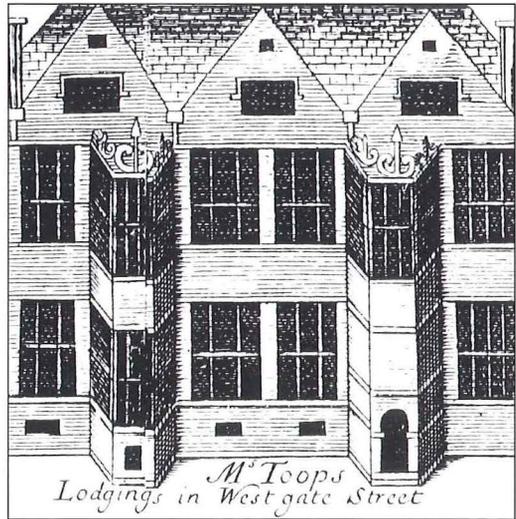


2. The Saw Close area as shown on Joseph Gilmore's map of 1694 (North is to the right). Compared with Speed, the area is already beginning to fill up with new buildings. On the west side of the Bridewell is Samuel Daw's house, and the building at the south end of the close, beneath the words 'Cock Pit' is the 'Pound House', now the *Loft bar*.

aspect of the Saw Close in later times. In 1685 Pocock was granted a further plot of ground for a stable on the north side of his garden, next to the exit door of Robert Shaa's former tenement in Bridewell Lane.³¹

Repairs continued to be made to Gascoyn's Tower, on which a flag appears to have been flown, and on Gilmore's map balks of timber are still shown lying in the Saw Close, although its life as a timber yard was probably coming to an end. What may be a line of tenter hook frames along the northern rampart are a reminder that cloth-making was still important in Bath. Prominently shown on the map is Westgate House, which by 1678 belonged to William Duckett of Hartham, Wilts, Esqr. During his tenure a malthouse, stable and coachhouse were added.³² The cottage at the end was occupied by William Cleevely, a carpenter and

sawyer who rented one of the sawpits in the Saw Close.³³ It is noticeable that many of the other lodging houses in Westgate Street had erected malshouses at the rear, presumably to provide for the needs of an increasing number of visitors. Richard Morgan, maltster, had arrived at the site, now nos.25 and 26, by 1676.³⁴ In 1674 the corner property (nos.27 to 29, including the western detached garden), was in the possession of Sir Edward Graves, bart. In 1651 a Dr.Graves had been given permission to alter the troublesome Almshouse windows at his own expense, but in 1687 the premises were acquired by Robert Toope, 'Doctor in Physicke', and continued to be used as a typical Bath doctor's lodgings. The ornate frontage of the house appears in the margin of Gilmore's map entitled 'Ms Toop's Lodgings' (fig.3). In the Somerset Hearth Tax of 1664-1665, Dr Graves was listed for ten hearths, outdoing even Westgate House which had seven, though not challenging the highest rated properties in Bath, of which all seem to have been in Bimbery, with William Ireland's holding by the Hot Bath at seventeen hearths.³⁵ Nevertheless, while the rent of this recombined corner property came to ten shillings, that of Westgate House, with its prestigious position, was forty shillings (disregarding provisions for double rents), one of the highest in the city. By way of a contrast, it had been agreed to let out the Bridewell as a tenement, although it was later stipulated that it should be 'put to the use as intended'. At the time of the survey of 1685 it was being rented to Thomas Rosewell, joiner.³⁶



3. Border detail from Gilmore's map of 1694 showing Widow Toop's house.

Georgian Developments

The first development beyond the northern city wall began in 1707 with the laying out of Trim Street, reached by an opening through the wall

opposite Bridewell Lane. The rent for this access, '... recd. from Mr. Trym for a way leading to his garden from the City Wall near Gastoins Tower, 1s.', appears in the city accounts for 1705-6.³⁷ John Wood describes it as a bridge or arch (later the site of Trim Bridge), over the old path called Barton Lane leading along the base of the city wall.³⁸ This was followed by the erection of Beau Nash's first house in St John's Court (see fig.4, now part of the Theatre Royal), by Thomas Greenway in 1720, on the site of the city refuse pit just beyond the western wall. The construction of Beau Nash's second house (only a few feet from Gascoyn's Tower) followed soon after. Although both houses were raised on cellars to the height of the Saw Close, the breastwork of the wall (called Gascoyn's Rampire by Wood) continued to separate them from the close for many years after. The narrow gap between Nash's house and Gascoyn's Tower gave access to Barton Street (started in 1728), and so to the new developments in Beauford Buildings and Queen Square.

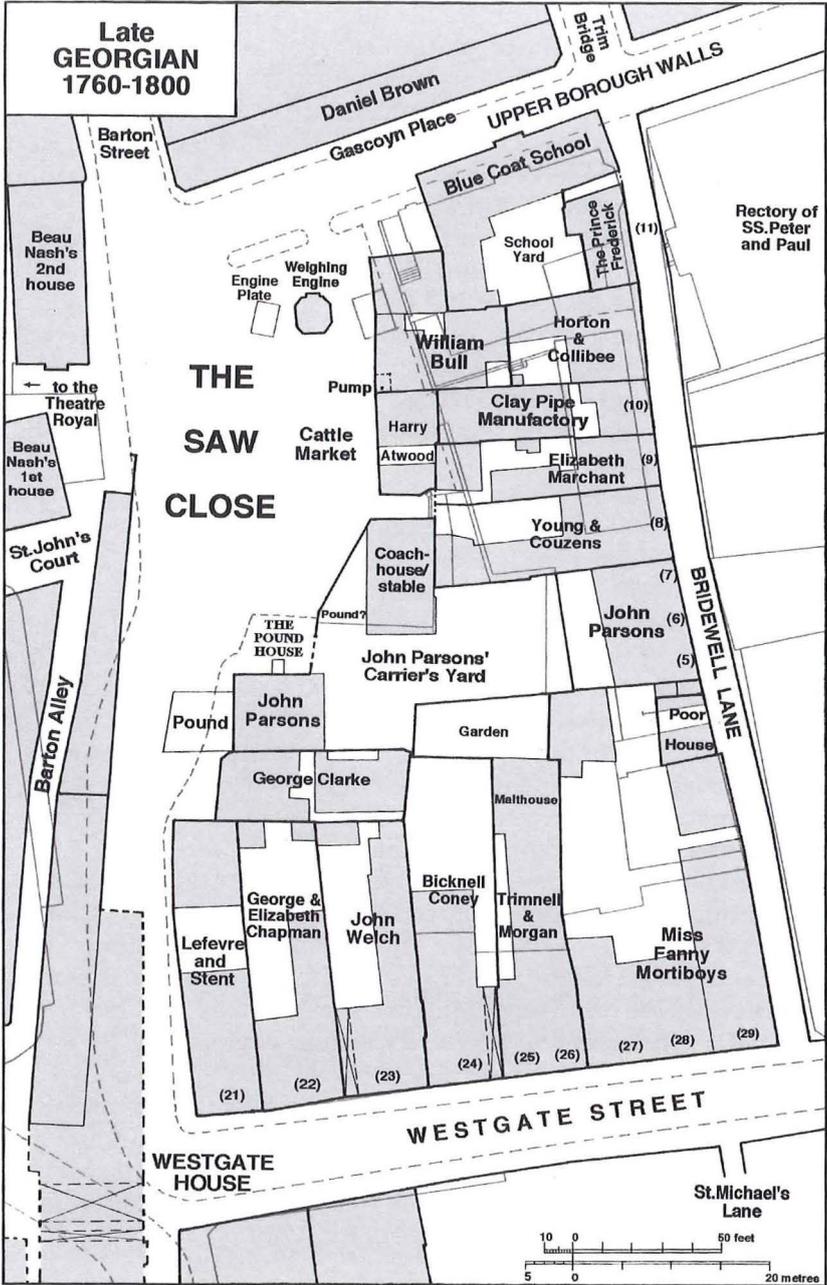
In the meantime the east side of the Saw Close continued to fill up with buildings. By 1719 the new house on Samuel Daw's property by the Bridewell, then owned by Alderman Charles Stone, saddler, had been extended southward by the addition of a 'Brewhouse or Washhouse', with a pump under the sheds facing the close. A second new house had also been built on the south side of these buildings, acquired by Walter Chapman the elder, gent., another saddler, with the right to use his neighbour's pump. Walter Chapman then obtained a grant in 1720 to extend his premises southward as far as the rear exit of the neighbouring gardens in Bridewell Lane (nos.8 and 9). In 1733 this enlarged property passed to the related Atwood family.³⁹ On the other side of the garden exit (from nos.8 and 9), ground was granted in 1706 to Thomas Merrick Esqr., on which a Coach House and stable had been built. This was acquired in 1720 by a Mr Anthony Biggs, gent., together with the next plot to the south containing the stable attached to the Pound House garden. These structures still form the basis of the present Saw Close Garage which is therefore in part an early eighteenth-century building, of historical interest. Having already acquired the Pound House itself in 1713, Biggs now owned a large proportion of the properties at the southern end of the Saw Close.⁴⁰

In Westgate Street there seem to have been few changes during this period, except in ownership. Westgate House, including the cottage at the northern end, was taken over by William Webb, gent., in 1701, succeeded by Randolph Webb in 1727. Princess Amelia in 1728 and the Prince of Orange in 1734 are said to have taken lodgings here. Number 23 was

owned by Philip Ditcher, cordwainer, and no.24, partly rebuilt, by William Barwell, watchmaker. The properties belonging to the house on the corner of Bridewell Lane (nos.27, 28 and 29) were in the hands of the executors of Grace Toope, widow, in the early eighteenth century. A notable exception was the next house (nos.25 and 26), still owned by the malster, Richard Morgan, who between 1714 and 1725 had erected an extensive malthouse and associated buildings in the garden at the back. Practically all the properties in Bridewell Lane were also rebuilt at this time, although Wood still remarked on the crookedness of Bridewell Lane, observing that it contained twenty houses 'of the meaner sort' which he thought were worth redeveloping.⁴¹ The house adjoining the Almshouse was rebuilt as three tenements or cottages (nos.5, 6, and 7) and several, including the slaughterhouse (no.8) were converted to dwelling houses with courtyards. Later plans suggest that these buildings largely consisted of rather squalid artisans' dwellings.⁴²

It was the site of the Bridewell however, which saw the greatest change. In the early years of the eighteenth century a part of the Bridewell garden, facing the lane, had already been separated off, and a house and a stable built there. Eventually the Bridewell itself was demolished and a new 'messuage' designed by William Killigrew was erected on the same site, 'as a Charity School or Schools for poor Boys and Girls'. A subscription had been opened in 1711, and the completed building was transferred to the School Trustees on 2 August 1722. The new 'Blue Coat School' (from the colour of the children's uniform) was a notable landmark in its day. Later plans show that the rest of the Bridewell garden on the south side of the premises was converted to two school yards, one each for boys and girls, with a wash-house and privy at the western end.⁴³

In the last four decades of the eighteenth century the city walls finally disappeared, some of the last parts to go being in the Saw Close area. This had ceased to be used as a timber yard, and was in John Wood's words, 'destined for the Sale of live Cattle, tho' little Use is made of it for that Purpose ...'.⁴⁴ The situation was reviewed by the Corporation in 1757, who decided in 1763 to erect a weighing engine there 'for weighing hay, straw, coals and other things' (fig.4). This suggests that heavy haulage to the city was becoming more important as roads and vehicles improved. The weigh-office is shown on later plans and photographs (see fig.7) as a small octagonal building with a door on the north side, and the engine plate located on the west side. This was presumably a compound lever weighing machine of the type invented in the 1740s by John Wyatt of Birmingham.⁴⁵



Wood mentions that there were three houses in the open area of the close.⁴⁶ The first of these would have been Charles Stone's premises (now adjoining the Blue Coat School) which had been acquired by William Bull, a farrier, apparently for a smithy. Bull expanded the premises by the addition of the western moiety of the adjoining garden in Bridewell Lane. The second house, on the south, was the Atwood property, then in the possession of Harry Atwood, a surgeon. The third was the Pound House, together with the other properties acquired by Anthony Biggs. All these premises, including the back garden of the three cottages in Bridewell Lane, were included under one holding when granted to a John Parsons, common carrier, in 1808.⁴⁷ The deed plan shows that by 1800 most of the property, except the Pound House ('the dwelling house') and the carriage house and stable (now combined into a store/counting house), had been thrown together for use as a carrier's yard. The entrance to the yard was on the corner of the Pound House, through a perimeter wall in front of the coach house. This was the beginning of a carrier's 'empire' which continued to grow as the use of road haulage increased. Meanwhile the property behind the Pound House, described as a plot 'on part whereof two stables lately stood but now fallen down', was sold in 1780 and a new building erected on the site.⁴⁸

It was during this period, probably in the 1770s, that the western rampart of the city wall and Gascoyn's Tower were finally removed, so that the Beau Nash houses (known as St John's Place) opened out onto the Saw Close. The northern battlements remained a little longer. In 1765 the end section of Barton Lane below the wall had been leased to Daniel Brown, carpenter, but nothing seems to have been built on it until 1789 when a new lease mentions 'two Messuages or Tenements and Buildings lately erected' by Brown. These buildings, called Gascoyn Place, became part of the street now called Upper Borough Walls.⁴⁹ It was probably at this stage that Trim Bridge was widened. The opening up of the Saw Close and the building of the Theatre Royal in 1805 must no doubt have added a new dimension to the area as a place of entertainment. The playbill for the opening performance announced: 'The Carriage entrance to the Boxes is in the Sawclose, and Ladies and Gentlemen are particularly requested to order their servants to set down with their horses' heads towards Westgate-Street, and to take up with their heads towards Queen Square, to prevent confusion. The Entrance for chairs is in Beaufort Square, and

4 (left). Plan of the Saw Close area in 1760-1800, superimposed on present detail, showing contemporary ownership and later street numbers. Similar plans of the other periods mentioned in the study are kept by Bath Archaeological Trust and the Survey of Old Bath.

the entrance to the Pit and Gallery is in St John's-Court'.⁵⁰ It should be noted that the 'Carriage entrance' mentioned here was through the narrow gap which then still existed between the two Beau Nash houses, later closed off by a foyer and ticket office.

In December 1776 Westgate House was surrendered by the 'trustees of Lewis Clutterbuck', for the demolition of the West Gate, which was 'to be thrown or laid into the street there for the widening the same'.⁵¹ In return, the tenants were allowed the northern portion of the property along the outside of the city wall to build a new line of houses there called New Westgate Buildings. This line extended up to several small buildings, removed in the early nineteenth century, which constituted the eastern side of St John's Court. The demolition of the West Gate created a new road junction between Westgate Street, Westgate Buildings, New Westgate Buildings, Avon Street, Kingsmead Street, Monmouth Street, and the still surviving Barton Alley which previously ran along the outside of the city wall towards Barton Street. It was presumably these seven streets which provided the name 'Seven Dials' for this junction (in imitation of London), as also for the public house which later stood at the entrance to Barton Alley in Westgate Place. These changes did not seem to affect Westgate Street. Richard Morgan's house (nos.25 and 26) still belonged to his family up to 1800, having acquired by about 1740 the western detached garden at the rear of their premises (previously held by the owners of nos.27, 28, and 29). Richard Morgan's malthouse stood at the northern end of the premises and was reached from the street by a narrow passageway. It was orientated at right angles to the rest of the buildings so that the 'Poin [gable] End' stood on the western boundary wall overlooking their neighbour's garden. It appears to have become disused by 1800 when all these properties were acquired by John Parsons, the carrier in the Saw Close.⁵² As to the premises on the corner of Bridewell Lane (nos.27, 28 and 29), from 1784 these were owned by Miss Fanny Mortiboys of Stratford-on-Avon, daughter of Thomas Mortiboys, Esqr., until the house was burned down in 1813.⁵³ The Almshouse still occupied the corner by Miss Mortiboys' garden, although by now it had become a 'Poor House' under the direction of the overseers of the Parish of SS Peter and Paul. Meanwhile, a new industrial activity had sprung up in Bridewell Lane. In about 1782 the property nearest the Blue Coat School (no.10) was converted to a clay pipe manufactory run by Joseph Smith, pipemaker. There were several kilns working on the site, although deed plans are not sufficiently detailed to show them. In 1810 the business was sold to another pipe-maker, James Clarke.⁵⁴ By 1785 the properties built in the garden of

the Bridewell, adjoining the new Charity School, had been combined into a 'new built messuage' which soon after became a public house known as the *Prince Frederick*. The new building (later no.11 Bridewell Lane) was separated from the school by a narrow passageway which was a shared right of way – serving not only the back door to the 'pub', but also the pupils' entrance to the school yard.

Changes in the Nineteenth Century

During the early years of the nineteenth century, the frontages of all the houses in Westgate Street began to be converted to shops, leaving the space at the rear free for light industry – a familiar pattern in the city at that time. From the 1820s the open space of the Saw Close became increasingly important as a delivery area for road haulage, in particular for coal wagons from the local coalfields. A Coal Market had become established on the east side of the Close and a second engine plate was installed on the east side of the weigh-office, but as trade expanded extra space was required. In 1822 the house at the west end of the school was demolished for this purpose, and the area behind it (originally the western moiety of the garden in Bridewell Lane) retained as a new site for the pound and an urinal. Cattle dealing was still carried on, but the previous site by the Pound House had evidently become an obstacle to traffic at the main southern entrance to the Close. The pump was also retained under its own small shelter against the north wall of Atwood's house which still had right of use. Since the 1790s this house, now no.1 Saw Close, had acquired a partly sunken courtyard along the front with steps at one end, perhaps as a result of the level of the Saw Close being raised during that time. By the mid-nineteenth century the house appears to have become derelict. It is from this period that we have firm evidence on house numbering (though not necessarily the same as today), from the first large scale map of the city by Cotterell and Spackman, produced for the Corporation in 1852.⁵⁵

The carrier's business to the south of Atwood's house (seen earlier in fig.4) had continued to grow, under Edward Mitchell from about 1817, and then from 1845 under Edward Strange. It extended into nearby properties, including in 1829 the back of no.24 Westgate Street for stables. The malthouse of nos.25 and 26 was also acquired by Mitchell, and re-adapted for commercial stables with lofts over and a gig house attached. All these buildings communicated with the yard (later roofed), which had a farriery ranging around the north and east sides. The entrance to



5. Fire at the soap and candle factory on 5 September 1846. This illustration, based on a wood engraving, is from the *Pictorial Times* of 12 September 1846.

the yard appears incidentally in an illustration of the Saw Close in 1846, showing a fire which had broken out in no.4 Saw Close (fig.5). On the left is an arched doorway with a sign over it advertising Lawes's Vans and the name 'W.Lawes & Co'. Also visible next to the entrance is a sign marked 'Williams', on the front of the Pound House which had by this time become a public house called *The Saw Close Tavern* (no.3 Saw Close). The fire at no.4 Saw Close was in premises which replaced the stables behind the Pound House. They had been acquired in 1815 by William Butcher, a tallow chandler, who converted them to a soap and candle factory. It was this combustible material which fed the flames in 1846. Although business was resumed the factory again became a public nuisance, and in 1859 new apparatus had to be installed to prevent offensive smells. In 1854 the Butchers had also become cheese factors, having acquired the warehouse in the carrier's yard (no.2 Saw Close) as a cheese store.⁵⁶

A notable feature of the 1850s is the increase in the number of public houses and wine merchants. As well as the *Garrick's Head* by the Theatre Royal, the western half of Gascoyn Place, then called Gascoyn House, was occupied by the wine merchants Broadley and Sturmey, and at the corner of Westgate Street (no.21) was Hancock and Son, also wine merchants. The rear premises of the houses in this part of the street were

now mostly being converted to industrial and other commercial uses. While the front of no.23 was used by a pork butcher, the rear was used as a brass foundry by William Witham from about 1839. All the backs of nos.24 to 26 were now part of the carrier's business, and the northern end of no.21 had become a plate glass warehouse. After the destruction by fire of the house on the corner of Bridewell Lane, the property was acquired by John Allen, pawnbroker, with an agreement to rebuild three new messuages (nos.27, 28 and 29) along the front within five years. Since Allen was also involved in property on the east side of the lane, he was required to set back the boundaries on both sides at this point to make the lane wider. He was also required to build two new buildings (nos.1 and 2 Bridewell Lane) at the back of nos.28 and 29 Westgate Street, which included a passage from the lane along the southern wall of no.1 to provide access into a butchery which had been established at the back of no.27. John Allen (with John Parsons the carrier as business partner) had also been granted the site of the Poor House in 1803. This they pulled down and replaced with two small houses, nos.3 and 4 Bridewell Lane.⁵⁷

In the early 1850s a redevelopment programme to expand the Blue Coat School was drawn up by the Trustees, who sought to acquire no.9 (then derelict) and no.10 Bridewell Lane. Owing to complaints made by the Trustees of the School and other neighbours about the noisome smoke from the pipe manufactory, and the dilapidated state of the house fronting the lane, the then owner Joseph Sants, pipemaker, and Ann Griffiths who lived in the house, were ordered to quit in 1851. One of the chief complainants was the Bath Commercial and Literary Institution down-wind on the opposite side of the lane. Nevertheless the Borough Property Committee was not prepared to proceed until the School's redevelopment finance was assured, although in 1859 no.8 was assigned to the School for this purpose. At some time before this, probably in the 1820s when the alterations to the Saw Close were being made, the premises on the north side of the Pipe manufactory (unnumbered) were acquired by the School and replaced with a boy's yard and shelter. As yet, none of these plans seems to have affected the *Prince Frederick* public house which was more influenced by changes in the titles of royalty, becoming in turn the *Prince of Wales*, and eventually the *Victoria Tavern*.⁵⁸

Substantial alterations carried out in the early 1860s brought the Saw Close into its present-day form, as revealed in the first large-scale Ordnance Survey map of the city in 1886.⁵⁹ In 1859 the rebuilding of the Blue Coat School began, following the demolition of the *Victoria Tavern*, together with the clay pipe factory, no.9 Bridewell Lane, and no.1 Saw Close (all



6. The Saw Close in 1912, which can be compared with fig.5. Just visible in the centre is no.4 Saw Close, which still has the ventilators of the earlier soap and candle factory on the roof. To the left is the arched entrance to the Lyric Theatre which replaced the archway of the carrier's yard. An early motor-car stand outside the garage further left, previously the cheese store. Note the horse trough in front of the garage. Right of centre, 'Fishy Lee's' oyster saloon occupies the shop with the curved front at the end of Westgate Buildings, previously John Lawrence's pawnbroker's and the *Peep o' Day*. On the right is the Theatre Royal. (*Bath Central Library, photographic collection L67*)

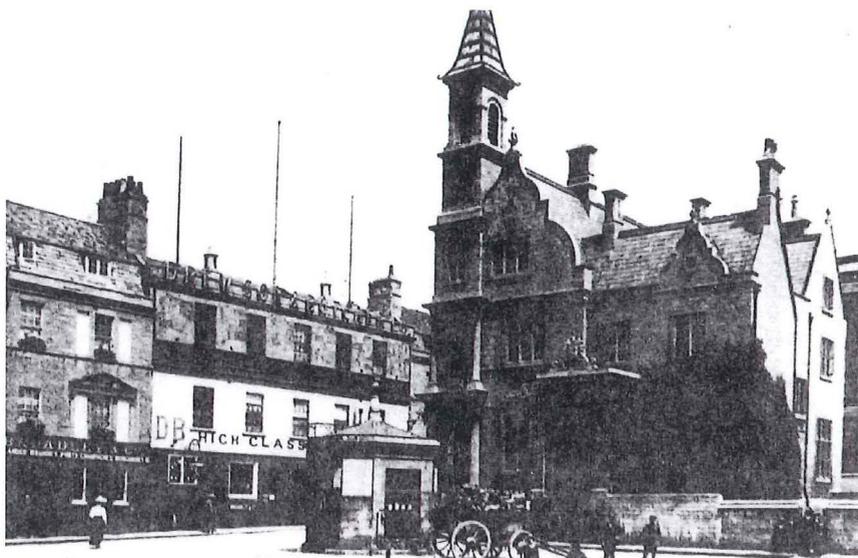
derelict), for new school yards. Manners and Gill were the architects.⁶⁰ The new lease for the school was signed in 1861, the same year that the new western wing of the Mineral Water Hospital was opened on the opposite side of Bridewell Lane. The front of the school building was set back to widen the road in front of Gascoyn Place, and the new western wall of the school yards was realigned to provide more space for the Coal Market. This involved the removal of the cattle pound, yet again, to a new site in the narrow corner left between the new school yard wall and the back of the cheese warehouse – where it remains to this day in a somewhat reduced form. The urinal and pump were replaced by a drinking fountain and an open screened urinal – situated against the north wall of the cheese store. The rest of the open market area, administered by the City Markets Committee, was then completely resurfaced with stone pitching.

In 1862 the Theatre Royal was destroyed by fire, but was quickly replaced, together with the present ticket office entrance in the Saw Close. The original

entrance was a more basic structure, erected sometime before 1852, which replaced the alleyway between the Beau Nash houses. Following these dramatic events, the pawnbroker's shop at the northern end of New Westgate Buildings (no.8) became a public house, aptly named the *Peep o' Day* – said to have been the title of the last show in the old theatre before the fire.⁶¹

It would seem that over the next 20 years the Saw Close became less important as a road haulage depot, possibly as a result of the spread of the railways, but still remained a prominent place of entertainment. It was probably these developments which prompted the purchase of the carrier's 'empire' for the erection in 1886 of a new theatre, called variously 'The Pavilion Music Hall and Tavern', 'The Bath Pavilion of Varieties', or in short, 'the Bath Pavilion'. It seems that its success, with its licences for Music and Dancing and Wines and Spirits, inspired the flotation, by 1895, of 'The Bath and Bristol Theatres of Varieties Ltd.', which bought in the Bath Pavilion and also a Bristol music hall, the Empire. The Bath Pavilion was remodelled in 1896 and renamed the Lyric Theatre of Varieties. Chaplin is said to have performed here before leaving for America. The main body of the auditorium and stage was housed within the existing structures of the stables and yard, including the walls of the old malthouse which can still be seen today. The ornate arch over the entrance hall and lobby reflects the archway of the yard gate which it replaced. *The Tavern* (no.3 Saw Close) had been included as a theatre bar and renamed the *Pavilion Bar*, later the *Lyric Bar*. Various alterations had been carried out to the front of *The Tavern* in 1882, including the removal of the ground-floor bay window and the shell hood over the entrance. Only the cheese warehouse (no.2 Saw Close) was excluded from these developments, being still occupied by the owners of the candle factory behind the Tavern. In Bridewell Lane the theatre had acquired the three cottages (nos.3, 4, and 5) by 1896, together with a workshop at the rear of no.4 which was converted to dressing rooms. Number 3 was adapted for use as an 'artistes entrance' and emergency exit corridor, but nos.4 and 5 remained as cottages. On the north side of the theatre, a second emergency exit at the rear of the pit, emerging through the western half of the new pound, was opened up in 1904. This was originally part of a proposal by Charles Davis, the City Architect in 1887, which included an enlarged urinal near the centre of the close where a horse trough already stood. A new urinal was eventually built, in 1905 – on the original site against the north wall of the cheese store.⁶²

A particular feature of the Saw Close area at the turn of the century was the appearance of a large number of warehouses and furniture depositories, presumably as a result of good vehicle access. These included Kendall's



7. The Blue Coat School and Upper Borough Walls in the early years of the twentieth century. A coal wagon can be seen waiting at the old weighing machine in Saw Close. (*Paul de'Ath collection*)

furniture warehouse in St John's Court, Copestake & Co.'s warehouse at 3 Gascoyn Place (next to Drew's corset manufacturers), and the furniture dealers Ponters in Beau Nash's House (later *Popjoy's*) next door to Benjamin's Coal Merchants. The Westgate Street shops however had not altered a great deal. Number 21 was still a wine merchants, known from the early 1870s as the *County Wine Vaults* – probably after the present structure, built in confident 'Italian Palazzo' style, was erected. William Witham still ran the brass foundry at the rear of no.23, but by now had also acquired the front shop. In contrast, the butchery which had stood at the back of no.27 with its entrance from Bridewell Lane had become separated off from the butcher's shop and converted to a Soup Kitchen, run by Richard P. Whitfield (and later by the Revd. Thomas Tyers), for the Society for Improving the Condition of the Working Classes. Perhaps seen as a revival of the Almshouse nearby, it was one of a chain set up throughout the city which became famous for the quality of its soup. The kitchens were often visited by clients who were not necessarily working-class but appreciated good food, and other towns asked for the recipe. Eventually in 1916 the soup kitchen was acquired by the Macnaghton Vaudeville Circuit Ltd. for a stage scenery store connected to the theatre.⁶³

The Saw Close Brought Up-to-Date

Various twentieth-century innovations were to alter the development of the Saw Close area – including changes in local government. In 1921 the Board of Education authorised the Trustees of the Blue Coat School to sell the building, and in July the lease was assigned to the Royal Mineral Water Hospital. In 1924 the building was acquired by the Bath Health Department for offices and a dental clinic, and renamed Blue Coat House. In 1927 a single-storey Infant Welfare Centre was built at the rear, in what was previously the eastern school yard. The yard itself was extended southward by the acquisition and demolition of nos.6 and 7 Bridewell Lane, presumably for parking and delivery.⁶⁴

By this time motor traffic was beginning to have an impact on the Saw Close area. Already in 1906, before the Butchers quit the candle factory in 1913, the cheese store was given up to Alfred Richardson, a coachbuilder, who then ran the Bathwick Carriage Works near Sydney Wharf. By 1908 the premises had become the Central Garage which, by 1925 was being run by S, D & R Motor Engineers, and Richardson & Sons, motor body builders. Richardson added the candle factory site in 1914, perhaps as an office to the Garage. Between 1912 and 1915 the old weigh-engine in the Close was considered for demolition, and by 1925 the present structure had been built, nearer the wall of the former Blue Coat School. The installation of the engine plate or weigh-bridge immediately in front of it, released additional space which was being used as a car park by the 1930s. In 1925 the *Bath Corporation Act* was passed to open up the city for motor traffic – including plans for the demolition of the Seven Dials block and New Westgate buildings, for a road scheme which involved an enlarged junction at Kingsmead Square.⁶⁵ The demolition was eventually carried out in the late 1930s, but further work was stopped by the outbreak of the war and the open space was used thereafter as a car park.

The silent screen arrived in Bath in 1911-1912, with the Picturedrome in Southgate Street, the Electric Theatre at no.22 Westgate Street (both owned by the Bath Electric Theatre Co.Ltd.), and the Vaudeville Electric Theatre at no.13 Westgate Street on the corner of St Michael's Lane. With the acquisition by the Electric Theatre of the brass foundry site next door at no.23 Westgate Street, a completely new design for the façade of the two properties, in the Egyptian style, was propounded by A.J.Taylor, and in 1920 the enlarged cinema was renamed the Beau Nash Picture House. At about the same time the candle factory site was added; although

subsequently partly utilised as a shop, it was presumably required as an emergency exit, a function it still fulfils today.⁶⁶

The Saw Close is still remembered as a popular night spot during the inter-war years. It continued to function as a market, particularly on Saturday nights when local butchers and other traders sold off their perishable stock cheaply before the weekend. The stalls, which included candyfloss vendors and the like, were lit by hissing naphtha flares, giving the close a particular atmosphere. A few feet away was the theatre and the musical hall (by this time renamed the Palace Theatre of Varieties) with its bar where artistes might gather after a show. The cinema stood just around the corner, while Mrs. Lee's Oyster Saloon and Fish & Chip Bar (previously the *Peep o' Day*), *Broadley's* and the *County Wine Vaults*, not to mention *The Garrick's Head* and the pubs in Kingsmead Square, all stood close at hand.

During the Bath Blitz of 1942 the Saw Close area does not seem to have suffered greatly from wartime bombing, unlike Kingsmead Street nearby. However, with the subsequent loss of local traders, the Saw Close also lost much of its character. Motor traffic became increasingly intrusive. The Central Garage became a petrol station in 1956 with three 'electric flowmeter petrol pumps (with swing arms)', since removed.⁶⁷ In the 1950s the engine plate of the weigh-machine was lifted and the urinal demolished to provide further room in the car park. The weigh-house itself (by now disused) was retained as a car park office. The yard of Blue Coat House was extended for deliveries and parking, by the demolition of no.5 Bridewell Lane. In 1961 a licence was granted to Wessex Newspapers to use the yard area south of the Infant Welfare Clinic, for loading newspapers from their premises on the east side of the lane, motor access being included from the Saw Close. The yard was further extended in 1986 by dismantling no.4 Bridewell Lane, at about the same time as no.3, which was turned into an open alleyway into the back of the Social Club. From the 1920s through to the 1950s the expanding newspaper business had been acquiring properties in Bridewell Lane for access to the machine rooms at the back of their premises in Westgate Street. Among these were nos.1 and 2, acquired in 1951, which were still two-storey buildings at that time.

Despite these developments, the Saw Close continued to remain a vital entertainment area. By 1957 the Palace Theatre had become the Regency Ballroom (with the Regency Bar), taking advantage of the Rock 'n' Roll boom, and in about 1968 it was converted to the present Bingo and Social Club by Messrs. Vogue of London, followed in 1978 by Zettlers Enterprises. Also in the 1970s Chemies nightclub (with new underground toilets), and a garden centre, were built opposite on the waste ground site of New

Westgate Buildings. The nightclub was in turn replaced in 1992 by the present Seven Dials complex (with public toilets), built by Chartwell Heritage. In the meantime Beau Nash's house had already become a restaurant, named the *Sedan Chair* by 1955, and *Popjoy's* in 1974. Today the Saw Close area can still claim to be a centre of Bath's night life. All three of Bath's cinemas are now located here, including the Robins cinema in St John's Court, and the Little Theatre in St Michael's Court, as well as the Beau Nash Picture House. Among the public houses, the *Garrick's Head* and the premises of *Broadley's* and the *County Wine Vaults* remain some of the oldest businesses in Bath still operating today. The tradition of hospitality, already established here in the middle ages will no doubt continue for some time to come.

Notes

N.B: Post-1850 deeds are currently in the care of B&NES Record Office in the Guildhall, Bath, but will be removed to Keynsham at a later date.

- 1 Recent research has shown that there was a long tradition of settlement in this area, going back to Roman and Saxon times. See Andrew Crutchley and Marek Lewcun, 'An archaeological investigation of the site of the former Bath Chronicle Printing Works, 31-35 Westgate Street, Bath, 1997', *Bristol and Avon Archaeology*, Vol.14 (1999), pp.1-16.
- 2 L.Toulmin Smith ed., *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543* (1907), Vol.1, part II, p.140.
- 3 B.R.Kemp ed., 'Deeds of St John's Hospital', *Medieval Deeds of Bath and District*, Somerset Record Society (SRS) Vol.73 (1974), I, 26-27.
- 4 Rev C.W.Shickle, Ancient Deeds belonging to the Corporation of Bath XIII-XVI Cent. [AD], Bath Records Society (Bath, 1921), III:2.
- 5 W.Hunt ed., *Two Chartularies of the Priory of St Peter at Bath*, SRS Vol.7 (1893), ii, p.174/492.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Shickle, AD, III:1. Also Kemp, SRS Vol.73, I, 30.
- 8 Shickle, AD, III:10, 11; III:31.
- 9 P.J.Greening, 'The Origins of the Historic Town Plan of Bath', *A Second North Somerset Miscellany*, Bath and Camerton Excavation Society (Bath, 1971), pp.7-16.
- 10 Shickle, AD, III:10.
- 11 *Ibid.*, V:56, 58.
- 12 F.D.Wardle ed., *The Accounts of the Chamberlains of the City of Bath 1568-1602* (Ch.Ac.), SRS Vol.38 (1923), 1569.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 1597.
- 14 Bath Record Office (BRO), M.S. Council Minute Book (C.M.B.), 9 May 1615. Provision was also made for John Biggs, as pavier, 'to keep clean before his house and pitch the street for 1¹/₂d a yard when required'.

- 15 BRO, C.M.B., 12 October 1621; 10 October 1623.
- 16 John Wood, *An Essay towards a description of Bath*, (Bath, 1765, 1969 reprint), pp.322, 333.
- 17 BRO, Survey of Bath, 1641, p.84:2.
- 18 Wardle, Ch.Ac., 1573.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 1590.
- 20 Wood, *Essay*, p.328.
- 21 BRO, C.M.B., 14 April 1634; see also Bath Central Library, copy of a plan of the Kingston Estate entitled 'A Map of the Scite of the dissolved PRIORY of BATH ...', dated 1725.
- 22 BRO, C.M.B., 20 September 1614; see also 9 June 1635.
- 23 John Wroughton, *A Community at War, The Civil War in Bath and North Somerset, 1642-1650* (Bath, 1992), pp.155-156.
- 24 Elizabeth Holland, 'Occupations in Bath in the Reign of James I', *Citizens of Bath* (Bath, 1988), pp.2-3.
- 25 BRO, Survey, 1641, p.87:3; access into the Saw Close seems to have become important at this time – various other tenants in Bridewell Lane had rented doors by 1617.
- 26 BRO, C.M.B., 23 May 1632.
- 27 BRO, Survey of Bath, entitled 'A survey taken ... of all the Chamberlandes and Hospitall Landes in the said Cittie and Liberties thereof ... Anno Dni.1641'; ditto, 1685.
- 28 BRO, C.M.B., 27 March 1665.
- 29 BRO, Furman's Repertory No.425, 10 March 1670, lease to Richard Pitcher feltmaker
- 30 BRO, Ch.Ac., 1696.
- 31 BRO, C.M.B., 30 March 1685.
- 32 BRO, C.M.B., 30 September 1678.
- 33 BRO, Ch.Ac., 1661-2.
- 34 BRO, Furman No.547, 2 October 1676.
- 35 BRO, Furman No.755, 26 December 1687. Dr John Wroughton, transcript of the Hearth Tax of 1664/5, Somerset Record Office E179/256/16(23) (first page missing).
- 36 BRO, C.M.B., 26 December 1664; 5 October 1685.
- 37 BRO, Ch.Ac., 1705-6.
- 38 Wood, *Essay*, p.327.
- 39 BRO, Furman No.1224, 30 March 1713; No.1733, 2 October 1733.
- 40 BRO, Furman No.1226, 30 June 1713; No.1354, 30 March 1720; No.1357, *ibid.*
- 41 Wood, *Essay*, p.328.
- 42 BRO, Deed Packet (DP) 2796A.
- 43 BRO, Bryant Calendar, lease of 2 August 1722; see also Wood, *Essay*, p.321.
- 44 Wood, *Essay*, p.340.
- 45 L.Day and I.McNeil eds., *Biographical Dictionary of the History of Technology* (1996), p.776.
- 46 Wood, *Essay*, p.340.
- 47 BRO, DP2486, 14 November 1808. DP2713, 14 November 1808.
- 48 BRO, DP2851A, 10 March 1780.
- 49 BRO, DP2525

- 50 William Lowndes, *The Theatre Royal at Bath* (Bristol, 1982) pp.37-38.
- 51 BRO, King Edward's deeds (Furman No.2143), 3 December 1776.
- 52 BRO, DP2854, 25 August 1800.
- 53 BRO, Property Committee Minutes (P.C.M.), 1 March 1813.
- 54 Marek Lewcun, 'The Clay Tobacco Pipe Making Industry of Bath', *Bath History*, Vol.V (Bath, 1994), pp.133-141.
- 55 BRO, M.S. map sheets of Bath, produced 1852 by Cotterell for the Corporation, for rating purposes.
- 56 BRO, DP2851A and DP2714A; P.C.M., 18 October 1858 to 10 September 1859.
- 57 BRO, P.C.M., 15 January 1818; C.M.B., 3 October 1803. This John Allen was presumably the radical politician whose election campaign led to a riot at the Guildhall in 1812. He is described as '... a considerable property owner in the city with a rent roll reputed to be in the region of £5,000 per annum'; see R.S.Neale, *Bath, A Social History 1680-1850* (1981), pp.330-334.
- 58 BRO, DP2796 and DP2796 i, ii, iii. See list of Westgate Properties at BRO, Acc.350.
- 59 Scale 1:500. For the Saw Close area, see Bath Sheet No.XIV.5.9.
- 60 See Neil Jackson, *Nineteenth Century Bath Architects & Architecture* (Bath, 1991), pp.201-202.
- 61 Lowndes, *Theatre Royal*, pp.51-53.
- 62 BRO, DP2714, 6 March 1896; Building Control Plan 1445, 15 April 1887.
- 63 BRO, DP2486; for details of the soup kitchen, see *Guide to Bath*, 1875-6, p.87.
- 64 BRO, DP2796.
- 65 BRO, *Bath Corporation Act 1925*, Street Work No.5.
- 66 BRO, Acc.323, Section B, drawings of 1915, 1917 and 1918: DP2851A (the rear of the property).
- 67 DP2714A. Electric pumps: DP2713, "Amended Plan", based on earlier lease plans, in lease of 24 December 1956, between the Corporation and the Cleveland Petroleum Co.Ltd, London. Further plan, H.Gunston, Director of Estate Management, 1975.

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