

THE CROSS BATH

Jean Manco

Introduction

The Cross Bath's brief moment on the national stage came three hundred years ago this year, when its all too effectual waters triggered the Glorious Revolution. At the time of these stirring events, it had already spent sixteen centuries as a magnet for aching bones and ailing flesh, but by the opening of the 18th century it was 'more Fam'd for Pleasure than Cures'. The frolics went on in a bath whose core was medieval and we wait until late in the century for that intriguing architectural conundrum, the Georgian building. The story of its Victorian gutting and conversion into a cheap swimming bath must sadden admirers of Bath's Georgian heritage, but as the 'Tuppenny Hot' the Cross Bath provided healthy recreation to those most in need of it. The fate of this elegant and complex little building is being decided as I write and I hope that, in the plans for its future, its past will not be altogether forgotten.

A Roman Shrine

The long history of the Cross Bath can be extended back, with the aid of archaeology, to the Roman period, when its hot bubbling spring was walled around to create an oval pool as large as the whole building now standing there, but centred rather more to the west. Deep under the present pool, two altar stones were found during 19th century clearings-out, one depicting scenes associated with Aesculapius, god of healing, and the other dedicated to the goddess Sulis Minerva, who was also credited

with healing powers. The Roman cup discovered with the former might perhaps be taken as a clue that this spring was used for medicinal drinking, with prayers and offerings to ensure the attention of these divine physicians to the sufferer. This can only be speculation, however, on the basis of such chance finds, and a far clearer picture could be expected to emerge from a systematic modern excavation.¹

The First Cross

It is tempting to imagine the re-dedication of such a sacred site in the Christian era, with the substitution of a cross for the offending altars and the continued use of the open healing spring, while all around the greater Roman buildings fell into ruin and despoliation. However, the evidence here is not merely slender, but totally non-existent. Continued resort to the hot springs is certainly suggested by the British and Saxon names for Bath – *Caer Badon*, *Hat Bathon* and *Akemanchester* – but we may never know exactly when the first cross was erected from which the Cross Bath took its name.

There has been some ingenious speculation that when the body of St Aldhelm was carried on its last journey from Doulling, where he died, to Malmesbury in 709, that Bath could have been one of the resting places marked by a cross along the route.² This, alas, remains entirely speculation. Such fragments of Saxon crosses as have been found within the walled city are of later date and there is nothing to link any them particularly with the Cross Bath.³

The Medieval Bath

Nor can we date with any precision the building of the medieval Cross Bath, first described by Leland about 1540:

There be 2. springes of whote water in the west south west part of the towne. Wherof the bigger is caullid the Crosse Bath, bycause it hath a cross erectid in the midle of it. This Bath is much frequentid of people deseasid with lepre,

pokkes, scabbes, and great aches, and is temperate and pleasant, having a 11. or 12. arches of stone in the sides for men to stonde under yn tyme of reyne.

Many be holp by this bathe from scabbes and aches.⁴

It seems a reasonable assumption that the King's Bath was part of the massive rebuilding programme begun by Bishop John de Villula in the late 11th century, when the whole south-east quarter of the city would appear to have been enfolded in a new abbey precinct. This presumably is the bath of which the Gesta Stephani, describing Bath in 1138, gives such a glowing account:

Through hidden pipes, springs supply waters, heated not by human skill or art, from deep in the bowels of the earth to a reservoir in the midst of arched chambers, splendidly arranged, providing in the centre of the town baths which are pleasantly warm, healthy and a pleasure to see . . . From all over England sick people come to wash away their infirmities in the healing waters, and the healthy to gaze at the remarkable bubbling up of the hot springs and to bathe in them.⁵

This description was almost certainly written by Robert of Lewis, Bishop of Bath and Wells,⁶ who brought to fruition the ambitious building plans of John de Villula. Perhaps, then, we see here a touch of pardonable pride, though unfortunately insufficient detail to be sure whether the Cross Bath was also in its medieval form by this date. However, the foundation of the adjacent St. John's Hospital in the later 12th century suggests a bath already usable or intended to be built in conjunction with the hospital, and the Cross Bath is certainly mentioned in medieval deeds of nearby properties from the late 13th century.⁷

From their building to the Dissolution, the baths of Bath were in the hands of the Church, which appears to have maintained them out of charity rather than the pursuit of profit.⁸ Had they been yielding an income, then no doubt eager hands would have reached out for them soon after 1539, when other ex-monastic properties found ready buyers. It was not until 1550, however, that the enterprising Humphrey Cotton saw the possibilities of exploiting the sick. As a doctor specialising in the use of the Bath waters, he could clearly profit in every way from a monopoly on

their source. By letters patent he became keeper of the baths for life, though the grant stipulated that one of the baths at least should be 'from tyme to tyme freely reservyd for the resorte of the pore.'⁹

This was scarcely likely to satisfy local feeling, and the grant to the Mayor and citizens two years later of all the property of the late Priory in the city for the maintenance of a grammar school and almshouses provided the opportunity to contest Cotton's claim to the baths. During the subsequent dispute, tempers became so frayed that Cotton was once actually thrown into a bath he was jealously guarding; but in 1555 he finally yielded to arbitration and was bought out. This brought the baths under city control, though legally as part of King Edward's charity until the charter of 1590 confirmed them as Corporation property.⁸

The Elizabethan Enlargement

The city fathers were content to keep the baths as they had always been until the last quarter of the century, when affluent England indulged in a flurry of building and standards of domestic privacy and comfort rose sharply. The baths changed with the times, but many of the specific changes followed closely the recommendations made in 1562 by the once Dean of Wells, Dr. William Turner, in his seminal work on the baths. Written with the express purpose of drawing the attention of the nation to the under-esteemed treasure of Britain's own hot springs, it contained a powerfully-worded plea for private patronage. Commenting acidly that there was money enough for cockfighting and other idle pleasures, he reproved 'I have not heard tell that anye riche man hath spente upon these noble bathes, beyng so profitable for the hole comon welth of Englande, one grote these twintye yeares.'¹⁰

This did not fail of its effect, though the generosity of benefactors has left historians with certain dating problems, since privately funded works bypassed the City Chamberlain's accounts and were not always recorded in those helpful memorial tablets which informed the bathers just precisely whom they had to thank for what and when. It seems tolerably clear, however, that improvements to the Cross Bath lagged behind those to the

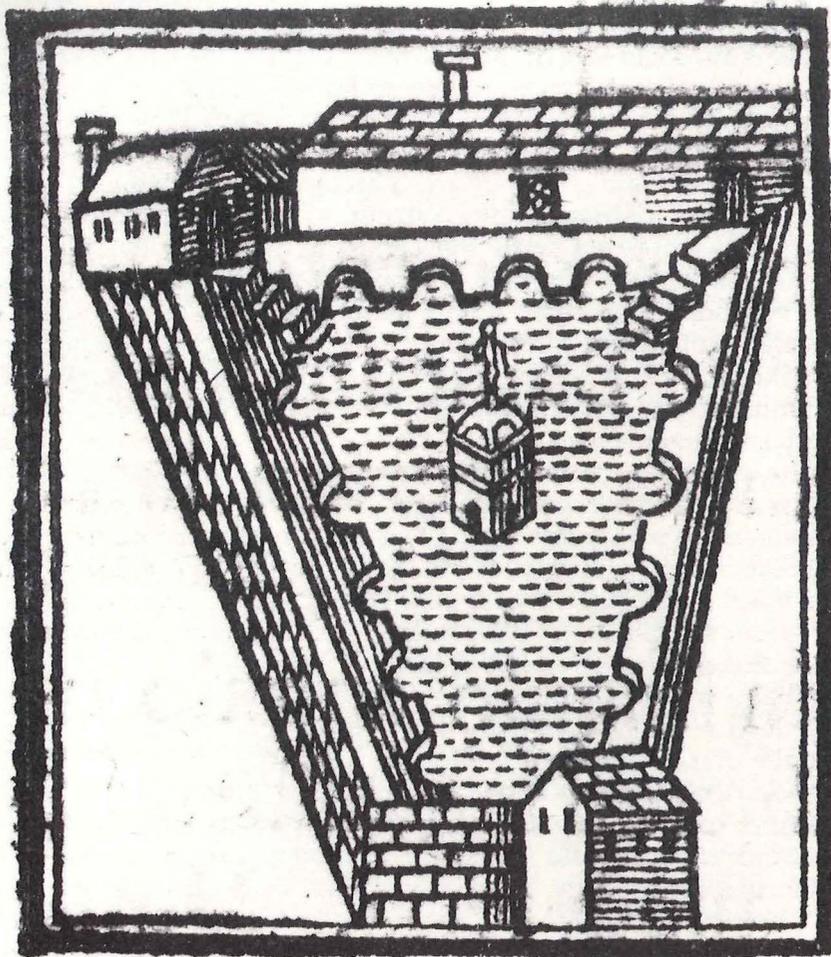
other two medieval baths, with the main rebuilding in 1593–4, almost twenty years after the construction of the Queen's Bath marked the beginning of this phase of change. The Chamberlain's accounts for these years record only the making of a porch, ironwork for the sluice and work on the walls,¹¹ but a clearer picture emerges if one compares plans and descriptions of the Elizabethan building with Leland's account of the medieval Bath.

The cross, perhaps falling victim to the Reformation, had already disappeared from the centre of the Bath by the time Camden described it in 1586, but he agreed with Leland in giving the number of the seats round the side as twelve,¹² whereas a detailed account of the 17th century Cross Bath gives the number as sixteen.¹³ This strongly suggests that the bath itself was enlarged in the 1590s, as well as being provided with various modern conveniences.

The most important of these from the sanitary standpoint was the provision of proper drainage – the sluice mentioned in the Chamberlain's accounts – which had been one of Turner's suggestions. He felt that it should be made possible to drain and clean out every bath at least once a day.

Turner's indictment of the state of the baths also contained the austere comments of a man of God on the habit of mixed bathing: men and women going in together 'lyke unreasonable beastes to the destruction of both body and soul of very manye.'¹⁰ He was not the first to show concern for the moral welfare of the bathers. Bishop Bekynton in 1449 had felt obliged to reprove the unseemly conduct of the citizens of Bath. When bathers male or female 'through modesty and shame try to cover their privy parts', the said citizens not only 'barbarously and shamelessly strip them . . . and reveal them to the gaze of the bystanders', but also exact a heavy fine.¹⁴ This practice may well have had its origin in a perfectly reasonable desire to limit the spread of the lice and other parasites that plagued medieval life, but one feels that Bishop Bekynton's response was understandable. He ordered that drawers for men and smocks for women should be obligatory in future.

Clearly the provision of the three covered, heated dressing rooms which can be seen to north and south of the bath in the delightful woodcut of 1634 must have made for a great improvement in both privacy and comfort. Although the Chamberlain's



1 The Cross Bath in 1634 from Thomas Johnson's *Thermae Bathonicae*.

accounts mention only the addition of a porch in 1593, a deed of 1637 (evidently repeating the description from an earlier one) refers to the north-west room as newly erected¹⁵ and it seems reasonable to assume that all three were added to the bath in the 1590s, when building work is known to have been going on.

Certainly there is no mention of them by Leland or Camden, but they can be seen in the first plan of the Cross Bath inset into Speed's map of Bath in 1610.

Medical Men

The bath itself remained open to the weather, a state of affairs deplored by many concerned commentators, starting with Turner. None were more concerned than the local doctors, whose custom drifted away in the autumn, to reappear only with the spring sun. The Cross Bath, however, being fed by the coolest of the three hot springs, had the advantage of being more tolerable in summer; and great play on this was made by Dr. Tobias Venner in his anxiety to extend the bathing season beyond the peak periods of May and September.¹⁶

The consistent advice of the local medical fraternity to consult a physician before taking the waters scarcely needs comment, but Dr. Venner goes further than most in portraying the dire results of neglecting this advice, or being so foolhardy as to consult one's own doctor instead of one of Bath's resident physicians. Such misguided persons

oftentimes never returne to their homes againe; or if they doe, it is most commonly with new diseases, and the old worse than ever they were.

He also issues a warning against importunate lodging keepers who extol the bath nearest to them above the rest, quite regardless of the patient's welfare.¹⁶

Since some physicians also kept lodgings particularly convenient for one of the baths, one suspects that they themselves, upon occasions, were not above the same practice. In a letter in 1604 to Robert Cecil, who was planning to visit Bath, Dr. Sherwood of Abbey House resorts to special pleading in favour of the adjacent King's Bath in August:

Neither is the water about that time of the year, in places especially farthest distant from the springs, hotter than the Cross Bath when it is most in use.¹⁷

In the jostle for custom, publicity was a powerful weapon, and in

the later 17th century the doctors Guidott¹⁸ and Peirce,¹⁹ unhampered by B.M.A. rules, produced rival lists of cures. The Cross Bath was credited with the relief of a fair number of patients, ranging from an unnamed London merchant to William, Viscount Stafford and covering a wide spectrum of disorders.

A cure recounted with particular glee by Dr. Peirce was that of Lady Dowager Brooke, whose trial of the Bath waters was opposed by her 'Eminent and Learned Physitians'. One even 'told her plainly it would kill her, and came to take a solemn leave of her, telling her ladyship that he should never see her more.' The unfortunate Dowager was suffering from lumbago and could neither stand upright nor extend herself straight on her bed. She bathed in the Cross Bath and sometimes drank the waters 'which in a few days time gave her Ease; in the first week she could stand upright in the Bath; and in a Months time could walk her Chamber; and was at length perfectly recover'd.'¹⁹

Baths Management

The city's chief publicists in the 17th century were its medical practitioners, but they were not the only ones to gain from the resultant influx of visitors. Already by 1634 the 'admired, unparalell'd . . . hot bathes' were attracting vistors from abroad,¹⁰ and they were described in 1662 as 'well known in all England and Europe over'.²¹ This popularity must have brought welcome employment, though it was not until the last quarter of the century that one astute observer commented that the people of Bath 'chiefly gett their Bread by their Water.'²²

Among the main beneficiaries were those who ran and staffed the baths themselves. From the early days of Corporation ownership, the management of the baths was delegated to a bath keeper, who paid a rental and took his profit in gratuities from the users of the baths. Under his supervision were lesser officials appointed by the City Council, but also reliant on the bathers for their income.⁸

That indefatigable traveller Celia Fiennes records:

There is a Serjeant belonging to the baths that all the bathing tyme walkes in galleryes and takes notice order is observed,

and punishes the rude, and most people of fashion sends to him when they begin to bathe, then he takes particular care of them and complements you every morning, which deserves its reward at the end of the Season. When you would walk about the bath I use to have a woman guide or two to lead me, for the water is so strong it will quickly tumble you down; and then you have 2 of the men guides goes at a distance about the bath to clear the way.²³

The bath guides also supplied bathing costumes and worked the pumps, for which there were fixed prices, but for the rest were dependant on the generosity of their charges, so, as John Wood points out, self-interest should have kept them civil.²⁴ Their behaviour, however, did not give invariable satisfaction: 'those clownish followers & ugly old Witches who never knew how to govern themselves, are yet guides to others.'²² In 1634 the widow Broade had to be dismissed 'because she miscarried herself through drinking and so caused the Maior to have several checks from the Lord Chiefe Justice.'²⁵

A more specialised attendant was the cloth layer, who assisted bathers in the slips, as the entrances to the bath were known, making sure that they had a dry cloth to step on as they came out of the water.²⁴ The income from this humble task was sufficient by 1693 for the Corporation to order the cloth layer at the Cross Bath to pay £5 out of her profits yearly.²⁵

Restoration Improvements

The disturbances of the Civil War wrought a brief hiatus in Bath's progress as a spa, but with the Restoration came a new kind of popularity, particularly benefiting the Cross Bath. Charles II brought with him from his exile in France a view of the spa as a place of relaxation for the fashionable world, as well as the resort of the sick, which the Merry Monarch was nothing loath to encourage in his new realm.²⁶ In 1663 Charles brought his infertile queen, Catherine of Braganza, to bathe in the waters of the Cross Bath. This did not produce the desired heir to the throne; but it did turn the eyes of the Court towards Bath, and the

then Mayor, Henry Chapman, was so delighted by this royal patronage that he had a plaque put up with the lines:

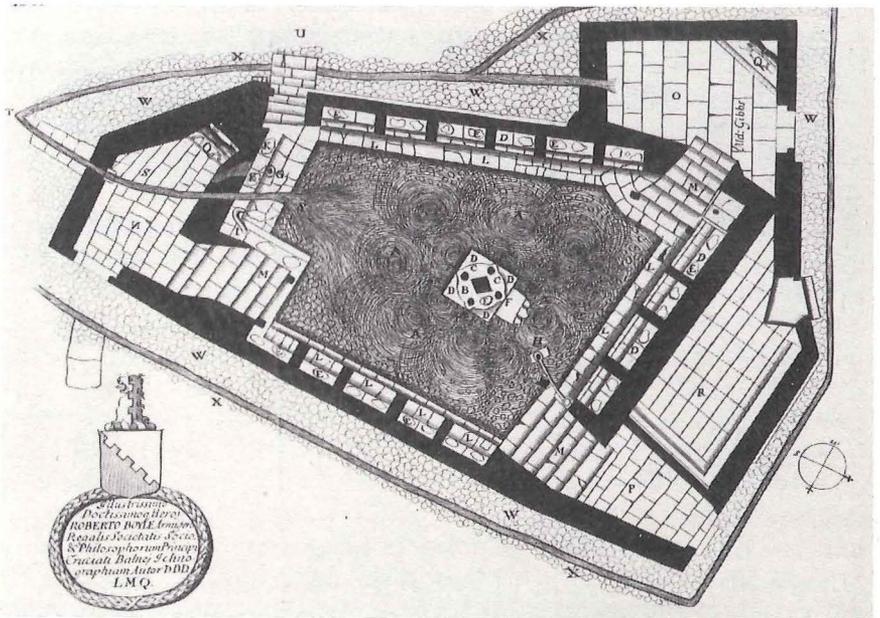
The name of Cross now lost it hath,
And shall be called Queen Katherines Bath.²²

This was wishful thinking and the tablet was removed 'upon the famous John Earl of Rochester's under writing the Mayor's Inscription with the Lines which made Mr Chapman the Chang'ling, and not the Bath.'²⁴

Queen Catherine's choice of the Cross Bath was probably dictated not by the season, since the royal visit was in September, but by the greater degree of privacy afforded by its high wall, which advantage would also recommend it to those fashionable persons anxious to follow her example. Pepys noted a few years later that this bath was almost monopolised by the gentry and it was soon known as the bathing place of pleasure.²²

The patronage of the wealthy brought tangible benefits. It had long been a custom for grateful patients of means to donate brass rings which could be fixed in the walls of the bath for the bather to cling to. The first of these, prettily patterned, was given to the Cross Bath in 1612 by Lydia White,¹⁸ daughter of William White, citizen and draper of London, as the inscription tells us. (This is now in the King's Bath.) Following the Restoration, rings were donated by, among others, both of Charles II's favourite mistresses, the Duchesses of Cleveland and Portsmouth.¹⁸

But there were far larger improvements on the way. The first cross of which we have any record was removed before 1586, as noted above, and was replaced by a smaller one with four seats below it²⁷ and a dome above, surmounted by a figure, which can be seen in the 1634 woodcut. This was probably built at the time of the Elizabethan alterations and its base survived until the late 17th century, to judge by the plan of the bath given by Guidott. However, the upper part with the figure, possibly that of a saint, was evidently lost at some time during the Civil War or Commonwealth periods and was replaced in 1665²⁸ by a column supporting a lion holding a small cross.¹³ Its sculptor, John Harvey, was rewarded with the freedom of the city.²⁵ Ten years later, a recoverer from palsy had a lead canopy added below the sculpture, to give more shelter from the weather to the seats where he used to sit, with the inscription:



3 A plan of the Cross Bath as it stood in 1687 from Thomas Guidott, *de Thermis Britannicis*.

- Key: A Springs filling the bath
 B Column supporting a lion holding a small cross
 C Seats between the columns of the cross
 D Seats on the outer part of the cross and in the arches
 E Movable stones on the seats, called cushions
 F Columns around the cross
 G Large pump donated by the Archbishop of York
 H Small pump for drinking water
 I Lead pipe from the Hot Bath to the Cross
 K Cushions on the stone steps
 L Stone pavement round the sides of the bottom
 M 3 lots of steps going down into the bath
 N South-east slip with chimney
 O North-east slip with chimney, near the lodging house of Alderman Walter Gibbs
 P North-west slip without chimney
 Q Faggots in the fireplace of the slips
 R The gallery erected by Lord Brooke
 S Lower conduit for emptying the bath
 T The outflow of the bath going towards the river
 U Outside steps going up to the musician's gallery
 W The street around the bath
 X Outside sewers

I, William Coo, of Grandford in the County of Northampton, Esquire, pay my vows to almighty God, in the 63rd year of my age, 1675.¹⁸

This cross, with its 'umbrella', was sketched by Thomas Dingley, although, as he helpfully notes, not in correct proportion.

In the previous year a covered gallery for spectators was built over the north side of the bath, the cost of which was born by Robert, Baron Brooke, son of the Dowager Lady Brooke whose cure so pleased Dr. Peirce. Lord Brooke suffered from diabetes, which he found most alleviated by drinking the waters of the Cross Bath.¹³ At that time, water for drinking had to be taken from the bath and, even with the more sanitary regime following Turner, doubts remained over its purity.²⁹ Then in 1673, the year of Lord Brooke's visit, the royal physician Sir Alexander Fraser devised a method of drawing up water fresh from the spring, which was soon adopted in all the baths.¹⁹ At the Cross Bath, a pump went into the bath itself. But far more convenient for those who did not wish to bathe as well was the pump supplied by Lord Brooke for his gallery: this was the Cross Bath's first pump room.

However, the bath for years had had another kind of pump, donated by the Archbishop of York around 1630. This was for the 'pumping' process, by which water was gushed over afflicted parts of the body, and which replaced the system of pouring it over in buckets-full.²⁹

At around the same time that Lord Brooke's gallery was being built, another went up over the south side of the bath, originally also for onlookers, who could exchange a word with their friends in the bath from a comfortably dry position.³⁰ But by 1687 it was being used by musicians to entertain the bathers,¹³ giving a decidedly sybaritic touch to the bath that by the turn of the century was 'more Fam'd for Pleasure than Cures.'³¹

The one thing still lacking for complete comfort was a roof, though experiments were clearly made with some form of wet weather covering at least twice during the 17th century. In 1621 Sir William Jordan, Dr. Jordan and others donated a covering to the Cross Bath which could be removed in a quarter of an hour.⁸ Then Gilmore's map of the city in 1692 shows what may be timber supports for an awning, since the Corporation purchased four

yards of canvas for the Cross Bath in 1701 (presumably for patching).²⁸

This, then, was the improved Cross Bath favoured again in 1687 with the royal presence; James II, anxious for a son, brought his second wife, Mary of Modena, on a lengthy visit. They arrived in mid-August and the Queen remained for the whole season, with the King in occasional attendance. Contemporary descriptions present a vivid picture of the whole procedure of bathing as the Queen must have experienced it.

Bathing

The early morning was the usual time chosen (Pepys rose at four in a vain attempt to be in and out before the crowd) and the bath was then drained down to its pebble bottom at ten or eleven a.m. to fill up again for any evening bathers. The process was repeated, if necessary, to give fresh water for the morning.²³

The manner of going in is for the gentlemen and ladies to dress themselves in their proper habits in their own apartments; the first in fine canvas waistcoats of a sandy colour, edged and trimmed with black ribbands . . . and tied down before with strings of the same colour, having on canvas drawers and slippers, and a lawn linen cap; the latter in canvas gowns and petticoats, with pieces of lead affixed at the bottom, to keep them down under the water.³²

The bathers were carried from their lodgings in a type of sedan chair, small and low with very short poles for manoeuvrability, covered inside and out in red baize, and delivered right into the slips. (Those staying in the lodging house immediately north of the Cross Bath enjoyed the privilege of the north-west slip to themselves, since it was privately rented with the house.)¹⁵ Going down the steps into the bath, the bather would be met by a guide³² and led in to sit on one of the stone seats, up to the neck in water. The more diminutive might need a stone 'cushion' to raise the seat. Hung above the arched seats were curtains, which could be brought down to the water to shelter the ladies' heads, says Celia Fiennes, though whether from rain, sun or masculine eyes, she does not specify.²³ It seems likely that these were the

curtains the Corporation had made in 1663, presumably for the visit of Catherine of Braganza.²⁸

The tricky business of coming out of the water with modesty intact is best described by Celia Fiennes:

When you go out of the bath you go within a doore that leads to steps which you ascend by degrees, that are in the water, then the doore is shut which shutts down into the water a good way, so that you are in a private place, where you still ascend severall more steps, and let your canvas drop of by degrees into the water, which your women guides takes off and the meanetyme your maides flings a garment of flannell made like a nightgown with great sleeves over your head, and the guides take the taile and so pulls it on you just as you rise the steps, and your other garment drops off.

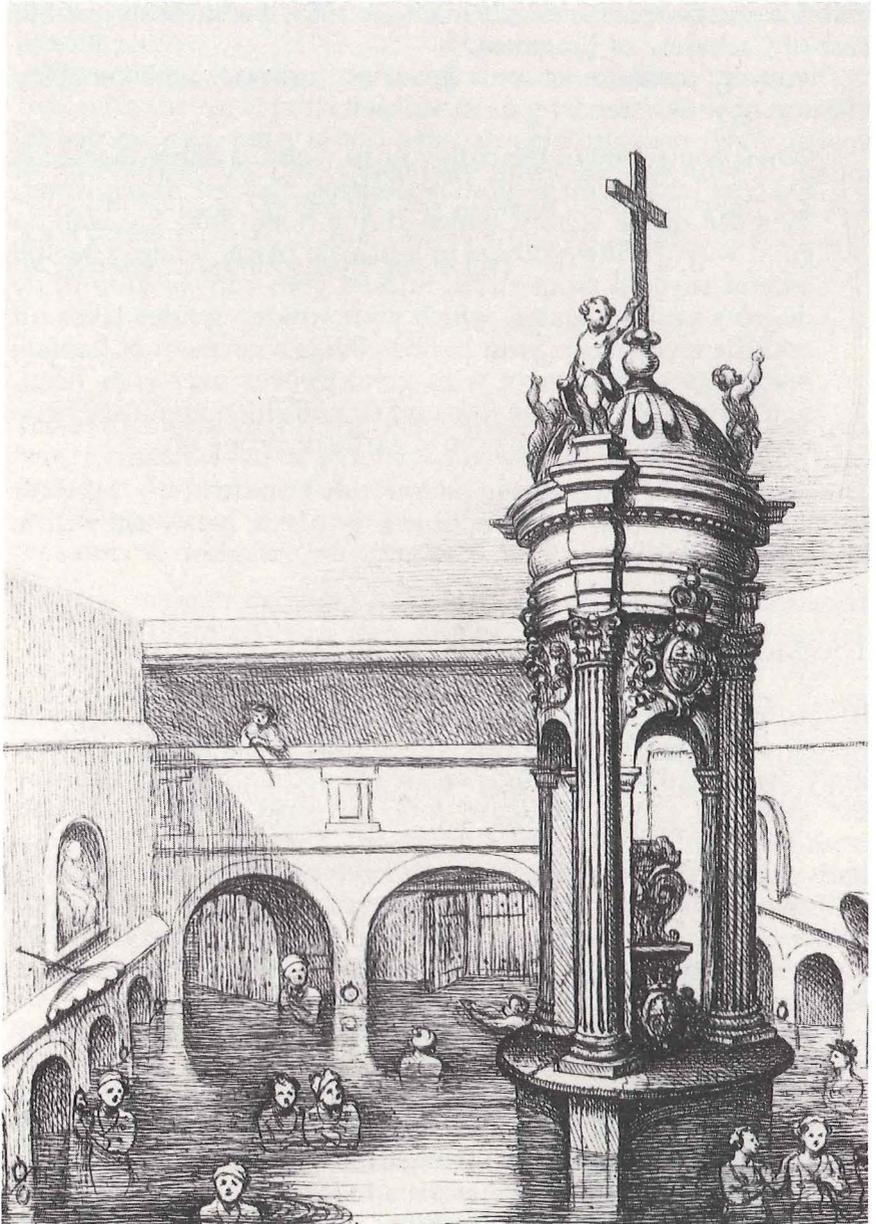
Thus swathed in flannel, the bather was bundled into the chair waiting in the slip and carried direct to his or her warm bed to sweat for a while.²³

The Melfort Cross

In fourteen years of married life, the devoutly Catholic Mary of Modena had produced no surviving child, so the nation, increasingly disquieted by the King's recklessly pro-Catholic and absolutist policies, could at least look forward with reasonable confidence to a Protestant succession. That is, until the Cross Bath worked its miracle and Mary conceived. The birth of a prince on June 10th 1688, next in line to the throne before the Protestant princesses, was a staggering blow and led before the end of the year to the repudiation of James II and the offer of the throne to William of Orange and Mary.

Those leading Catholics increasingly favoured by James naturally felt rather differently. Elated by the effects of the Bath waters, they confidently predicted a son, and a massive marble cross of intricate workmanship was commissioned for the Cross Bath, expense no object, quite probably well before the actual birth, since it was in position within three months afterwards.¹⁹

It was made for Secretary of State John, Earl of Melfort, by a London sculptor, Thomas Davis,²⁴ who later produced statues for



4 The Cross Bath in 1739, engraved by John Fayram. (Bath Reference Library.)

Chatsworth and work for Hampton Court,³³ and was admired in its day as elegant and ornamental.³² This ornate memorial to a lost cause had three columns springing from a pedestal and supporting a dome, surmounted by a cross with a crown of thorns. Around the dome were three cherubim holding aloft a crown, sceptre and orb. Between them were shields with inscriptions on them and below them, dedicating the cross to the Holy Trinity and the memory of Queen Mary, made fertile by the Spirit of the Lord illuminating the bath waters, thus making her the mother of the heir to three kingdoms.²⁴

The cross was a political embarrassment to the Corporation within months of its erection and they waited only until James had fled to the coast before ordering the removal of the crown of thorns, the inscriptions 'and all other superstitious things belonging thereunto.'²⁵ Exactly which other superstitious things went in 1688 and which were sacrificed to a further surge of anti-Jacobite feeling during the rising of 1715²⁴ is unclear; but in the 1739 Fayram print of the Cross Bath, the cherubim can be seen to have lost both their wings and royal regalia. The original design has a depiction of the Holy Ghost descending as a dove between the columns, which had also been tampered with, being regarded, says Wood, 'as the most flagrant Mark of Idolatry.'²⁴

Short of total demolition, nothing of course could be done about the structure itself, whose three-column design proclaimed the doctrine of the Trinity in marble, but so determined were the attacks upon it that in 1743 it was in danger of falling down. The Corporation had it rebuilt, though with a crown where the Holy Ghost had been, and in 1746 the cross on top was replaced by a stone vase.^{24 25}

When the Melfort Cross was finally dismantled in 1783, the more decorative portions of it were not thrown away. The cherubim eventually came into the possession of a perfumer of Old Bond Street,³⁴ and one still occupies a niche in the front of his house, now a jeweller's shop, facing Milsom Street. This has recently been restored to all its original charm. Various other carvings were stored away and forgotten until 1904, when the Baths Committee was reminded of their existence³⁵ and five years later found a use for the three taken from the heads of the arches. They were incorporated into the front of the counter then set up in the North Parade Gardens to dispense the Bath mineral water,

'their white marble contrasting agreeably with the red wilderness stone on which they are set.'³⁶ Still stored in the Roman Baths Museum are the Melfort arms and supporters, which can be seen between the bases of two columns on the Fayram print, and the Melfort motto 'Ab Uno Ad Omnes'.

The Bathing Place of Pleasure

The first half of the 18th century saw the Cross Bath, like the city, in its fashionable heyday, the resort of the Quality, bent on pleasure.

Here is perform'd all the Wanton Dalliances imaginable: Celebrated Beauties, Panting Breasts, and Curious Shapes almost expos'd to Publick View; Languishing Eyes, Darting Killing Glances, Tempting Amourous Postures, attended by soft Musick, enough to provoke a Vestal to Forbidden Pleasure . . . The vigorous Sparks, presenting them with several Antick Postures, as Sailing on their Backs, then Embracing the Elements, sink in a Rapture and by Accidental Design, thrust a stretch'd Arm . . .³¹

This last, of course, was just the sort of thing that the bath sergeants were meant to prevent, and they did their best. Segregation of the sexes was the rule. When Celia Fiennes visited, the gentlemen were confined to the cross in the centre and the ladies had the arches round the sides; but the Melfort Cross not having seats, the sexes subsequently were given one side of the bath and one slip each.³⁷ Gentlemen were banned from the ladies' territory and fined by the sergeants for any transgression, the presumption being that the ladies needed no such restraint.³² A certain amount of mingling went on, however, 'and the Place being but narrow, they converse freely, and talk, rally, make vows, and sometimes Love.'³⁸

The Corporation themselves took measures to preserve the decencies, in 1737 with a ruling on necessary clothing for bathers which echoes that of Bishop Bekynton almost three hundred years earlier, and in 1753 with an attempt to arrange separate days for male and female bathing in the Cross and Hot Baths.

This was abandoned within months, though it was replaced with a rule that no person was to swim while bathing!²⁵

An atmosphere of opulence prevailed at the Cross Bath. Its patrons sipped chocolate, the luxury hot drink of the period, and

The ladies bring with them japanned bowls . . . , tied to their arms with ribbands, which swim upon the surface of the water, and are to keep their handkerchiefs, nosegays, perfumes, and spirits, in case the exhaltations of the water should be too prevalent.³²

Twenty years after this account Defore noted that to this bowl of delights had been added a snuff box and patches, 'tho' the Bath occasioning a little Perspiration, the Patches do not stick so kindly as they should.³⁸

The company was beguiled by music from the gallery, which was often a tribute to some particular heart-stealer:

When Sylvia in her Bathing, her Charms does expose,
The pretty Banquet dancing under her Nose;
My heart is just ready to part from my Soul,
And leap from the Ga.'ry into the Bowl:
Each day I provide too,
A bribe for her Guide too,
And gave her a Crown,
To bring me the Water where she sat down;
Let crazy Physitians think Pumping a Cure,
That Virtue is doubtful, by Sylvia's is sure.

The Fiddlers I hire to play something Sublime,
And all the while throbbing my hearts beats the Time;
She enters, they Flourish, and cease when she goes,
That who it is address'd to, straight ev'ry one knows;
Wou'd I were a Vermin,
Call'd one of her Chairmen,
Or serv'd as a Guide
Tho' show'd as they do a damned tawny Hide,
Or else like a Pebble at bottom cou'd lye,
To Ogle her Beauties, how happy were I.³⁹

Little was done, however, to improve the bath during this period of gaiety. There were repairs and replacements and in 1754 a slip

was enlarged, to make more room for the sedan chairs.²⁵ This did not satisfy Dr. Sutherland, who felt that:

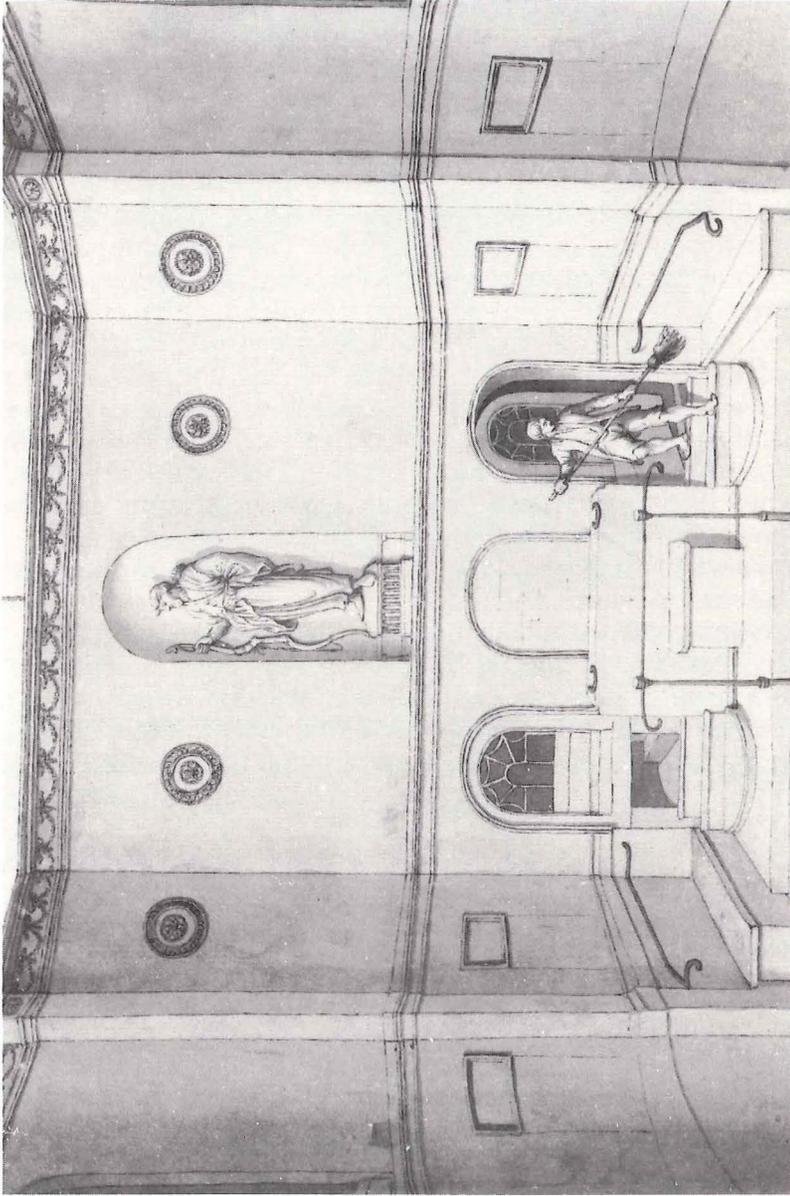
The slips resemble rather cells for the dead, than dressing rooms for the living. Their walls and floors are composed of the same materials, cold stone, eternally sweating with the steam of the bath, dark as dungeons, and, in their present condition, incapable of being warmed. From these dressing rooms we descend by narrow steps into open unseemly ponds.⁴⁰

Nor was he the only complainant. By the mid 18th century the baths were out of date, and Tobias Smollett accused the Corporation of complacency and wilful neglect. Bath's medical fraternity lobbied for improvements, and initially met with little response;⁴¹ but in 1776 the Corporation approved Wood's plans for a new Hot Bath and in June 1783 work began on the rebuilding of the Cross Bath.⁴²

The Georgian Bath

Here we enter a hitherto confusing phase of the Cross Bath's history, with two rebuildings following close upon each other, two architects and two unsigned, undated designs for architectural historians to juggle with. The solution to the mystery, which emerged from the research for this essay, was unexpected, but provides a stylish Georgian example of imaginative conservation.

The first rebuilding, completed early in 1784, was the work of the City Surveyor, Thomas Baldwin, who had already produced the new Guildhall and went on to design the Great Pump Room, as well as the development of Bathwick New Town, linked to the building of Pulteney Bridge. This latter was designed by Robert Adam, whose influence can be seen in the calm elegance of Baldwin's work. In the rebuilding of the Cross Bath, Baldwin was operating under certain constraints, since the bath was still hemmed in by the narrow lanes and tightly-packed frontages of the medieval period. The problem was such that, when a scaffold fell during the work, it went straight into a shop window.⁴² His plan therefore followed closely the almost triangular outline of the Elizabethan building, but imposing his own neo-classical



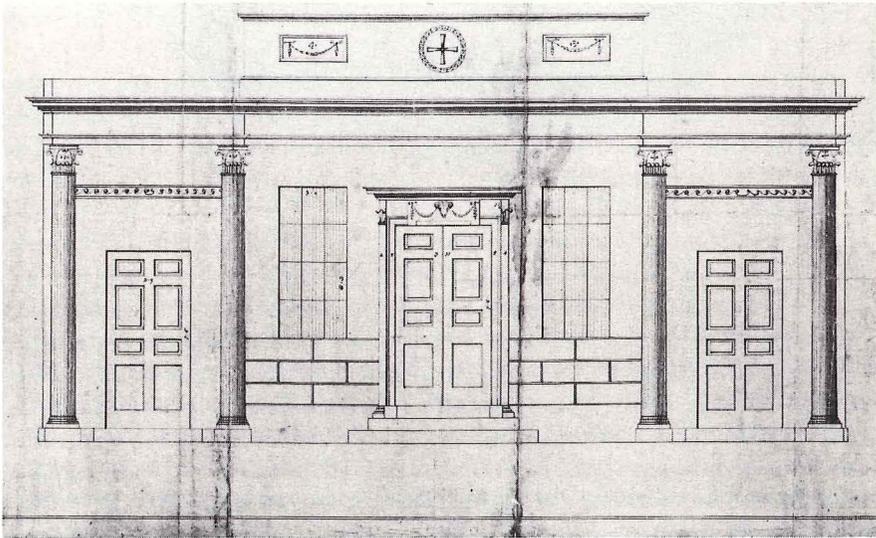
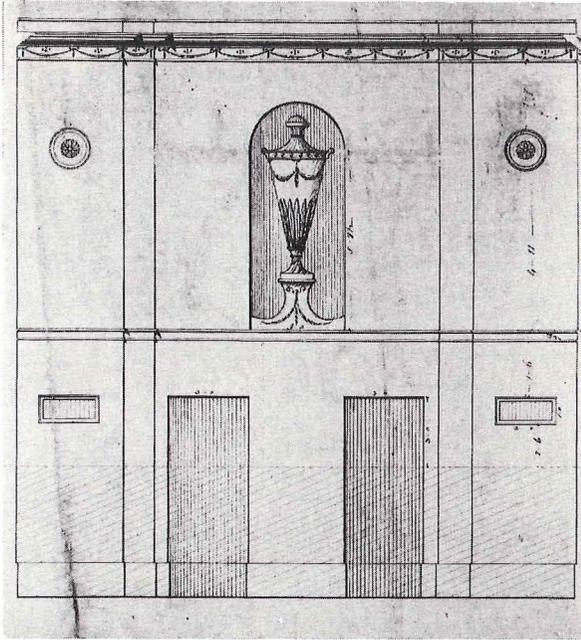
5 Drawing of the interior of Baldwin's bath in 1789 by S.H. Grimm. (British Library.)

regularity.⁴³ The façade of what the *New Bath Guide* called his small, neat pump room was serpentine and the bath itself an oblong bowed out east and west.⁴⁴ It was labour intensive work: putting in a new bath required twenty-eight men to pump day and night, seven days a week for two months.⁴² The harmony and balance of the result can be seen in Grimm's drawing of the empty bath being cleaned.

However, just a few years later Baldwin was involved in a scheme for city centre improvements which was to make his new Cross Bath a misfit. As early as 1735 John Wood had campaigned to have private property cleared back from the hot springs, which he feared were in danger of being diverted by the effects of building so close to them;²⁴ and, half a century later, others pressed the same case to greater effect.⁴⁵ The city leaders may also have been influenced by the comments of those visitors critical of the city centre's cramped streets of old houses, with their overhanging upper stories.⁴⁶ In 1788 they approved Baldwin's plans for clearing the area around the baths and the creation of five new streets, of which Bath Street was one.⁴⁷

This spacious, colonnaded new street cut a swathe through the huddled mass of shops and lodgings between Stall Street and the Cross Bath, creating the first distant view of the bath. Unfortunately, the chief façade of Baldwin's Cross Bath faced north, invisible from Stall Street, and all that was on display was a largely blank wall. It must have been Baldwin's intention to use the opportunity to enlarge the bath provided by opening up a semicircle around it and to create at the same time something worthy of this new vista.

At first all went well. The old buildings along the line of Bath Street were demolished and the new street started to rise. Then came the differences with the Council, largely financial, which led to Baldwin's dismissal in July 1792.²⁵ He was succeeded by John Palmer, the competent, if less inspired, architect responsible for Lansdown Crescent. In August 1797, the Improvement Commissioners noted that Baldwin, having provided a plan for improving the Cross Bath in 1789, had then failed to supply an elevation to accompany it. They therefore approved the ground plan and elevation signed by John Palmer and dated 22 July 1797.⁴⁸ This was the date they were passed by the Council²⁵ and work started immediately afterwards, so that Baldwin's pump room had



6 Designs by Thomas Baldwin for (above) the interior of the bath, (below) the pump room facade. (Bath Record Office.)

actually come down by the time the Improvement Commissioners gave their formal approval.⁴²

Palmer's building accounts mention a temporary porch, taken down towards the end of the work. This presumably gave access to Baldwin's bath, which was left untouched while rebuilding went on around it and could have been in almost continuous use. The only place that bathers could have been allowed in and out without affecting the building work was through that stretch of Baldwin's western external wall left standing and incorporated into the new enlarged Cross Bath. There, towards the southern end, can still be seen a blocked-in doorway. Palmer's building, completed in August of 1798 and surrounded by the railings supplied by George Stothert,⁴² is shown in the drawing by Shepherd.

Where then is the mystery? So far we have a bath indubitably designed by Thomas Baldwin and a building around it containing dressing rooms and a pump room equally certainly designed by John Palmer. The problem is that we also have two unsigned, undated designs, which have been carefully preserved together, drawn to the same scale and to all appearances from the same hand, one of which is clearly for the bath of 1784 and the other apparently, though there are significant differences, for the eastern façade of 1798.

A clue to the solution is provided by a Bath building token, one of a set issued mainly in 1797,⁴⁹ which depicts the Cross Bath pump room in a form much closer to the design than to the building as drawn by Shepherd. Most significant is the rustication of the lower part of the wall either side of the main entrance. If the token and the drawing show one and the same building, it is very difficult to see how the rustication could simply have vanished. The eastern wall had to be rebuilt in 1854, but this drawing, another by J.C. Buckler and a print by Storer all pre-date this rebuilding and none shows rustication. A second clue comes from comparing the only extant ground plan by Baldwin of his Cross Bath⁴³ with the outline of Palmer's, substantially the same as the present building. The northern façade of Baldwin's building fits exactly the serpentine central section of the eastern façade of the later Cross Bath.

The solution, then, is that the anonymous designs are Baldwin's in 1783 for his bath and northern façade; and, when the



7 Building token c. 1797 showing the Cross Bath Pump Room. (Roman Baths Museum.)

latter was taken down in 1797, it was not simply carted away to some municipal rubbish dump, but carefully set aside and re-used, though without rustication, as the Cross Bath's main display towards Stall Street. The best evidence of this comes from bills for ornamental stonework presented to the Corporation (Appendix 2). One from Thomas Parsons in August 1783 and signed as examined by Thomas Baldwin nowhere mentions the Cross Bath by name, but matches the decorative work of

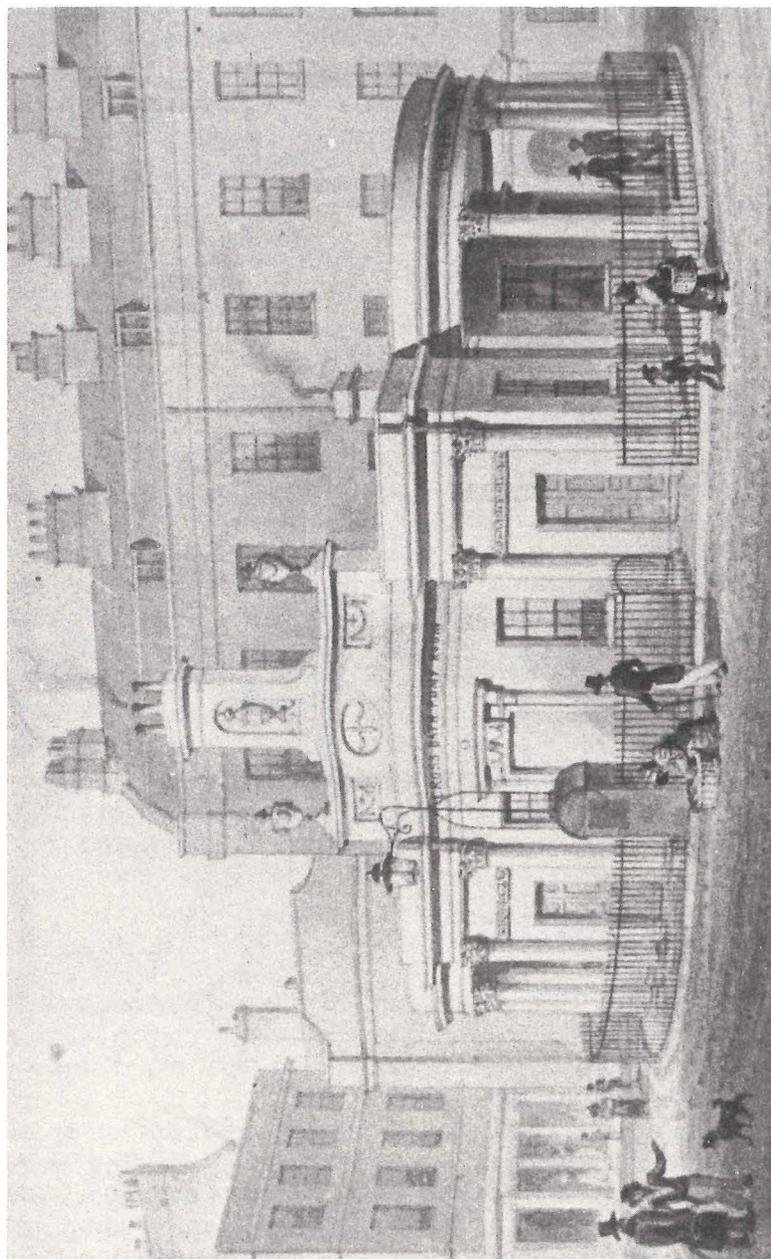
Baldwin's building, as it can be reconstructed from the two designs, the Grimm drawing and his plan. The other is from William Biggs in August 1797, signed by John Palmer, and would exactly meet his requirements if he re-used Baldwin's northern front and southern doorway.

Biggs freshened up some of the fourteen-year-old external stonework taken from Baldwin's building and supplied matching Corinthian capitals and other decorative details for the northern portico. This of course was Palmer's replacement for the switched façade, so that the bath presents an attractive face to each of the three approaches to it. His Head of Apollo, possibly inspired by the discovery a few years earlier of the Gorgon's Head from the Temple of Sulis Minerva, can still be seen over the entrance, although, of the panels either side, only the western one is original. We do not know how Baldwin's pump room was heated, but Palmer's design clearly required the necessary evil of a chimney, which he made a rather awkward attempt to turn into an ornamental feature with the vase in relief, balanced by rams' head vases on either side. This over-heavy decoration, combined with the railings, cluttered the graceful lines of Baldwin's façade. The overall design, though, with its pleasing curves and colonnade echoing Baldwin's sinuous façade and the half-moon end of Bath Street, could scarcely be faulted. To Palmer must go the credit for the ingenious creation of a coherent whole, using parts of a quite differently shaped building. The Georgian Cross Bath surely ranks as a notable piece of architectural recycling.

Gradually the process of blocking doors and windows has created that shuttered look so familiar to the citizens of Bath that I suppose few passers-by pause to imagine the Cross Bath as it was in the late Georgian period. All of its five doors were in use then and windows were needed to light the covered area around the open bath, containing three dressing rooms, two recesses and a pump.⁵⁰

Social Decline

In the first half of the 19th century, the Cross Bath took a dramatic dive down the social scale. In 1813 it was being patronised by Lady Bridges, one of Jane Austen's circle,⁵¹ but in 1841 it was



8 The Cross bath in 1829, drawn by Thomas H. Shepherd. (Victoria Art Gallery.)

relegated to the status of a second class plunge bath.⁵² There seemed little else to do with it. The then lessees of the baths, Messrs. Simms and Green, found it scarcely ever used when they took it over in 1840 and failed to make it pay as a ladies tepid bath.⁵³ Clearly it could not compete then with the facilities offered by the greatly enlarged Hot Bath and later it lacked the space to accommodate the increasingly complex spa treatments of the machine age.

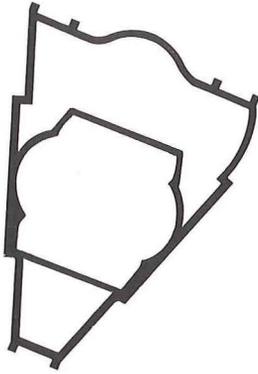
In a stage by stage process, complete in 1829, the economics of the baths' management evolved from attendants supporting themselves on variable tips from the patrons to the modern system of standard charges and salaried employees. In 1836 the charge for bathing in the Cross bath was reduced to 1s, the same amount that Pepys had given to his cloth layer in 1668. It came down again under Messrs. Simms and Green, and after the first Victorian rebuilding in 1855 the charge settled for thirty years at 2d (if you supplied your own towel), otherwise 3d.²⁵

'The Tuppenny Hot' was for males only and very popular with boys, including those from the nearby ragged school, whose high spirits sometimes got out of hand. Missiles would be lobbed over the wall from outside to fall into the bath: stones, refuse and on one dreadful occasion, a bottle. A sixteen-year-old, diving straight onto the jagged edge, had his abdomen sliced open and was considered lucky to survive. After this the bath was netted over.⁵⁴ Time in the bath was restricted, but one new attendant 'had all the difficulty in the world in getting the boys out of the water.' A councillor waggishly suggested a 25ft fishing rod.⁵⁵

The Victorian Alterations

By this time, the late 19th century, the bath was a Georgian shell around Victoriana at its most utilitarian, though even the exterior went through a lengthy phase of looking less like Palmer's original building than it does today.

Declining returns from the Cross Bath Pump Room led to its closure in December 1829,²⁵ to be replaced by two reclining baths (very much like the average domestic bath) with their own dressing rooms.⁵⁶ Curiously, the Shepherd drawing, although dated earlier, shows the pump room door already blocked.



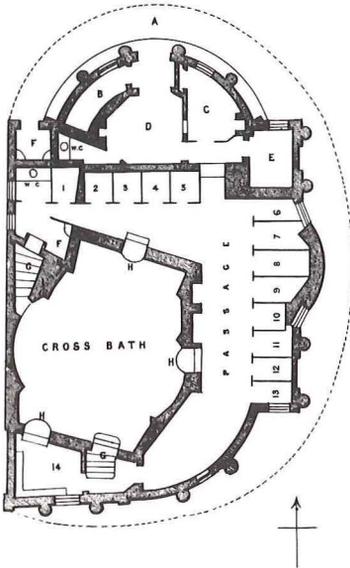
9 The development of the present building:

(Left) The first Georgian Cross Bath, completed by Baldwin in 1784.

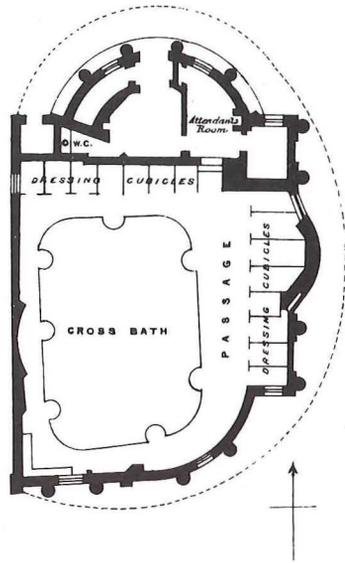
(Left below) After enlargement by Palmer in 1798 and alterations by Manners in 1855.

(Right below) After alterations by Davis in 1886.

THE CROSS BATH.



THE CROSS BATH.



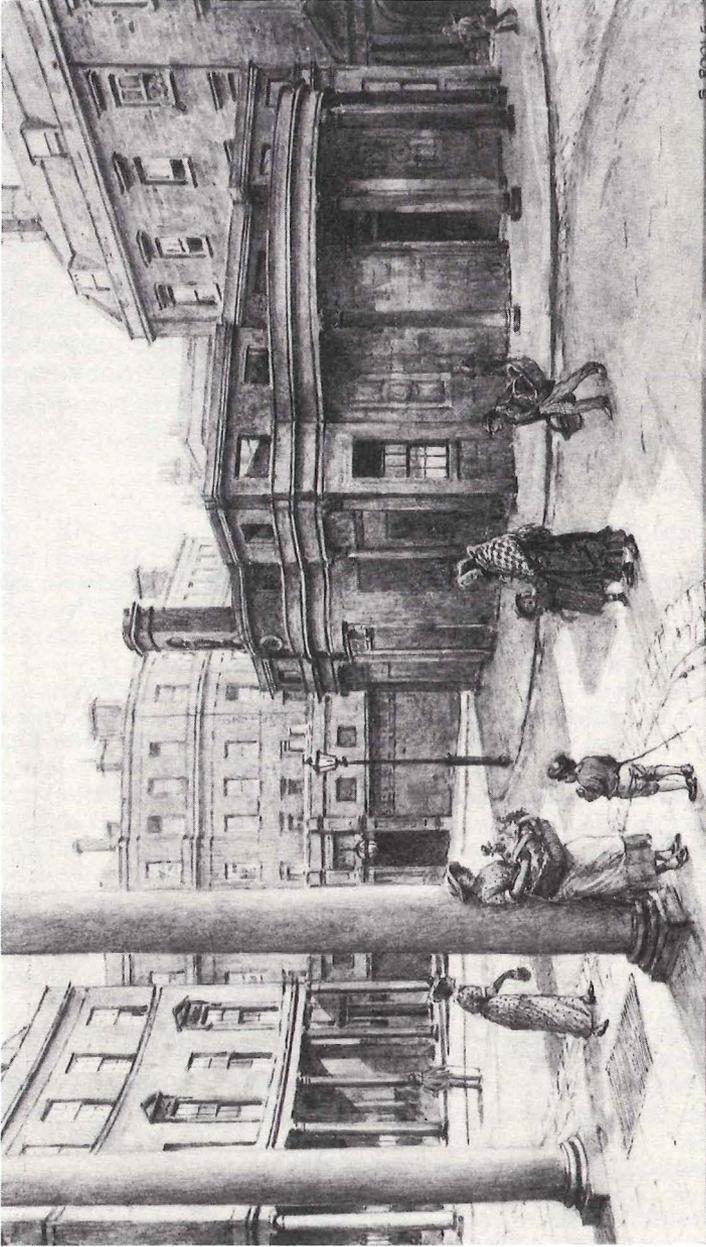
Perhaps five doors had been felt to be a shade excessive. However, it was not until the management of the baths had been taken into the hands of the Corporation in 1854 that the first major reconstruction was carried out under the City Surveyor, George Manners, whose plan shows the ruthless treatment of the portico. This was blocked in to create space for a coal cellar and an attendant's room, which also meant the removal of part of Palmer's external wall. The bath itself was lengthened by two feet and the reclining baths and public dressing rooms replaced by mainly private dressing rooms. All this involved the blocking of further doors and windows.⁵⁷

Next came the attack on Baldwin's bath which has earned the next City Surveyor, Charles E. Davis, some harsh words in this century. Contemporaries felt differently; his plans for the Cross Bath in 1885 were seen as a distinct improvement:

At present there is a great deal of space wasted for no other purpose apparently than to make the bath gloomy and inconvenient.⁵⁸

The bath was considerably enlarged by Major Davis and the only remnants of Baldwin's bath now in situ are the sections of it attached to the western wall, holding a relief carving of a vase and the one remaining patera. The figure of Bladud after a drawing by Hoare, which appears in Grimm's view of the bath, seems to have led a wandering life. After its removal by Major Davis, it spent some years lying around in the corridor of the now Beau Street Baths and then seems to have moved to the Kingston Baths until their demolition.⁵⁹ It finally returned home and is now decorating the east wall of the bath.

Naturally, since the wall of the bath had been supporting it, the roof of the dressing room area had to come down as well. Davis re-modelled the changing cubicles and constructed his own roof over them, which projected out over the area between them and the bath. This was evidently not felt to be entirely satisfactory, for in 1888 it was agreed for the first time to put a roof over the whole bath,²⁵ something for which medical opinion had been clamouring for over three centuries. Some method of allowing steam to escape was needed and Davis's solution was an open screen over the parapet, matched to Baldwin's upper frieze. Presumably the festooned panels were removed from the upper frieze at this time



10 The Cross Bath in the first half of the twentieth century. Watercolour by Samuel Poole. (Victoria Art Gallery.)

and the rams' head vases taken down. The watercolour by Samuel Poole shows the Cross Bath as it appeared during the first half of the 20th century, with Davis's roof and screen and the portico reopened.

The Cross Bath Today

This century has seen a three-stage restoration process, with the exterior restored in 1903,⁶⁰ the roof removed in 1952,⁶¹ and the current renovation. With its stonework newly cleaned, the architectural details of the Cross Bath can now be better appreciated than for many years past. Restoration, however, cannot be an end in itself and surely the challenge of the 20th century is to produce a scheme of imaginative re-use to match that of the 18th.

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Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: Chronology of Building

11th/12th C.	Medieval bath constructed
1593-4	Enlargement and drainage of bath; new cross
1613	Rings inserted in wall of bath
1621	Wet-weather covering donated
c. 1630	Pump donated for hydro-massage
1665	New cross carved by John Harvey
1674	Galleries erected, one with drinking water pump
1675	Umbrella under cross erected and leaded
1688	Melfort Cross carved by Thomas Davis
1748	New pump put in east end of north gallery
1754	Slip enlarged for sedan chairs
1783-4	Melfort Cross removed; complete re-building by Baldwin
1797-8	Enlargement by Palmer
1809	Attempts to stop loss of water; Roman altar discovered
1829-30	Pump room closed, replaced by reclining baths
1854-5	Alterations by Manners: portico walled in, doors and windows blocked, east wall re-built, bath enlarged, reclining baths and public dressing rooms replaced by private dressing rooms
1881-2	Railings round building removed; stonework restored
1885-6	Alterations by Davis: roof and internal wall removed, bath considerably enlarged, dressing rooms remodeled; reservoir cleaned out, discovery of Roman altar and pool
1888	Building roofed over, open screen added to roof line
1903	Exterior restored
1952	Roof and open screen removed
1954	Building renovated
1955	Viewing grille inserted
1987	Restoration of stonework

Appendix 2: Stonemasons' Accounts

1. Augt. 13 1783	The Chamber of the City of Bath to Thomas Parsons 1 Door-head including Architrave freeze Tablet & Pilaster Caps, Stone masonry & Carving 12½ feet Vitruvian Scroll D(itto) @ 2/3 8 Pateras, Stone masonry &c @ 12/ 6 Corinthian Capitals @ 1.11.6 Carving Bladud & Vases in Relievo Stone for the three Niches 1 large Stone with 3 Pannels 72 feet of Festoon Freeze @ 4/ 2 pannels, festoons & flowers 1 Central Oval Pannel & Cross	2.13 1. 8. 1½ 4.16 9. 9 10.10 2. 5 2.12 14. 8 2.10 1.15
Exd. Ths Baldwin		<hr/> £52. 6. 1½
1. Augt. 1797	The Commissioners of the Bath City Improvements Act by the Order of Mr Palmer to William Biggs To 4 Corinthian Capitals to Match those at the Cross Bath whole ones @ 2.12.6 To 2¾ ones @ 1.16.6 To New working of the old Corin. Capitals To D(itto) Tablet and Water Leaves To Apollos Head To A Large Vase in Basorelivo To 1 Pair of Rams Head Vases To Waterleaves at the Door To 2 Large Patras with Husks &c	10.10. 0 3.13. 0 1.15. 0 0. 5. 3 1. 5. 0 1. 1. 0 4. 4. 0 0. 4. 6 1. 2. 0
Examd. Jn Palmer		<hr/> £23.19. 9

Source: Bath Record Office