

Thomas Ross



Thomas Ross. c. 1730-1745. Bathwick Mill and Walcot. Oil on canvas (91.5 cms x121.5 cms.).

This is an attractive, if somewhat romanticised, view of the weir and Bathwick Mill, that gives a rare indication of the scene as it was when William Pulteney and his friend Robert Adam fielded their proposals for a bridge.

Thomas Ross came to Bath from Suffolk where he had worked with Tillemans on over door and chimney piece pictures. He is also recorded as drawing the foregrounds of plants for Buck's views, of which the large view of Bath is well known locally. Otherwise he painted some rather indifferent portraits, and only half a dozen of his pictures have made it into major museums and galleries. This despite his being sufficiently fashionable in Bath for Ralph Allen to have a number of his works at Prior Park.

Today, the position of the lock gates and the island can still be seen although the weir has been much reconfigured. The mill was demolished as late as 1969, along with the Spring Gardens Cottages. The mill race is effectively preserved below the radial gate flood defence mechanism, behind the now brutalised island.

Bathwick Mill was a fulling mill. That is to say it processed the newly woven cloth by beating it with water driven wooden hammers, in a mixture of ingredients including fuller's earth, a very fine grained naturally occurring clay, which was sourced at Odd Down. This treatment degreased and felted the cloth. The drying cloth can be seen beyond the mill hanging on hooked frames called tenters. The beginnings of formal gardens are suggested to the right of the mill and would become the famed Spring Gardens pleasure grounds. Above the weir, can be seen the little ferry which ran from the bottom of Slippery Lane which partly survives to the left of Saville Row barbers shop close to Waitrose.