

THOMAS BALDWIN: HIS PUBLIC CAREER IN BATH, 1775 – 1793

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Thomas Baldwin is well known as the architect of some of Bath's finest buildings, and his financial ruin and dismissal from the City's employ in 1792 is almost equally notorious. Nevertheless, recent research has suggested that the received wisdom on some of the more notable aspects of his public career should be reconsidered and this is what this article attempts to do.

Baldwin was born in 1749 or early in 1750;¹ despite extensive research the date and place of his birth have yet to be established, but it seems clear that he was not a native Bathonian. He was in Bath by September 1774,² and within a year was acting as the City's architect for the rebuilding of the Guildhall and Markets. It is not easy to believe that a man who could design the Bath Guildhall at the age of 25 was entirely self-taught, or taught by the plumber and glazier Thomas Warr Atwood to whom he was acting as clerk in 1775,³ but with no knowledge of his antecedents it is impossible to do more than speculate about where he might have received his education. Clearly his work owed much to the inspiration of Robert Adam, the only non-native architect of national stature to work in Bath during the eighteenth century; Adam's Pulteney Bridge was erected in the city c.1769–74, and the first volume of the *Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam* appeared in 1773.

However it came about, by 1775 Baldwin had sufficiently gained the confidence of the Corporation to be closely involved in supervising the building of their new Markets and designing the Guildhall. The controversy which raged in the city over the involvement of the self-serving Thomas Warr Atwood in this development after a previous scheme by Timothy Lightoler had foundered has been outlined by Walter Ison.⁴ By April 1775 Warr Atwood had made considerable progress in rebuilding the Markets, and on 3 July 1775 'Mr Atwood's plan for rebuilding the Town Hall' was adopted by the City. Ison takes this to have been Atwood's own design, but subsequent events suggest that it was probably by Baldwin. When an alternative design by John Palmer was produced, a furious debate broke out but the Corporation continued

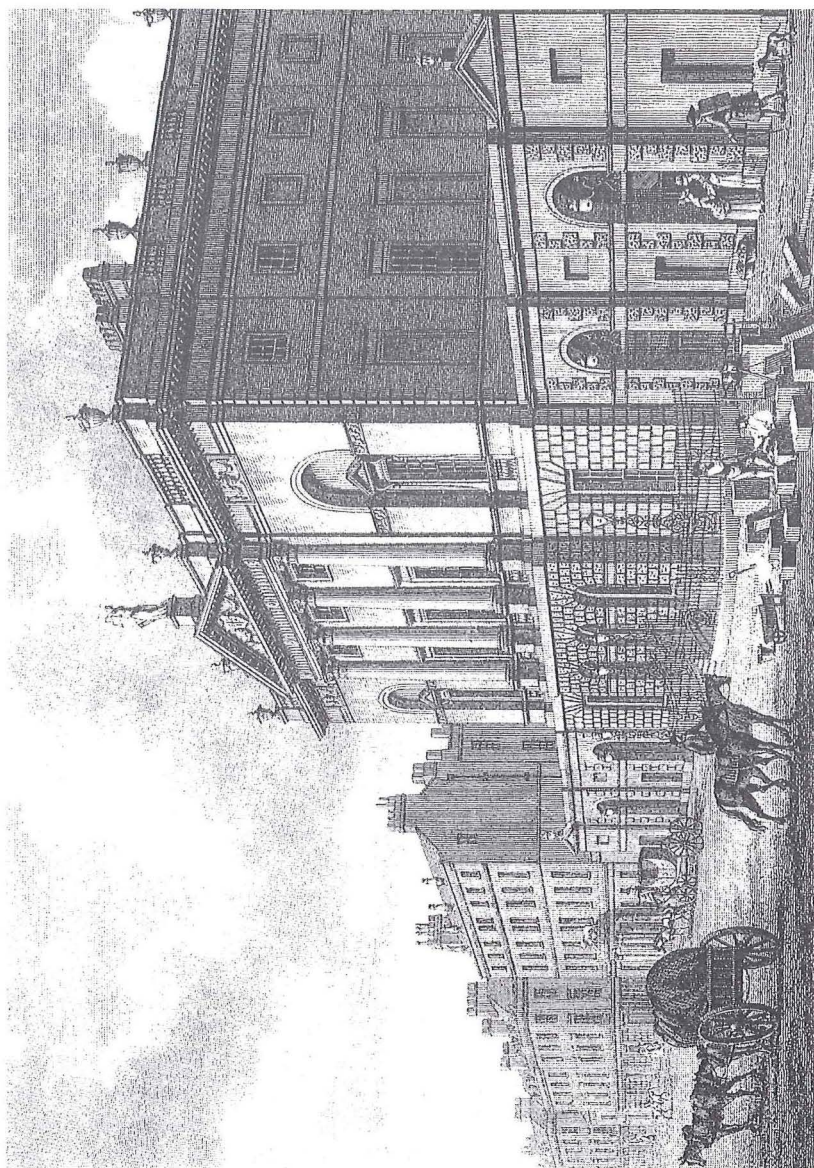


Fig. 1 The Guildhall in 1779, engraved by W. Watts, 1794. (Courtesy Bath Central Library)

to promote Atwood's scheme in the face of considerable opposition. Ison suggests that it was only Atwood's accidental death shortly afterwards which silenced the Palmer camp. He does not explain why Palmer's supporters tamely allowed Baldwin to step in rather than redoubling their efforts on behalf of their scheme if, as he suggests, the Corporation abandoned Atwood's scheme as a result of his death. Clearly Ison cannot have seen a minute book containing a record of the activities of the Committee for finishing the Markets and rebuilding the Guildhall from 13 December 1774 to 13 March 1779,⁵ from which it is clear that Baldwin was supervising much of the work on the Markets and had designed the present Guildhall well before Atwood was killed on 15 November 1775.

When Baldwin had assumed this role is not clear, but on 27 September 1775 it was he who was asked to produce a design for a new weighing house for the Markets. On 11 October the Committee ordered that

...the North and South Fronts [the side elevations] of the Hall be finished conformable as near as can be to what is already done & that Mr Baldwin do make an Elevation for ye two fronts, with as little expence in Ornament as may be consistent with the same.

The work which was 'already done' seems likely to have been an abortive start on an earlier scheme, perhaps Lightoler's, rather than a change of heart about the scheme produced by Atwood only three months earlier. On 24 October 1775 rates were agreed with Richard Singers and Charles Hale for the 'Rustic work, both frosted & Common' on the two fronts, so Baldwin must have had his designs well in hand by the time the official order was given. On 1 November the Committee issued an order which confirms their reliance on Baldwin before Atwood's death. This was '...that the remaining part of the old White Lyon building be taken down as soon as can be, and that Mr Baldwin do procure... Rooms instead of that he now uses in ye said Building as contiguous to ye work as he can.'

It was during the demolition which followed this order that Warr Atwood was killed 'by the violent contusions he received in his head, &c by the falling in of the floor'.⁶ However, the death of Warr Atwood seems to have had little effect on the progress of the work. On 22 November the Committee '...order'd yt all Work, as well Carpenters as Masons, &c: be done under ye Inspection of Mr Baldwin...'. The minute book outlines the completion of the Markets which by this time were well advanced, and provides a complete chronology for the erection of the Guildhall.

On 13 December 1775 Baldwin's east elevation was approved, and on 28 February 1776 his west or entrance front design. Throughout this time he was receiving large sums on account to pay for the work and the Committee minutes record the continuing routine transactions relating to it. On 10 December 1776 the Committee voted not more than two shillings and sixpence per head for 'a Roof rearing Dinner [to] be given to the Workmen employed about building the Hall'. In the meantime Baldwin had produced designs for the principal interiors; on 29 October 1776 it was

...agreed that the Designs presented by Mr Baldwin for finishing the sections of the grand or common Entrance into ye Town Hall, ye grand Stair Case, the Lobby at ye Top of D[itt]o leading into ye Banqueting Room, the said Banqueting Room, & Council Room, be approved of, & signed by the said Committee....

On 3 December 1776 Daniel Fowles was awarded the contract for the 'plaistering and ornamental work', and on 22 April 1777 he received his first payment of £100 on account. He continued to work on the plasterwork throughout the summer, being paid sums of £150 on 10 June and 3 September. Baldwin's designs for the three chimneypieces for the Banqueting Room were accepted in November, and on 10 December the order was given for James Atwood to make the ironwork balustrade for the staircase to a design he seems to have provided himself 'with some little Alterations as Mr Baldwin shall direct'. Baldwin's design for the ironwork for the front of the musicians' gallery was accepted at the same meeting. Baldwin was by this time much involved in decisions about fitting up and furnishing the building. In September 1777 he was sent to Bristol to make enquiries about kitchen fittings, and in the same month he produced proposals for the interior of the justiciary court and the furnishing of the offices. In December he was instructed to obtain proposals for providing chandeliers, and in the same month the Committee turned its attention to furniture in greater earnest, ordering chairs, tables and settees. At the very end of the minute book is recorded an order made on 13 March 1779 that Daniel Fowles should whiteme and colour the Hall, probably a reference to the whole building rather than just the Banqueting Room, and that Tucker should finish the painting. This seems to mark the completion of the building.

Previous writers have been unanimous in their praise for Baldwin's achievement at the Guildhall. Despite J.M. Brydon's careful but over-large



Fig. 2 The east front of the Guildhall.

late-nineteenth-century extensions and the dome he added to the Guildhall itself, it is still possible to appreciate the graceful dignity of what is arguably Baldwin's best building. His debt to Adam is very evident from both the principal fronts. The west front exhibits many Adam details, such as the capitals of the giant order which are based on the Ionic of the Erechtheion in Athens, but it is the form of the east front (Fig. 2) which is most obviously comparable with Adam's work. Baldwin used here for the first time the end pavilions which were to become characteristic of his own work and which he was to adapt and refine throughout his career. The fine plasterwork in the principal interiors in the Guildhall displays an equally confident handling of the repertoire of fashionable ornament, and few would dispute Walter Ison's description of the Banqueting Room as '...beyond any question the finest interior in Bath, and a masterpiece of late eighteenth century decoration'.

It seems to have been during the construction of the Guildhall that Baldwin was officially appointed City Surveyor. On 28 December 1775

the Chamberlain's Accounts record a payment of £50 to Baldwin, presumably for services rendered although this is not stated. On 24 April 1776 the Rebuilding Committee approved a payment of £30 to Baldwin 'as part of his Salary' but it is not clear what period of time this covered. On 23 September 1776 he was referred to in the Council Minutes as City Surveyor, and on 29 July 1777 the Rebuilding Committee agreed to pay him £120 'on Acct of his Salary, as City Surveyor'. In the following year he was paid a quarter's salary of £35 by the Rebuilding Committee on 23 June, but when he was also appointed Deputy Chamberlain on 12 October 1779, the salary for the combined posts was £140 per annum.

On 15 September 1779 Thomas Baldwin and Elizabeth Chapman were married by licence at St James's Church in Bath. Elizabeth was the daughter of John Chapman the saddler, six times Mayor of Bath, and his wife Margaret Coward who was her husband's first cousin.⁷ The Chapman family had considerable local influence, but in 1779 Baldwin must have appeared enough of a rising star to make a very acceptable addition to the dynasty. The influence of his wife's family was a major factor in the course of his future career, and it can scarcely be coincidental that on 12 October 1779, a month after his marriage, Baldwin was appointed Deputy Chamberlain to the Corporation of Bath, the Chamberlain 'having informed the Corporation that the business incidental to his office is too large for one to conduct'. The Bill in Chancery which the Corporation filed against Baldwin in the crisis of 1792-3 gives the date of his first appointment as 7 January 1782, but according to the Council Minutes this was the second renewal of his combined appointment as City Surveyor and Deputy Chamberlain. The Bill says that in 1782 he offered a Bond for £1000; this is not mentioned in the Minutes until 6 October 1783, after a further renewal of his appointment, so possibly the reappointment of 1782 is quoted in the Bill because it represented an attempt to place his employment on a firmer legal footing.

Baldwin's role as Surveyor involved much routine work, but the Corporation had been seeking a more active role in the development of the city since the 1760s and in 1775 initiated the redevelopment of the baths by employing John Wood the younger to build the new Hot Bath. In 1777 Baldwin was asked 'to secure and preserve' the so-called kitchen in the centre of the King's Bath 'which leans out of the perpendicular and is likely to fall down',⁸ but in 1781 the City resolved to replace it with a new building to Baldwin's design. Commissions for very small buildings often seem to concentrate the designer's skill, and the elegant little pavilion Baldwin produced is no exception to this. It was demolished in

the nineteenth century but is known from two drawings of 1789 by S.H. Grimm.⁹

In 1783–84 the Cross Bath was rebuilt under Baldwin's direction. The previously confused history of the Cross Bath has been disentangled by Jean Manco,¹⁰ who has identified a first phase of work carried out by Baldwin at this date, followed by a remodelling by Palmer in 1797–98 to accommodate Baldwin's building to its new setting following the creation of Bath Street. In order to achieve this, Palmer took down and rebuilt Baldwin's Cross Bath Pump Room façade, which had faced north, as the eastern elevation of the remodelled building, and provided a new north elevation to his own design.

On 27 September 1784 the Council resolved that a ruined tenement adjoining the main Pump Room at the King's Bath should be taken down and converted into water closets in accordance with a plan produced by Baldwin. On 3 October 1785 the Council Minutes record a report from the 'Committee appointed for improving the Baths and Pump Rooms' recommending the erection of a colonnade before the Pump Room to keep it warmer. Previous writers have confused this colonnade with the one north of the present Pump Room, but they cannot be the same. The much smaller old Pump Room was situated within the site of the present building at its eastern end, facing out over the King's Bath. Harcourt Masters' turnpike map of 1787¹¹ shows the old Pump Room and the colonnade of 1785, which appears to project in front of the middle three bays of the arcaded five-bay north elevation of the building. The old Pump Room was articulated by an applied order of attached Corinthian columns, with an intercolumniation of about nine feet,¹² and it is possible that a bill for stone carving dated 5 November 1785 submitted by Thomas Parsons in 1789¹³ listing four Corinthian capitals and one 'Elegant Pannel' nine feet five inches long, collectively marked 'Pump Room', may refer to work carried out on the colonnade. However, it is clear from the City Chamberlain's vouchers that the erection of the colonnade was only part of a general refurbishment of the building. For example, a bill submitted by the statuary Thomas King for a variety of work carried out during 1785, most of which seems to have been at the Pump Room, includes an item dated 10 August: 'To cleaning the Figure of the late Mr Naish new working the Plinth writing the Inscription and new drawing the plan of the Hospital'.

On 10 May 1788 the Mayor laid the foundation stone of the Corporation's New Private Baths (Fig. 3), which were to provide 'dry pump-rooms, sudatories, and every possible accommodation...' ¹⁴ for

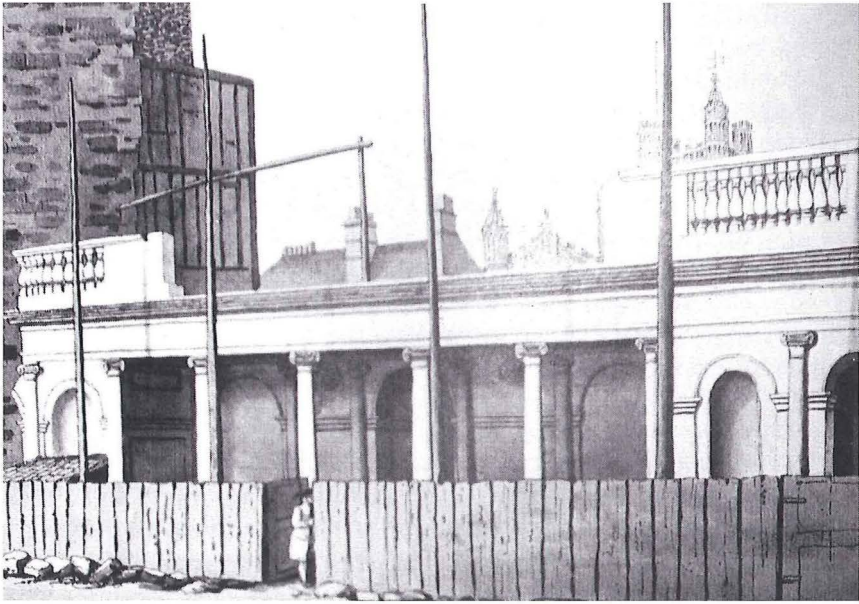


Fig. 3 The New Private Baths in 1789 from a drawing by S.H. Grimm.

wealthy visitors. These baths were the last development carried out by the Corporation before the Improvement Commissioners appointed under the Improvement Act of 1789 took over this role. By the time the foundation stone of the New Private Baths was laid, preparatory work for the Act was well advanced and Baldwin's overall plan for the area to be included in its provisions had been approved by the Corporation. The New Private Baths were thus the first-fruits of a scheme which already existed on paper, in outline if not in detail, and it is their colonnaded entrance front which represents the *leitmotif* for all that was to follow. The creation of these Baths on a site formerly occupied by houses also represents a foretaste of Baldwin's astonishing ingenuity in reordering the heart of the city to bring eighteenth-century rationality out of a jumble of buildings which were still essentially mediaeval in character. Marta Inskip has noted¹⁵ that the ground on this part of the east side of Stall Street had been divided into plots of approximately fifteen feet wide in mediaeval times, and that this module of fifteen feet still underlay the disposition of the ground in the seventeenth century. Her plan of this

area¹⁶ also demonstrates how Baldwin's redevelopment was carried out within this same existing rhythm of property divisions.

To understand how the redevelopment of the centre of Bath was continued after 1789 under the aegis of the Improvement Commissioners, it is necessary to look back to 1785. In the latter part of that year the impetus for improvement was formalized in the commissioning of Baldwin to prepare and cost a scheme which formed the basis of the Improvement Act of 1789. From a printed copy of the resolutions of the Council, and of the Committee they had established to carry forward the improvements,¹⁷ the course of their deliberations can be followed. On 6 October 1785 the Committee recorded their opinion that the best way of effecting the desired improvement would be by

making very convenient Thoroughfares through the City; which can only be done by widening some of the old Streets, making an open Communication between the Upper and Lower Town, and laying the Baths as open as possible; to complete which, Mr Baldwin is desired to draw an accurate Plan of the City, describing where such Improvements are most necessary to be made.

After this fine-sounding declaration progress was slow. Committee meetings were repeatedly adjourned and after two years of inaction the full Council met to reconsider the question of the improvements. They decided to refer the matter back to the existing Committee, who were to meet weekly on Thursday evenings at the Guildhall. On 6 December 1787 Baldwin was asked to open discussions about the prices of various properties in Stall Street, and on 20 December the Committee got down to serious business. Baldwin must have produced a plan for them to consider, for they decided that his proposals should 'not at present extend beyond the Line described by the Letters A B C D E F G H I K L'. He was instructed to produce a survey of the area, a plan for the improvements, an estimate of the value of property which would be destroyed in executing them, and an estimate of the increased value of buildings and ground which would adjoin the proposed new streets. On 18 January 1788 Baldwin produced a plan showing his proposals, which was approved, and he was urged to expedite his report on the property which would be destroyed in consequence. On 31 January the full Council met and resolved to petition Parliament for leave to bring in a Bill. After numerous meetings to consider plans and schedules prepared by Baldwin, the Committee settled on Plan E, which it was estimated

would cost the Corporation £47,163-16-5.¹⁸ This was approved by the full Council on 18 March, and formal instructions were given on 27 November 1788 that the Draft Bill should be prepared.

Following the passing of the Act, the first meeting recorded in the Improvement Commissioners Order Book,¹⁹ which contains the minutes of their meetings, took place on 27 July 1789, when some necessary preliminaries were transacted. On 14 August Baldwin attended the Commissioners and presented a plan for widening Cheap Street and part of Stall Street 'and passages leading to and from the same'; this was approved and at the next meeting on 28 August the proposals for Cheap Street were ordered to be put into execution. Baldwin's elevations for both sides of the street with the signatures of some of the contracting parties are in the Mowbray Green collection in Bath Central Library;²⁰ the drawing of the south side was signed on 26 February 1790 with a further signature added on 9 July, and the north side was signed on 30 April. The Cash Book of the Commissioners' Treasurer, Samuel Howse,²¹ records a flurry of payments in connection with the setting back of property in Cheap Street around May 1791, so on this occasion at least the improvement seems to have been expedited. The north side of Cheap Street has since been refronted again, but the south side is largely intact, although Baldwin's simple but elegant shopfronts with segmental bow windows have all been replaced. Clearly he intended these low-key elevations, articulated by attached Doric columns on the ground floor, to complement the greater riches he was planning for the Abbey Churchyard.

During the latter part of 1789 Baldwin was busy producing surveys, estimates and valuations for property being bought for the improvements and he was empowered to call in assistance when necessary. On 30 October 1789 the Commissioners resolved to proceed with the five new streets which had been provided for in the Act. These were Union Street, Cross Bath Street, Nash Street (from the Cross Bath to Westgate Street), Hot Bath Street and Bow Street. On 4 December 1789 Baldwin produced his elevations for Cross Bath Street (now known as Bath Street) 'with Colonades and Segments at each end with Balustrades on Top' which were approved, and he was ordered to proceed forthwith in preparing a full set of plans, sections and elevations with descriptions and levels for potential builders to inspect before the ground was let. However, Bath Street fell victim to the interminable delays and setbacks which beset the whole process of improvement, and on 9 April 1790 the Commissioners ordered that Baldwin should revise his plan and elevation for Bath Street, and report back to their next meeting whether it would be best built with

or without colonnades. On 16 April they confirmed their decision to build the street *with* colonnades, and ordered that the ground should again be advertised. On 6 August the Commissioners gave instructions about any material of archaeological interest which might be unearthed in digging the foundations of Bath Street, but by 14 January 1791 they were advertising another meeting '...to take into Consideration whether Cross Bath Street shall be built with or without Colonades And whether the former Order respecting Colonades shall or not be recinded'. 'At this meeting they seem finally to have made up their minds, and the foundation stone of Bath Street was laid on 31 March. The building leases for the street are dated in 1790 and 1791²² and an undated drawing in Bath Record Office showing the elevations of the segments at the eastern end of the street seems to have been signed in connection with the building contracts. Baldwin seems to have enjoyed the challenge of a complex design problem, and Bath Street is generally reckoned to be one of his triumphs; Pevsner went so far as to describe it as 'a perfect piece of design'.²³

The Commissioners had not formalized Baldwin's position as architect by 26 March 1790, when they ordered that he should attend their meeting on 9 April equipped with '...his Terms and Proposals for Surveying Estimating Drawing plans and Elevations and doing other Business as an Architect and Surveyor for carrying the said Act into Execution...'. By 14 May it had been decided that his salary should be £200. His salary as Deputy Chamberlain and Surveyor to the Corporation was by then £210 per annum, and he must also have been receiving a suitable emolument from the Bathwick estate. He employed several clerks, although it is not clear how many at one time, but there is no record of his taking any pupils. It has already been noted that the Improvement Commissioners allowed him to bring in extra assistance when necessary, but even so the amount of work he must have undertaken personally during the late 1780s and early 1790s is prodigious. Although it is clear that deliberate fraud was involved in Baldwin's subsequent financial difficulties, some of his carelessness and mismanagement may well have resulted from sheer lack of time to attend to details.

On 12 March 1790 Baldwin was ordered by the Commissioners to begin the foundations for the west front of the Pump Room and colonnade, and to proceed with building 'agreeable to the Plan and Elevation thereof drawn by Mr Baldwin' as the demolition of the houses on the east side of Stall Street permitted. On 4 June it was resolved that the new Pump Room should be 87' by 47' and 35' high with a coved ceiling, almost precisely the dimensions of the completed room. On 2 July 1790 Baldwin's

elevation for the north front of the Pump Room was approved, but this was not ordered to be put into execution until November of that year. Writing in 1801 the Rev. Richard Warner described the construction of the new Pump Room as having taken place in two distinct phases: the old Pump Room was

...adorned with a superb western frontispiece, in 1791. The corporation further beautified the city in 1796, by taking down the old Pump-Room entirely, and building on its scite the much larger and more magnificent edifice known at present by that name.²⁴

The process cannot have seemed quite so straightforward to passers-by who for many years had to pick their way through the Abbey Churchyard between fenced-off sites, the fences of which were constantly being moved or repaired.²⁵ Warner's account highlights the obvious desirability of keeping the old Pump Room, situated on the eastern end of the site of the new one, functioning for as long as possible, but by the latter part of 1794 a temporary pump room was needed. On 8 October of that year Miss Katherine Plymley recorded in her diary: 'Miss Charlotte [Isted] accompanied us to the pump room. It is at present a temporary one, the old one for some reason is not used, & the new one which will be a magnificent building is not finish'd'.²⁶ This was her first day in Bath, which explains why she seems to have been unaware that the old Pump Room was by this time concealed within the shell of the new one.

In view of later events it is not surprising that relatively few tradesmen's accounts survive from the period when Baldwin was employed by the Commissioners, but a lengthy series from the carpenter Daniel Brown²⁷ begins with an item dated 26 June 1790 for demolition work on 'Mr Marchant's house in Stall Street', the site of which was needed for the northernmost half-bay and terminating wall of the Pump Room colonnade. Baldwin had been instructed on 5 February to prepare plans and elevations for rebuilding the block of houses on the north side of the Abbey Churchyard opposite the site of the new Pump Room, but on 16 July the Commissioners decided that there was no immediate need to take down those not obstructing the completion of the east side of Stall Street. On 13 August they signed drawings for the south (Fig. 4) and west elevations of the block.²⁸ These drawings show how Baldwin intended to handle this important but slightly awkward site (in the event developed only after his dismissal) and a comparison between them and the executed design by John Palmer points up the markedly inferior abilities

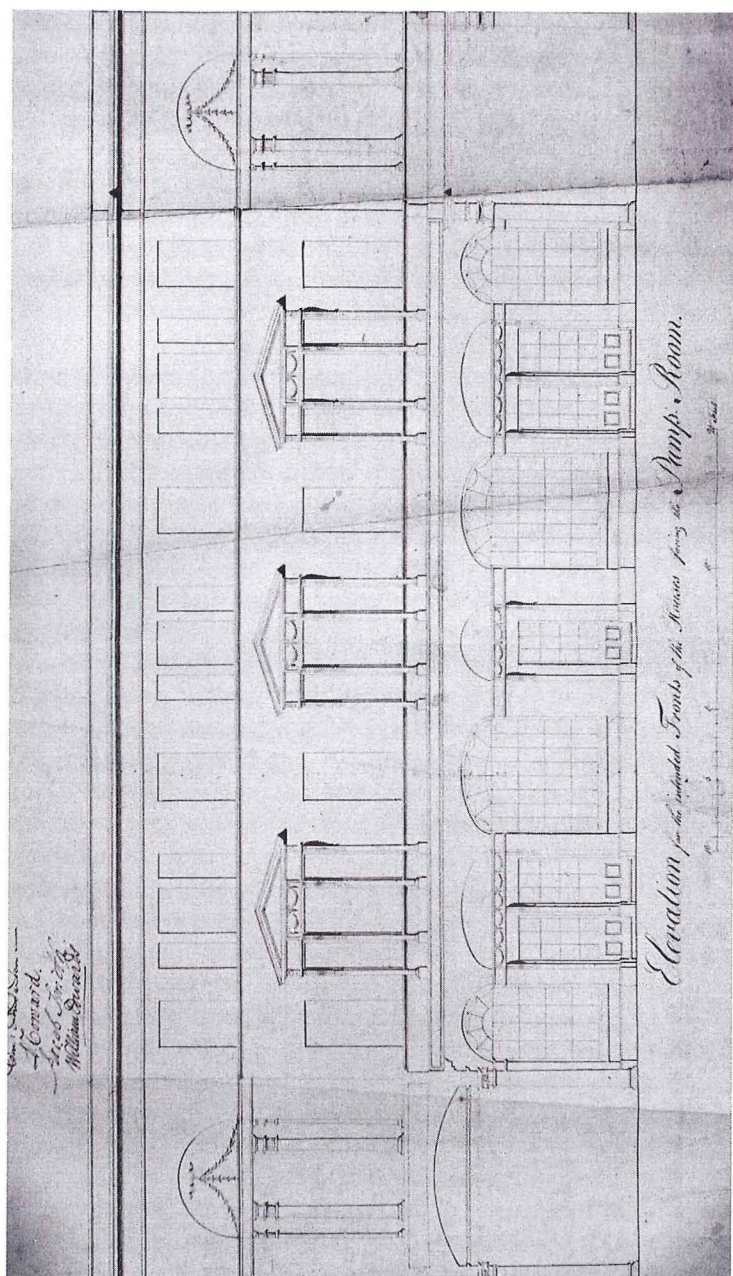


Fig. 4 Baldwin's south elevation for the block opposite the Pump Room. (Courtesy Bath Record Office)

of the latter. Apart from the colonnade itself the only fragment of Baldwin's scheme to be realised was the narrow south elevation on the site of Marchant's house, with its blind tripartite window mirroring that on the Pump Room opposite.²⁹ Palmer subsequently treated this merely as an adjunct to his façade, but Baldwin's elevation shows how he had intended it to respond to the western pavilion of the Pump Room opposite. Repeated at the eastern end of the range as Baldwin intended, this recessive pavilion on an open colonnaded ground floor would have disguised the lack of alignment with the passageway through to Cheap Street rather more effectively than Palmer's scheme.

The Pump Room colonnade seems to have been completed in the summer of 1791. Daniel Brown's accounts include an item for 'Nails to the Covering of the Colonnade' on 7 May, and work on the colonnade continues to appear in the account until the end of the month. References to the Pump Room itself are less easy to interpret, but the evidence suggests that the west front was almost complete and the north front well advanced by the time of Baldwin's dismissal by the Improvement Commissioners on 28 June 1793. Bills submitted by William Biggs to John Palmer in 1794³⁰ for work on the ornament of the west front include items for 'Workg off the Surface of 8 Corinthian Capitals West Front', and

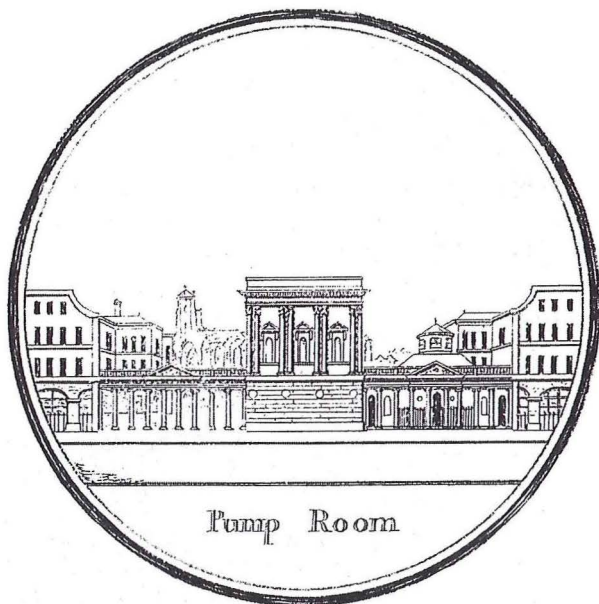


Fig. 5 The west front of the Pump Room, 1793.
(Courtesy Bath Central Library)

'3 Ramsheads, Ribbons and festoons of Husks' and '4 Large Pateras with Wreaths of Laural and Flutes' and making good the surrounding rustication. However, this work does seem to have been carried out in accordance with Baldwin's intentions. A small engraving of the west front of the Pump Room with its flanking colonnades dated 26 January 1793³¹ (Fig. 5) shows all the principal features of the design in place.

The Commissioners ordered that work should start on the north front of the Pump Room on 26 November 1790, but it was not until 13 August 1791 that Daniel Brown supplied three quantities of 'Elm planks to the foundation of the Pump Room'. The first eight planks were twelve feet long, two feet wide and eight inches thick, making a total length of 192 feet. A further sixteen were each only six feet long but otherwise the same, and eight more were six feet long, two feet wide and five inches thick. The dimensions suggest that these were used in the foundations of the three remaining walls of the building. The walls had risen to at least the ground floor by 30 June 1792 when Brown supplied '81 feet of 12 by 12 for heads over the windows', followed by a further 78 feet a week later. By the time of Baldwin's dismissal in June 1793 it seems that one of the pavilions of the north front, probably at the west end, was up to at least the first floor. A bill from William Biggs shortly after the recommencement of work on the Pump Room under John Palmer in 1794 includes an item 'To Cleaning the Ornamental Part of 8 whole and 2 half Trusses'. Here the word truss can only be taken to mean corbel, which is an alternative to its more usual meaning in a building context, and to refer to the consoles of the aedicular surrounds of the west front niches and the large windows in the pavilions of the north front. Since most of the other work on the bill is for the west front, it seems reasonable to assume that six of the consoles are accounted for by those on this elevation. The obvious inference is that those remaining were already in place on the pilasters of one of the windows in the pavilions on the north front. The plan attached to a deed of 12 December 1792³² conveying property from the Bath Corporation to the Improvement Commissioners shows the shallow projecting portico Baldwin intended for the north front of the Pump Room. (Fig. 6) The foundations of this portico were found during the excavation of the site in the early 1980s, and a bill for sixteen guineas from Francis Lancashire dated 6 November 1792 'To Carving Masoning & Stone for 4 large Corinthian Capitals For the new Pump room' probably refers to capitals supplied for it. The columns seem to have been partly built at the time of Baldwin's dismissal. One of the most significant changes made to the Pump Room by Palmer

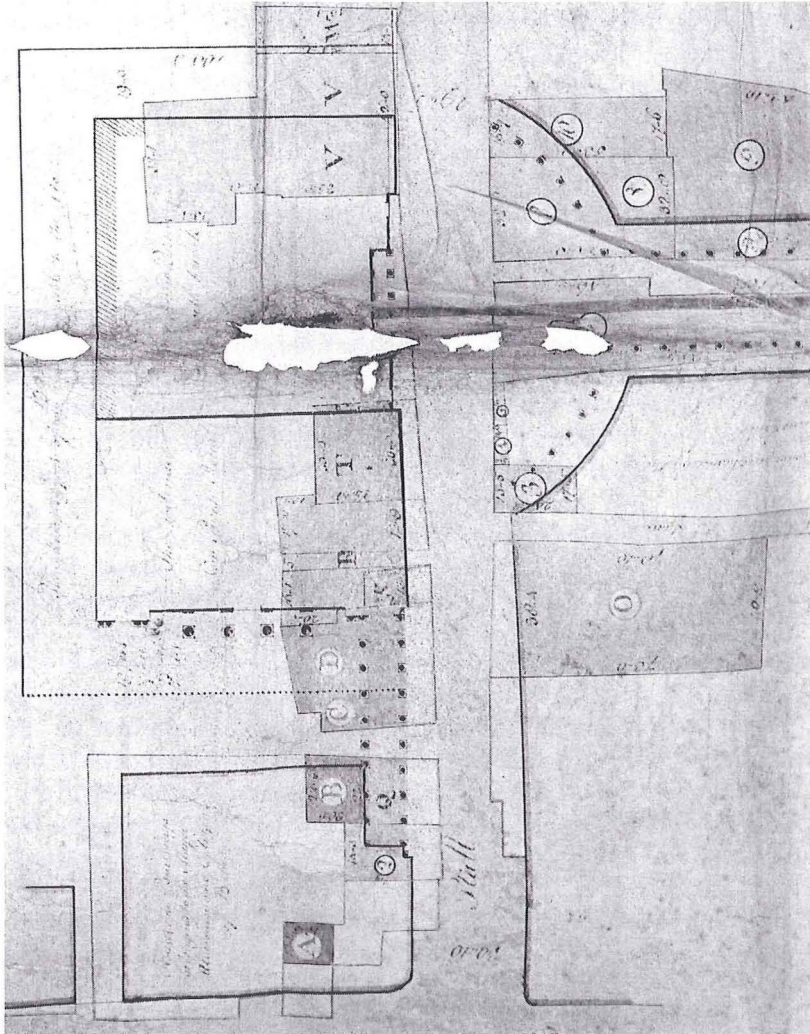


Fig. 6 Plan of the Pump Room and its environs, 1792. (Courtesy Bath Record Office)

after Baldwin's downfall was to set the portico back against the wall, but before moving on to that period, we need to follow the course of events which led up to it.

On 3 June 1791 the ground plan of Union Street was presented to the Commissioners, who approved it and ordered that it should be carried out. They also instructed Baldwin 'with all convenient speed' to prepare the elevations of each side of the street and the west side of Cock Lane, now Union Passage. Doubtless in connection with these resolutions regarding the creation of Union Street, in May 1791 the Governors of the General Hospital had begun to consider moving the hospital to a new site.³³ By the end of the month they had decided against moving, but had accepted Baldwin's offer to produce proposals for the improvement of their existing building. This he had done by 27 July when the Governors appointed a committee to consider his proposals. However, the issue of moving the Hospital arose again early in the following year, and was not finally laid to rest until the Improvement Commissioners decided on 16 March 1792 that the Act did not empower them to make an exchange of property with the Governors of the Hospital.³⁴ By this time Baldwin himself had run into difficulties with the Improvement Commissioners.

On 6 January 1792 the Treasurer, Samuel Howse, and Baldwin were ordered to prepare and produce their accounts. Baldwin had already been in dispute with the Bath Corporation, and in the previous October had been dismissed as Deputy Chamberlain and ordered to produce his accounts. This resolution of the Improvement Commissioners must therefore be seen as evidence of mounting suspicion on their part too. Nevertheless, their culpable lack of control over their financial affairs up to this time must have contributed to the confusion. A week after this resolution the Commissioners instructed Baldwin to apply to the tradesmen he had employed on their behalf for their accounts up to the end of 1791, and appointed a committee out of their number to examine the accounts submitted by Baldwin and Samuel Howse. On 9 and 23 March the Commissioners passed a number of resolutions relating to their financial difficulties, from which it is evident that they felt they had overreached themselves and needed to sort out their existing debts and contracts before entering into any more. On 15 June they ordered that Howse and Baldwin should prepare their accounts up to 24 June, but Baldwin evidently did not do so, because on 28 September they ordered a cessation of all work with effect from the next day, a Saturday, because they had not received Baldwin's accounts. Howse was instructed to pay the workmen a week's wages in lieu of notice; his cash book³⁵ records

that he had been giving money to Baldwin to pay wages since July, and from 29 September 1792 until April 1793 Howse paid the workmen himself.

On 5 October 1792 Baldwin produced his accounts, and a committee was appointed to examine them. On 12 October the Commissioners ordered that work should recommence on the Pump Room at the rate of no more than ten pounds expenditure per week. On 14 December the committee examining Baldwin's accounts recommended that John Palmer should be commissioned to measure the work already done at the Pump Room and the unused materials on the site. They also recommended that the accounts relating to the sale of second-hand materials on behalf of the Commissioners should be regularised, and bills made out and the money collected by the Treasurer. Baldwin continued to work for the Improvement Commissioners while Palmer's investigation was in progress, but Palmer had already supplanted him at the General Hospital. On 5 December 1792 the Governors had been notified that a plan for extending the existing building was shortly to be submitted to them, and on 2 January 1793 they approved Palmer's proposals for adding a second floor to the building and appointed a committee to supervise the work; it is this upwards extension which we see today.

In the meantime Baldwin had been instructed by the Improvement Commissioners on 28 December that he was to examine and sign all bills before passing them to the Treasurer for payment, and on 15 February 1793 the Commissioners resolved to advertise ground in Burton Street to be let for building, for which purpose Baldwin was to prepare a plan and elevation. At this meeting they also ordered Baldwin to prepare a plan and elevation of the east side of Union Street, and they must have advertised this very shortly afterwards because on 22 March they resolved to withdraw their advertisement 'for letting the Ground in the Bear Yard', on which Union Street was to be built, and to postpone it indefinitely. Probably they already had in mind their resolutions of 12 April ordering Baldwin to attend the Commissioners' meeting the following week to give an account of all his transactions on their behalf, and ordering another immediate cessation of work on the Pump Room and a survey and valuation by John Palmer. The writing was on the wall for Baldwin when on 17 May a committee was appointed to investigate the building of the Pump Room and the Commissioners' affairs in general, for whose benefit he was to surrender all documentation in his possession and on whom he was ordered to attend. On 28 June 1793 the following resolutions are baldly recorded in the Order Book:

Ordered that Mr John Palmer be requested by this day Fortnight to prepare a plan and Estimate for finishing the present Pump Room.

Ordered that Mr Thomas Baldwin be and he is hereby suspended from the Office of Architect and Surveyor under the said Act from and after the Twenty Seventh day of July next until further Orders.

Palmer had produced a plan and estimate for completing the Pump Room by 12 July, when it was referred back to Palmer and Willey Reveley, the architect and authority on Greek architecture,³⁶ for further consideration. Reveley seems rather to have thrust himself on the Commissioners, producing 'Several Plans and Elevations for improving the Public and Private Baths' before them on 26 July, 'but nothing was determined on'. On 15 November the Commissioners were still uncertain that they would be able to complete the Pump Room, and ordered a full statement of their finances. In the meantime Palmer had secured the building for the winter.³⁷ On 7 February 1794 Palmer's plan and elevation were accepted, and a month later the order was given for work to recommence. On 29 March the masons Lideard and Fisher were 'Taking down Collomns oultring and Reseting [ditto] &c'.³⁸ The supposition that these were the columns of the portico on the north front seems to be confirmed by subsequent bills. An account from Palmer for day work at the Pump Room records the provision of three oval moulds for the masons on 17 May, and 'A Sett of Cornice moulds, for the North front each side the pediment' on 24 May. In the same month William Biggs supplied 56 modillions for the Pump Room, the same number as on the pediment on the north front and the only ones on the building.

We have seen that Palmer was responsible for setting back the portico, presumably for reasons of economy. It is tempting to suggest that he lowered it too, thereby detaching it from the main entablature. He then compounded the architectural felony by attempting to anchor the portico visually by extending the architrave across the front of the building to connect it with the imposts of the pavilions. This inept handling of the external order obliged him to substitute windows of proportions properly belonging to the attic for those appropriate to the first floor. The fenestration of the Pump Room has obvious affinities with Baldwin's treatment of the Banqueting Room at the Guildhall, but the arrangement of windows at the latter relates correctly to the architectural treatment of both the interior and exterior of the building. It is hoped that a more thorough analysis of the fabric of the building may provide further evidence about Baldwin's intended design for the north front between

the pavilions. It appears possible that a full-height portico correctly aligned on the main entablature of the building would have allowed room for first floor windows of the same height as those in the pavilions, and an attic storey perhaps expressed by blind windows. This fenestration would not have worked internally with Palmer's giant order, but could have been incorporated into a scheme similar to that in the Banqueting Room interior, where Baldwin's applied order rises through one storey only.

Baldwin's differences with the Improvement Commissioners were closely paralleled in his relationship with the Bath Corporation. On 27 September 1790 Abel Moysey the Younger was elected City Chamberlain.³⁹ Moysey was a lawyer with a lawyer's eye for detail, and in 1775 he had recommended John Furman⁴⁰ for 'inspecting and methodizing the writings relative to this Corporation'. It is not surprising therefore that 'having discovered some improper conduct carelessness and mismanagement' on 4 October 1790 the Corporation made their first attempt to regulate Baldwin's performance of his official duties. On this date he was re-elected Surveyor and Deputy Chamberlain at the same salary of £210. However, a rider was added that he must 'provide a Clerk to attend at the Chamberlain's office at least two days a week; and all the business of Chamberlain to be transacted at the Town Hall'. A year later the Corporation's suspicion of him seems to have deepened, for on 3 October 1791 he was re-elected Architect and Surveyor at the salary of £105 per annum, but not Deputy Chamberlain, the other half of his former salary being paid to the Chamberlain '...for employing proper assistance'. On 26 October the Council ordered unanimously that the Landed and Water Rentals and 'all other Books belonging the Corporation' in Baldwin's possession should be delivered to Dr Harington, the then Chamberlain. He had not complied by 22 November when the Town Clerk was instructed to apply to Baldwin asking him to do so, and it was resolved that 'if he refuses a Bill in Chancery to be immediately filed against him'.

On 10 July 1792, after Baldwin had defaulted on at least three occasions when he had been required to produce and explain his accounts, the Corporation resolved that he should be discharged from any future employment with them. They also resolved to commence proceedings in Chancery against him, and on 26 July a copy of their resolutions was sent to Baldwin with the following note: 'This friendly Notice of the above Order is sent to Mr Baldwin that he may if he please avoid unpleasing Difficulties by faithfully accounting and delivering Books &c without

Coercive Measures'. However friendly, this note did not achieve the desired result, and on 31 January 1793 the Corporation of Bath filed a Bill in Chancery against Thomas Baldwin for the production of his accounts and the return of the monies they claimed were due to them.⁴¹ The Bill sets out the substance of the Corporation's charges against Baldwin in some detail. In brief, these were that he had carried out his duties with a carelessness amounting to negligence, and had been guilty of consistent false accounting, for example by filling in figures after his accounts had been signed and by falsifying payments to tradesmen on the City's account for work which had either not been done or had already been paid for.

The Corporation's Bill was evidently adjudged to have revealed a *prima facie* cause of complaint against Baldwin, because in due course he was summoned to answer it. The Lord Chancellor's writ of subpoena against him may have met with as much resistance as every previous attempt to get him to explain himself. When on 26 July 1793 Baldwin swore an affidavit at the house of a Mr Wright in Carey Street in London, he was apparently 'in Custody'⁴² which may mean that having failed to appear to answer the Bill he had been arrested and committed to the Fleet Prison for contempt. The affidavit Baldwin swore was a plea that he could not answer the charges without access to records in the Corporation's possession. On 29 July judgement was given by the Lord Chancellor that Baldwin should be free 'to inspect peruse and take Extracts' from a list of relevant documents.⁴³ However, on 15 August bankruptcy proceedings against Baldwin were commenced by one Edmunds, a creditor who is otherwise unknown.⁴⁴ It seems likely that he had got wind of the Corporation's suit against Baldwin and was anxious lest they be awarded more than their fair share of his assets. Bankruptcy was the only available legal means of ensuring full access to a debtor's estate and an equitable distribution of his assets amongst his creditors.⁴⁵ Edmunds' action resulted in the opening of a Commission of Bankruptcy against Baldwin; this had been awarded by 12 September 1793 when an advertisement appeared in the *Bath Chronicle* stating that he had been declared a bankrupt, and announcing creditors' meetings on 14 and 23 September and 10 October. At the first meeting the creditors were to come prepared to prove their debts, at the second the assignees were to be chosen, and at the third Baldwin was 'required to finish his examination' and the creditors were to vote on whether or not he should be granted a Certificate of Conformity. The granting of the Certificate had to be approved by four-fifths of the creditors by number and value; it

released the bankrupt from his debts, and therefore effectively gave him a fresh start.⁴⁶ Baldwin's Certificate was not allowed, apparently because the Corporation of Bath were dependent on the records and accounts which he should have kept on their behalf to prove his debt to them. His refusal to produce the necessary evidence prevented his bankruptcy from being resolved, but probably he alone knew what charges a revelation of the true facts might expose him to.

Without further information about Baldwin's finances, which he was clearly determined should remain obscure, it is difficult to be certain about the immediate cause of his insolvency. Ison attributes it to the failure of the Bath City Bank in April 1793, but as he does not provide any evidence for this statement and seems to be mistaken about the date on which notice of Baldwin's bankruptcy was published in the *Bath Chronicle*, it is difficult to decide how much truth there is in this. A large number of building speculators did become bankrupt in 1793, not only in Bath but all over the country, and Baldwin's downfall should be seen in this wider economic context. On a personal level, his mounting difficulties over several years in all spheres of activity are evident from the records of the Bath Corporation and the Improvement Commissioners, and he had a history not merely of imprudence, but of deliberate dishonesty.

On 16 January 1794 Baldwin's estate was sold by order of his assignees.⁴⁷ On 17 February the assignees signed an agreement with the Corporation, appointing independent arbitrators to establish what Baldwin's debt to the Corporation was. The arbitrators were initially given six months to reach their conclusion, but this period was extended by a further six months on 11 August 1794 and 22 September 1795.⁴⁸ In fact, they made their award on 29 September 1795, when they concluded that Baldwin owed the Corporation £2,824-0-9 and ordered him to deliver the Corporation's books and papers to them.⁴⁹ The City cannot have received satisfaction, because nearly seven years later on 16 July 1802 the Council Minutes record:

The Corporation having petitioned the Court of Chancery to suspend the granting of Mr Baldwin's Certificate until they were able to prove their Debt under his Commission of Bankruptcy, it is resolved that the sd Thos Baldwin be at liberty to withdraw such petition provided the Assignees consent.

This they evidently did, as Baldwin was granted his Certificate on 26 August 1802.⁵⁰ This concluded what must have been for him nine difficult

and frustrating years, although he was more fortunate than many contemporary bankrupts who were never allowed a Certificate at all.⁵¹ The conclusion of his bankruptcy enabled him to re-launch his career. After his humiliation at the hands of John Palmer and the Improvement Commissioners, one of his greatest satisfactions during these years must have been his final victory in the struggle over the building of Union Street, but that is another story.

Notes

- 1 When he was buried at St Michael's, Bath, on 14 March 1820 his age was given in the register as 70.
- 2 On 1 September 1774 he witnessed the lessees' signatures on the leases for 18 and 19 Bennett Street: Bath Record Office, Deed Packets 2452 and 2453A.
- 3 *Bath Journal* 21 August 1775.
- 4 Walter Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bath*. 2nd ed. (Bath, 1980), pp. 11–13.
- 5 Bath Record Office, City General Committee Memorandum Book, 1774–79.
- 6 *Bath Chronicle* 16 November 1775.
- 7 I am indebted to Miss E.A. Holland for information on the Chapman family.
- 8 Bath Record Office, Bath Corporation Minute Books, 6 October 1777.
- 9 One is reproduced in Ison, op. cit., p. 40, the other in Mowbray A. Green, *The Eighteenth Century Architecture of Bath* (Bath, 1904), Plate CXXIII.
- 10 Jean Manco, 'The Cross Bath', *Bath History*, Vol. 2 (1988), pp. 68–74.
- 11 Somerset County Record Office, D/T/ba 24.
- 12 Bath Record Office, Baths and Pump Room Committee, 162.
- 13 Bath Record Office, Chamberlain's Vouchers.
- 14 Richard Warner, *The History of Bath* (Bath, 1801), p. 331.
- 15 Marta Inskip, 'Two Views of the King's Bath', *Bath History*, Vol. 3 (1990), p. 33.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Fig. 2.
- 17 Bath Record Office, Baths and Pump Room Committee, 5.
- 18 This plan is now lost.
- 19 Bath Record Office.
- 20 Bath Central Library, Bath Plans 20 and 22.
- 21 Bath Record Office.
- 22 Bath Record Office, Bryant Catalogue.
- 23 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (Harmondsworth, 1958), p. 126.
- 24 Warner, op. cit., p. 329.
- 25 See, for example, Daniel Brown's bills, Bath Record Office, Improvement Commissioners Box 1.
- 26 Ellen Wilson, 'A Shropshire Lady in Bath, 1794–1807', *Bath History*, Vol. 4 (1992), p. 96.
- 27 Bath Record Office, Improvement Commissioners Box 1.

- 28 Bath Record Office, Maps IA.
- 29 Although the elevation differs in detail from the drawing.
- 30 Bath Record Office, Improvement Commissioners Box 1.
- 31 Bath Central Library, Small Loose Print D3/5.
- 32 Bath Record Office, Bryant Catalogue.
- 33 Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases Archive, Committee Minute Book 1789–95, 1/11.
- 34 Although even then the issue was raised again at the Annual Meeting of the Hospital Governors in May: *ibid.*
- 35 Bath Record Office.
- 36 Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (London, 1978), pp. 682–3.
- 37 Bill for day work, Bath Record Office, Improvements Commissioners Box 1.
- 38 Bath Record Office, Improvement Commissioners Box 1.
- 39 Bath Record Office, Bath Corporation Minute Books.
- 40 Furman was a stationer of Inner Temple Lane; his catalogue, the 'Repertory of Corporation Leases', is still in daily use in Bath Record Office.
- 41 Public Record Office, C12/2427/15.
- 42 Bath Record Office, Corporation vs Thomas Baldwin, 6.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 44 Public Record Office, B4/23.
- 45 Julian Hoppit, *Risk and Failure in English Business 1700–1800* (Cambridge, 1987), Chapter 3.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 *Bath Chronicle* 2 January 1794.
- 48 Bath Record Office, Corporation vs Thomas Baldwin, 8 and 9; the period was presumably also extended early in 1795 although there is no record of this.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 50 Public Record Office, B6/11 f47.
- 51 Sheila Marriner, 'English Bankruptcy Records and Statistics before 1850', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, Vol. 33 (1980), p. 364.

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