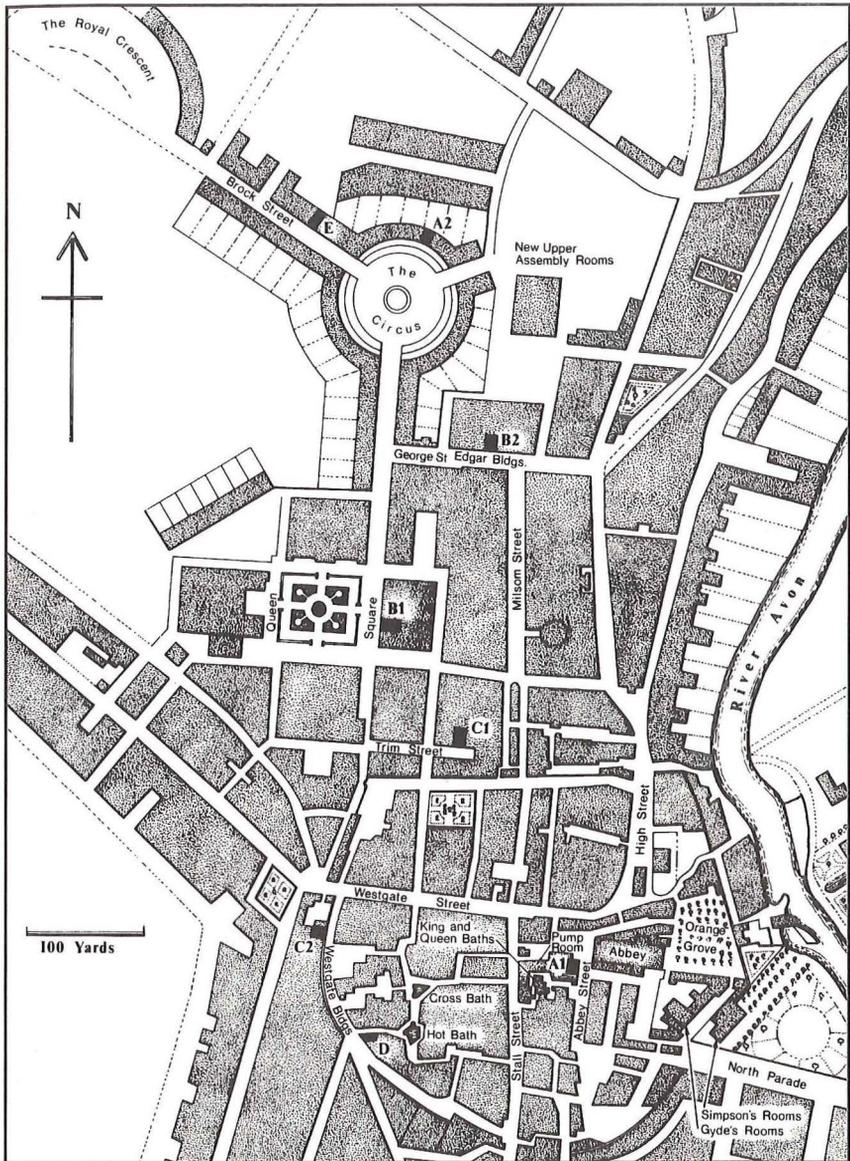


## ARTISTS' PICTURE ROOMS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BATH

Susan Legoux Sloman

In May 1775 David Garrick described to Hannah More the sense of well-being he experienced in Bath: 'I do this, & do that, & do Nothing, & I go here and go there and go nowhere – Such is ye life of Bath & such the Effects of this place upon me – I forget my Cares, & my large family in London, & Every thing ...'<sup>1</sup> The visitor to Bath in the second half of the eighteenth century had very few decisions to make once he was safely installed in his lodgings. A well-established pattern of bathing, drinking spa water, worship, concert and theatre-going and balls meant that in the early and later parts of each day he was likely to be fully occupied. However he was free to decide how to spend the daylight hours between around 10am when the company generally left the Pump Room and 3pm when most people retired to their lodgings to dine. Contemporary diaries and journals suggest that favourite daytime pursuits included walking on the parades, carriage excursions, visiting libraries (which were usually also bookshops), milliners, toy shops, jewellers and artists' showrooms and of course, sitting for a portrait.

At least 160 artists spent some time working in Bath in the eighteenth century,<sup>2</sup> a statistic which indicates that sitting for a portrait was indeed one of the most popular activities. Although he did not specifically have Bath in mind, Thomas Bardwell noted in 1756, 'It is well known, that no Nation in the World delights so much in Face-painting, or gives so generous Encouragement to it as our own'.<sup>3</sup> In 1760 the Bath writer Daniel Webb noted 'the extraordinary passion which the English have for portraits'.<sup>4</sup> André Rouquet in his survey of *The Present State of the Arts in England* of 1755 described how 'Every portrait painter in England has a room to shew his pictures, separate from that in which he works. People who have nothing to do, make it one of their morning amusements to go and see these collections'.<sup>5</sup> Since there were by the mid eighteenth century plenty of visitors in Bath with 'nothing to do', it follows that artists would have done their best to attract people to their rooms and hoped to win new patrons from among the idle viewers. In fact in Bath the display of an artist's work was probably his most important form of advertising. Not every painter could afford the luxury of a room permanently set aside for exhibition as well as a room in which to paint, although the most eminent artists such as William Hoare (1707-92), Thomas Gainsborough (1727-88), Robert Edge Pine (c.1730-88), Thomas Beach (1738-1806) and Joseph Wright (1734-97) certainly did<sup>6</sup> (fig. 1).



1. Artists' picture rooms in Bath:

A1, A2 – Thomas Gainsborough; B1, B2 – William Hoare; C1, C2 – Thomas Beach;  
 D – Robert Edge Pine; E – Joseph Wright.

Hoare was in Bath from 1738 until his death, with only a few periods of absence; Gainsborough from October 1758 until spring 1759 and then from late autumn 1759 until autumn 1774; Pine from 1772-79; Beach on and off from 1772-1803; and Wright of Derby from November 1775 until June 1777.

Of the 160 or so recorded painters, at least half were miniaturists, who seem to have rented or begged display space in a variety of commercial premises in the town. Andrew Rymdyk (1753/4-86), for example, advised prospective customers at the beginning of the autumn 1786 season that specimens of his work could be seen 'Every day at Mr Meyler's Circulating Library in the Grove, where Ladies and Gentlemen will please to leave their address'. He described his work as 'Portraits drawn in small ... and put into the most fashionable frame that ever was invented'.<sup>7</sup> Peter Ogier (fl.1793-1800), miniaturist, showed his work at Lintern's Music Shop in Abbey Churchyard, while Francis Laine (1721-1810), another miniaturist, showed at the shop belonging to Mr Butt, peruke-maker in Orange Grove.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Worlidge (1700-66) sold his portraits and prints through Mrs Wicksteed's well-known toy shop in Orange Grove, and successfully combined business and family life by making the Wicksteeds' daughter his third wife when he was sixty-three years old.<sup>9</sup>

Miniatures which needed almost no drying time and could easily be fitted into ready-made frames were particularly suited to the transitory Bath clientele, but at the same time a healthy demand existed for oil portraits, reaching a peak between 1760 and 1780. The most successful painters of oil portraits probably all had separate picture display rooms and painting rooms as described by Rouquet, and some had more than one display room. One of the reasons that separate exhibition rooms were so essential was that painting time and viewing hours coincided, both taking advantage of the brightest daylight of the Bath winter season. While visitors were occasionally admitted to watch artists at work, most painters probably preferred to work undisturbed and to rely on a footman or assistant to welcome visitors and deal with enquiries. Only the young Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), who was promoted by his father as a child prodigy, seems to have willingly worked in front of an audience. (One Bath visitor who watched Lawrence at work was as captivated by the beauty of his luxuriant, wavy hair as by his artistic ability.<sup>10</sup>) In contemporary records, viewing rooms are called picture rooms or show rooms, often spelt 'shew' rooms. In 1763 Gainsborough described his as his 'best parlour to show Pictures in'.<sup>11</sup> The room in which the artist worked was invariably referred to as the 'painting room', the Italian word *studio* not coming into general usage in England until the nineteenth century.

Diarists and letter writers John Baker, Mary Delany, Mary Hamilton, Samuel Ireland, Elizabeth Noel, Eliza Orlebar, John Penrose and Dorothy Richardson all record visiting Gainsborough's Bath picture rooms (see Appendix below), but their accounts are all disappointingly bland. Much more evocative is a letter written by Horace Walpole on 9 June 1781 in which he described in some detail an enjoyable morning spent at Thomas Beach's house at 2 Westgate Buildings, Bath. Beach had been a pupil of Reynolds in London and though hardly an exciting or innovative artist, had an acknowledged gift for capturing a likeness (fig. 2). Walpole attended

a little private concert, in the picture rooms of Mr Beach of Bath. Amongst the performers were the celebrated Mr Salomon, Sig. Tenducci, and Miss Guest ... A fine light and shade being thrown upon the paintings, every one found himself surrounded, as if by magic, by a number of his acquaintances, breathing in canvass ... About fifty ladies and gentlemen formed the audience; and, in such natural shapes did the pictures look upon, and seem to listen to us, that it was difficult to persuade ourselves they were not auditors also.<sup>12</sup>

It is little wonder Walpole was impressed by this entertainment. The German violinist, Johann Peter Salomon, had made his first British appearance at Covent Garden only three months before and was in Bath to lead a concert for the benefit of the Pauper Charity on 31 May 1781.<sup>13</sup> Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci, the Italian castrato, was a colourful character who had long been popular in Bath. Miss Mary Jane Guest was the most talented keyboard performer in Bath, at this time at the threshold of a successful career as a performer and teacher. This high-quality musical gathering must have been a powerful bait to attract visitors to Beach's rooms. From Walpole's description it seems the portraits were carefully lit, perhaps artificially, even though the concert was in the morning.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately this appears to be the only account of a concert in a picture room in Bath: one can only speculate as to whether this was a unique occasion or whether it followed precedents staged by Gainsborough or Hoare, both of whom were keenly musical.

A year after the Beach concert, in November 1782, a Mr Bateman presented Philippe De Louthembourg's *Eidophusikon* in rooms on the opposite side of Westgate Buildings which had formerly been Robert Edge Pine's picture rooms. The *Eidophusikon* was a display of panoramic pictures animated by moving lights in order to suggest effects of weather, fire, the sun and moon and other natural phenomena. Visitors to this



2. Miss Julia Keasberry by Thomas Beach (1738-1806), 1782. Oil on canvas, 158.0 x 140.0cm. (Photograph by courtesy of Sotheby's, London)

exhibition could also enjoy further transparent paintings by De Loutherbouurg, stained glass by Thomas Jervais, and copies by John Powell of Sir Joshua Reynolds' *Nativity* and *Marlborough Family*.<sup>15</sup> Whereas at the London performances of the *Eidophusikon* Michael Arne had played on the harpsichord, in Bath Joseph Wilkins played Handel 'and other distinguished masters' on the organ.<sup>16</sup> De Loutherbouurg was also a designer for the stage and the *Eidophusikon* was in itself a piece of theatre without actors.

Thomas Beach's attempt to add sound and drama to the portrait painter's picture display room is just one instance of the way in which the arts of painting, music and theatre interrelated and nurtured one another at this period. A sale of Thomas Beach's studio effects in Bath in 1803 included portraits of Tenducci and actors John Henderson and Mrs Siddons,<sup>17</sup> and it does appear that artists deliberately retained portraits of performers and other well-known characters as show-piece works to hang in their picture rooms, and painted versions of commissioned portraits expressly for this purpose. The intention was clearly to present to the picture room visitors the faces of individuals they had recently seen at the theatre or assembly rooms, so that they could judge for themselves how good a likeness the artist achieved. Portraits of David Garrick proliferated at this time and many were probably used for this purpose. A portrait of Garrick hung in Robert Edge Pine's picture room in Bath<sup>18</sup> and a Mrs Collins, profile and miniature painter, advertised a portrait of Garrick at her premises at 6 Bond Street, Bath in the *Bath Chronicle* of 11 February 1779.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to David Garrick written from Bath, Gainsborough explained that one reason for the delay in delivering his portrait was that he wanted to make a copy of it to hang in his own parlour, 'not as a show Picture, but for my own enjoyment'.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Gainsborough stated that this copy was *not* a 'show Picture' suggests that it was normal practice to paint show pictures.

A documented show picture which relates specifically to Bath is a double portrait by Joseph Wright of Derby (fig. 3). Wright settled in Bath in November 1775, possibly on the recommendation of the former Bath resident artist Ozias Humphry whose company he had enjoyed in Italy in June and July of the same year.<sup>21</sup> Wright occupied a house on the north side of Brock Street, just off the Circus, probably the one now numbered 29.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Gainsborough in the late 1750s, Wright was not overwhelmed with commissions on his arrival and in April 1776 he confided to his brother, 'I am now painting a half-length of Dr. Wilson and his adopted daughter Miss Macauley (*sic*); this is for reputation only, but you must not say so'.<sup>23</sup>



3. *The Rev Thomas Wilson D.D. with his adopted daughter Miss Macaulay* by Joseph Wright (1734-97), 1776. Oil on canvas, 101.5 x 127.0cm. (Photograph by courtesy of Sotheby's, London)

Dr Thomas Wilson, son of the Bishop of Sodor and Man, was Rector of St Stephen's, Walbrook in London, but kept a Bath residence, Alfred House in Alfred Street and was a familiar figure in Bath society with a face that

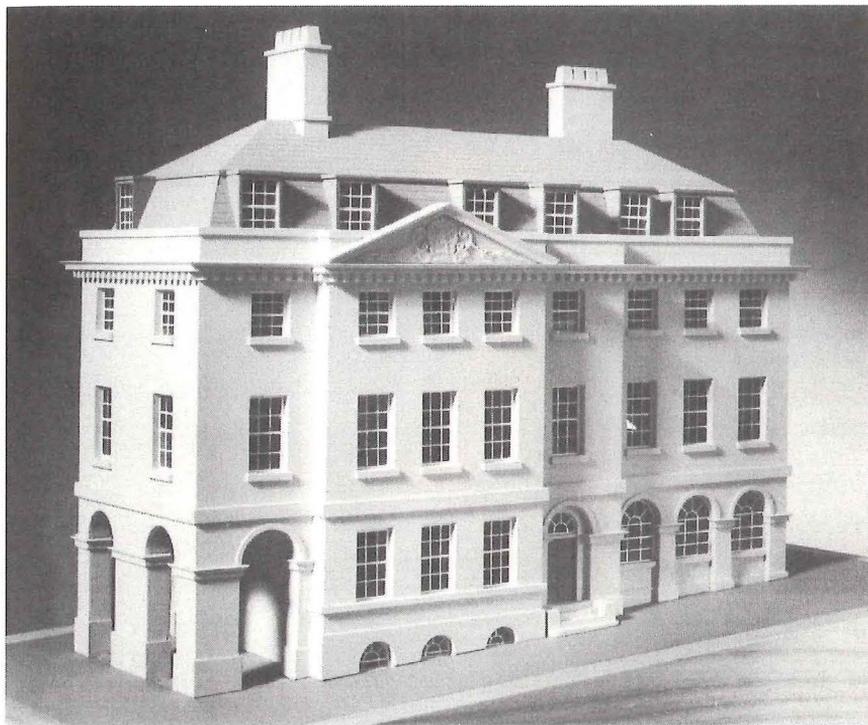
would have been instantly recognizable to picture room visitors. For a short time Wilson idolized the authoress and historian Mrs Catherine Macaulay, showering her with gifts and favours in a manner which he lived to regret. He celebrated her birthday in April 1777 with an extraordinarily lavish entertainment at Alfred House.<sup>24</sup> The double portrait of Wilson and Mrs Macaulay's young daughter which Wright painted in an attempt to promote his portrait practice may have been purchased by Wilson or given to him on Wright's return to Derby in 1777. It must have still been in Bath in 1781 when the twelve-year old Thomas Lawrence copied the figure of Wilson (carefully omitting Miss Macaulay) for an engraving to be given to subscribers to Cruttwell's *The Works of ... Thomas Wilson ... Bishop of Sodor and Man*.<sup>25</sup> By September 1782 and probably earlier, Lawrence was living just a few doors along from Wilson's house, at 2 Alfred Street. Even though Joseph Wright's show-piece portrait failed to bring in commissions, it must have had an effect on the young Lawrence and may also have inspired William Hoare's attractive double portrait of the poet *Christopher Anstey with his daughter Mary*, painted around 1779 and now in the National Portrait Gallery.

Mrs Macaulay herself was painted in Bath by Robert Edge Pine who settled in the city in 1772 (fig. 4). The Pine family's association with Bath has its roots much earlier in the century, when Robert's father John Pine engraved the thirteen plates for the architect John Wood's *Essay towards a Description of Bath*, published in Bath in 1742. It is known from Bateman's advertisements for the *Eidophusikon* that Robert Edge Pine's rooms at Hetling Court off Westgate Buildings were grand and spacious. One of the press notices announces, 'Mr Bateman has engaged for the purpose of these exhibitions, the House in Westgate-Buildings lately occupied by Mr Pine, which contains a suit (*sic*) of apartments happily calculated to display the whole series of effects to the utmost advantage'.<sup>26</sup> In another advertisement Bateman added 'The door next the Hot Bath Pump Room in Hetling Court will be open for the admission of company in the morning. Care will be taken to keep the several rooms constantly well aired'.<sup>27</sup> It is evident that Pine's house was adjacent to the Hot Bath Pump Room, a perfect site from which to attract visitors. Westgate Buildings was also on the direct carriage route from the Circus, a factor which must have influenced both Beach and Pine in their choice of rooms. By the 1770s the Circus was the hub of Bath's social life, being one of the prime new residential locations with the New or Upper Assembly Rooms just a matter of yards away.



4. *Mrs Catherine Macaulay*, attributed to Robert Edge Pine (c.1730-1788), c.1777. Oil on canvas, 73.4 x 62.2cm. (Photograph by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery)

At the end of 1766 Gainsborough had moved with the tide uphill to the Circus, but during the first half of his stay in Bath he had taken a house situated, like Pine's, right next to one of the principal bathing establishments. The ground floor of Gainsborough's first town house in



5. Model of Gainsborough's house, Abbey Street, Bath. The house was demolished following the discovery of the Roman Baths in 1892. Gainsborough leased the house from 1760-1774 and worked here from 1760-1766.

Abbey Street actually incorporated a public passageway to the King's and Queen's Baths (fig. 5). This house, which Gainsborough called his 'House in the smoake',<sup>28</sup> was brand new when the artist became the first tenant in May 1760. It stood very near the south-west corner of Bath Abbey, making the corner of Abbey Churchyard and Abbey Street, with its front door opening on to Abbey Street.<sup>29</sup> The room in which Gainsborough displayed his paintings was the 'best parlour', the principal ground floor room to the left of the front door. The other large room on the ground floor to the right of the front door was home to a millinery run by Gainsborough's sister Mary Gibbon. In common with other milliners in Bath at this time Mrs Gibbon would have sold dress fabrics, lace, flowers and perfumes, as well as hats. Exotic perfumes must have wafted through from Mrs Gibbon's shop to the picture room and in many respects her

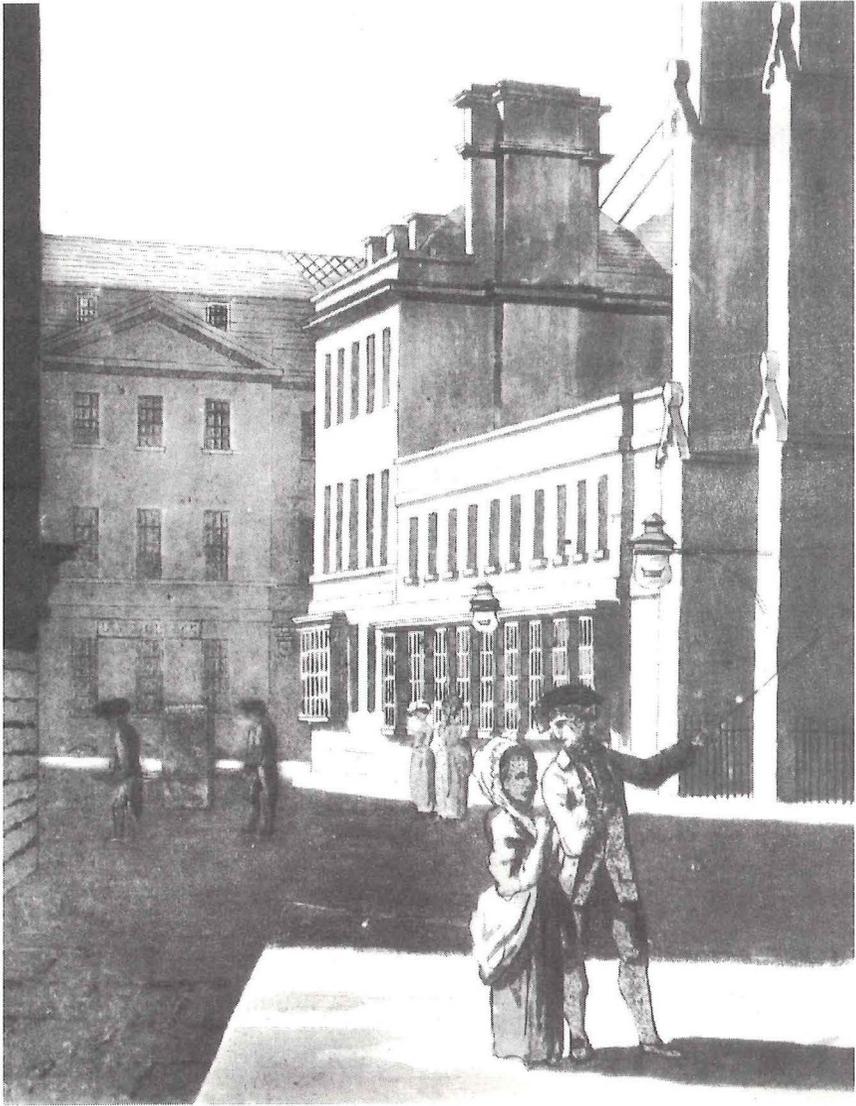


6. *Harriet, Viscountess Tracy* by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), c.1763. Oil on canvas, 126.4 x 101.0cm. (Photograph by courtesy of Gainsborough's House, Sudbury)

business must have complemented her brother's portrait practice. Her merchandise may well be represented in some of the female portraits which hung in the best parlour. Between 1762 and 1766 Gainsborough

produced a notable series of Van Dyck-inspired three-quarter length female portraits in which rich fabric, lace and flowers feature prominently. *Mary, Lady Carr*, at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, and *Harriet, Viscountess Tracy*, at Gainsborough's House, Sudbury (fig. 6), are particularly dazzling examples. When Gainsborough arrived in Bath he had searched for a property where 'a good painting room as to light, a proper access etc., could be had'.<sup>30</sup> The light was clearly important for painting, and the access for visitors to the picture room and for sitters. The public access at Abbey Street could scarcely have been improved upon. Abbey Street was a busy pedestrian and sedan chair route leading from the Pump Room and Bath Abbey to the two Lower Assembly Rooms (the Upper Rooms were not to open until 1771), the theatre and the Parades. Most visitors to Bath in the early 1760s would have unavoidably passed his door more than once a day. A depiction of the house by Thomas Malton of 1784 shows a flat, almost certainly wooden, sign board just above the ground floor windows (fig. 7). It reads BATH BANK, signifying the business which subsequently occupied Gainsborough's picture room. It is quite likely that a similar board advertised the painter's presence some years earlier: Philip Thicknesse deplored the fact that even the most eminent painters in Bath placed name boards on their houses, a practice which he considered both vulgar and inappropriate.<sup>31</sup> Slightly earlier artists, in common with other traders, used hanging signs with pictures or symbols rather than name boards, it being assumed that those with money to spend were not necessarily literate. In London Hogarth had a hanging sign with Van Dyck's head and a minor artist, S. Morley, a Golden Head, while in Bath as late as 1762 Thomas Worlidge marked his house in Stall Street with a Golden Head.<sup>32</sup> In Bath in the 1740s, engraver Jacob Skinner wittily advertised the sign of a Grasshopper, a play on this own name, since grasshoppers shed their skins.<sup>33</sup>

Although Gainsborough may well have used a name board in Abbey Street, the splendour of his house must have acted as an advertisement in itself. In an awkwardly restricted site John Wood had designed a classic town house which seems to have been intended as a Bath residence for Evelyn, 2nd Duke of Kingston. The pediment was boldly carved with the Duke's crest, enriching the façade and distinguishing the house from its neighbours.<sup>34</sup> It was one of the most expensive houses in Bath, costing £150 a year in rent in the 1760s, more for example than 1 Royal Crescent whose tenants, including the Duke and Duchess of York, paid £140.<sup>35</sup> For Gainsborough the investment in a grand property paid off: commissions



7. *North East View of the Abbey Church at Bath* (mistakenly entitled: it should read *South East View ...*) (detail) by James Gandon after Thomas Malton (1748-1804), 1784. Aquatint, whole image size 33.0 x 48.0cm. The house seen in shadow to the left is Gainsborough's. (Photograph courtesy of the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath & North East Somerset Council)

flooded in, 'he could live in the style of a gentleman, and entertain company'<sup>36</sup> and his establishment was nicknamed 'Gain's borough'.<sup>37</sup> In London in the following decade the portraitist Tilly Kettle employed the same tactics but with less talent and unhappier results. According to Edward Edwards, 'Thinking he might acquire more notice by an increase of shew, [Kettle] built for himself a house in Old Bond-street, opposite Burlington-gardens, soon after which he became bankrupt ...'.<sup>38</sup> Thomas Lawrence, who was introduced to portrait painting in Bath, was always conscious of the need for a prestigious address and when he moved to London, struggled to pay for his ambitious lifestyle. Thomas Barker, who also learnt his trade in Bath and was profoundly influenced by Gainsborough, took Benjamin Vandergucht's large exhibition room in Lower Brook Street, London after the latter's death in 1794.<sup>39</sup>

At Abbey Street, Gainsborough's picture room measured 24ft by 20ft 8ins, a sizeable space, but probably smaller than Francis Cotes's 'shew room' in London.<sup>40</sup> The exact size of Cotes's room is unknown, but on the floor he had an Indian carpet measuring 22ft 6ins by 14ft 6ins and a Turkey carpet of 9ft by 7ft 7ins, suggesting a very generously-proportioned space. Thomas Beach's picture room in Bath, as has already been shown, could accommodate a seated audience of fifty and a group of musicians. Gainsborough's Abbey Street show room was undoubtedly well suited to showing the increasingly large canvases he produced between 1760 and 1766. The rooms at 17 Circus, where the artist lived and worked from 1767 until 1774, were slightly smaller, and it is a fact that Gainsborough did not paint anything as large as *General Honeywood* (Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida) or *The Byam Family* (Marlborough College, Marlborough) after his move to the upper town.

At the Circus, Gainsborough's principal picture room was probably the main south-facing room on the first floor, adjoining the painting room, from which it would have been separated by double doors.<sup>41</sup> In a letter written in 1773 from the Circus to his friend and sitter, the well-known preacher Dr William Dodd, Gainsborough described how he secretly watched observers reacting to Dodd's portrait. It appears from this particularly animated and amusing account that the artist could not resist eavesdropping on his picture room visitors from the painting room. He tells Dodd that he had considered further improvements to the portrait, but 'the ladies say it is very handsome as it is; for I peep & listen through the keyhole of the door of the painting room on purpose to see how you touch them out of the pulpit as well as in it. Lord! says one, what a lively eye that gentleman has!'<sup>42</sup> An early nineteenth-century watercolour by



8. *A Portrait Painter's Ante-Room* by Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827), 1809. Pencil, pen and ink and watercolour, 12.4 x 20.1cm. (Photograph by courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

Thomas Rowlandson shows an arrangement of artist's rooms which is probably very like that found by visitors to Gainsborough's house at the Circus (fig. 8). A show room is buzzing with chattering visitors while an obsequious footman opens a door for a sitter to enter an adjoining painting room where the artist waits. The huge number of paintings seen on the wall in Rowlandson's drawing serves as a reminder that the picture display room must have housed drying-out commissioned portraits as well as show pictures. An average period of about five months elapsed between initial portrait sittings and delivery of the finished work<sup>43</sup> and as can be deduced from Gainsborough's letter to Dodd, the normal procedure must have been to hang up completed paintings until they were dry enough to be varnished.

In London, Francis Cotes's painting room and show room adjoined, and both were furnished with rich carpets and mahogany furniture. Sir Joshua Reynolds had a London house to which he 'added a splendid gallery for the exhibition of his paintings and a commodious and elegant room for his sitters', while George Romney had 'a painting room with perfect light, and a capacious show room well fitted for the artist'.<sup>44</sup> It is to be expected that artists in Bath would have offered similar stylish

furnishings and home comforts. When 2 Westgate Buildings was advertised in January and February 1779, immediately prior to Beach's occupancy, it was described as a 'House Elegantly Furnish'd ... next the Bishop of Salisbury's ... Very Roomy and Convenient ... with excellent offices, situated within a sixpenny fare of the rooms, play-house and markets; to be lett immediately, ready furnished. A genteel private family, that would take care of the furniture, may have it on reasonable terms'.<sup>45</sup> Gainsborough's Abbey Street rooms were certainly wallpapered<sup>46</sup> and a number of his portraits from the early 1760s such as *Robert, Earl Nugent* (private collection) and *Matthew Hale* (Birmingham City Art Gallery) probably reflect the appearance of the painting room which was on the first floor, directly above the millinery. Gainsborough is said to have complained to Garrick that portraiture forced him to 'stew ... in an elegant carpeted damn'd dungeon'<sup>47</sup> and although the words may be apocryphal they do conjure up an image of the rather sumptuous surroundings in which the successful portrait painter operated.

Like Gainsborough, William Hoare lived 'in a handsome genteel manner' in Bath, at first probably on the east side of Queen Square and later in Edgar Buildings.<sup>48</sup> Neither he nor Gainsborough, Beach or Pine advertised in the local press, presumably because the practice was considered demeaning and these artists' picture rooms were prominently situated and marked with sign boards. In Bath, a relatively small city which could be traversed on foot or by sedan chair, the picture room display was probably more important than the production of prints or the use of press 'puffs' as a means of advertising. It is not known whether Gainsborough, Beach or Pine charged for entry to their rooms. Visitors to Hoare's rooms were certainly expected to part with money for the privilege, although it is not clear whether this passed to the artist or remained with the footman. The Rev John Penrose recorded 'Mr Brinsden put us to see Mr. Hoare's Paintings in Edgar-Row, and genteely gratified the Servant's Expectations, not suffering me to give'.<sup>49</sup> The minor portrait and historical painter Solomon Williams and the fruit painter and art dealer William Jones asked one shilling entrance, the same as it cost to visit the Society of Artists' exhibition in London.<sup>50</sup> Joseph Wright either charged or received handsome gratuities. In a letter from Bath on 30 April 1776 he outlined to his brother his plan to spend the summer painting a 'sea-piece, or some blacksmith's shop which will bring company to my rooms next season, for there is some advantage arising from their seeing only; there has been given at the doors £22 already, wch. more than pays a qrs. rent'.<sup>51</sup> It may be that only those portrait painters who also showed subject pictures or

old masters were able to charge for entry. Gainsborough included old masters in his display and Beach owned Dutch and Italian paintings said to be by Rembrandt, Van Dyck and Guercino amongst others, although it is not known whether he exhibited these alongside his own work.<sup>52</sup> In London, after Gainsborough's death in 1788, his wife Margaret opened an exhibition of his remaining pictures at Schomberg House, charging half-a-crown admission, a fee she reduced to one shilling at the end of the first month. 700 visitors were recorded on the last day.<sup>53</sup> A flexible payment system was adopted at one exhibition in Bath in 1759. This was not strictly an art exhibition, but consisted of twelve life-sized waxworks of the King of Prussia and members of his court. Here sixpence was charged for servants and children, while ladies and gentlemen were left to give what they pleased, the expectation clearly being that they would give more than sixpence.<sup>54</sup> In 1781 Bateman sold season tickets for entry to an exhibition of stained glass and a device called 'Mr Storer's Royal Accurate Delineator' at Gyde's Assembly Rooms, but ran into difficulties when visitors attempted to transfer the 2s 6d tickets to their friends.<sup>55</sup>

Robert Edge Pine exhibited both historical compositions and portraits at Westgate Buildings in Bath<sup>56</sup> and it was no doubt in this city that he was convinced of the benefits of an elegant display room. An ambitious man of considerable ability but hampered by a 'morbidly irritable' temperament, Pine must have had Gainsborough's success in mind when he chose to settle in Bath in 1772.<sup>57</sup> Although he could not expect to rival Gainsborough during the two years both artists were in Bath, he probably picked up a number of commissions from those who could no longer afford Gainsborough's prices. When Philip Thicknesse fell out with Gainsborough over an unfinished portrait of himself he threatened to go and 'give Mr. Pine his fifty guineas'.<sup>58</sup> Pine probably learnt from Gainsborough above all others the commercial value of a good display room, and not long after leaving Bath he was to carry this message to America. In Philadelphia in 1786 Pine opened the first room in the United States specifically designed to exhibit works of art. The American painter Rembrandt Peale vividly recalled visiting Pine's house as a young man. 'When I entered Mr Pine's spacious saloon, I was astonished at its magnitude and the richness of the paintings which covered its walls ... and when I was with my father, admitted to his painting room, my surprise was increased on seeing a very small and slender man as the author of the great works I had just left'.<sup>59</sup>

A spacious and well-situated picture viewing room and a north-lit painting room were clearly the optimum requirements for the successful

eighteenth-century portrait painter whether he worked in London, the provinces or overseas. When the artist James Northcote asked his brother to search for rooms for him in Plymouth he specified that they should be 'very good ones and one room which I am to paint in should have a north light or very nearly so'.<sup>60</sup> Gainsborough found in Bath two houses which satisfied the practical need for a good display room and a north-facing painting room, and his faith in property as an investment is borne out by the fact that during the second half of his 15-year stay he was spending in excess of £250 a year in rent, £100 more than he was to pay for Schomberg House on his move to London.<sup>61</sup> William Hoare also had a large north-south facing house in Edgar Buildings, George Street, and Joseph Wright's in Brock Street was equally well-placed. The houses in Westgate Buildings were not aligned north-south but had the benefit of carriage access from the Circus, proximity to the Hot and Cross Baths and cheaper rents. Westgate Buildings does seem to have been a favourite address for artists in the last two decades of the century. In addition to Beach and Pine a number of lesser-known painters including Solomon Williams (1757-1824), Elias Martin (1739-1818), Joseph Sheldon (fl.1781-1821) and John Sanders (1750-1825) all worked there. Thomas Robins the younger (1742-1806) moved into Pine's old premises in 1788.<sup>62</sup> Josiah Wedgwood's first Bath showroom was in Westgate Buildings.<sup>63</sup> More significantly a Mr John Cozens, almost certainly John Robert Cozens (1752-1799), Pine's nephew, had a house in the same street between summer 1779 and 1783, after Pine left for London.<sup>64</sup> Cozens may have exhibited Mediterranean landscapes in his picture room since he had only returned from Italy in April 1779. Although he was out of England again in November 1782 when the *Eidophusikon* was shown, De Louthembourg's dramatic light and weather effects must have been close to Cozens' heart and it is just possible that he was in some way involved in bringing the exhibition to Bath.

In London, the first independent public art exhibitions of the 1760s enabled people to compare the work of one living artist with that of another for the first time. Bath saw the flowering of exhibitions arranged by individual artists in their own houses from the mid-century, but the town could not support anything along the lines of the London public exhibitions. In 1778 Thicknesse expressed the view that a public room in Bath should be allotted to artists where each could 'put up a Specimen of their Genius, we think that would be a fair Way, and the only fair Way of advertising the Public',<sup>65</sup> and in April of that year an attempt was made to inaugurate an annual open exhibition at Beach's house in Westgate Buildings. A 'puff' in the *Bath Chronicle* of 30 April expressed optimism:

A London Artist, who has seen the Bath Exhibition of Paintings, remarks, that (as it is only in its infancy) it reflects no small honour on the genius of the Bath artists in general. He observes, that several pieces by Messrs. Beach and Pine in particular, would be an ornament to a Royal Exhibition ...'

By 1778 however, Hoare was living the life of a gentleman, with few remaining artistic ambitions, Gainsborough had settled in London and Pine was nearing the end of his stay in Bath. It is no surprise that the scheme soon foundered. Despite this failure there is no doubt that between 1760 and 1780 the private picture rooms of Hoare, Gainsborough, Beach, Pine and Wright must have been an ornament to Bath and probably competed keenly with the other attractions on offer on dreary winter mornings. The situation and grandeur of Gainsborough's Abbey Street house, with its best parlour devoted to his paintings, must have set a standard to which other artists in Bath and beyond aspired. Recorded snippets of picture room conversation suggest that visitors were much entertained by the paintings they viewed, and spoke of portraits as if they were regarding the sitters themselves. William Dodd, as already noted, was admired for his 'lively eye' and a Gainsborough family group was proclaimed by one visitor 'the finest portrait she ever saw', and all the better for reminding her of an absent member of her own family.<sup>66</sup> Even the cynical Horace Walpole, who claimed to detest Bath, was so charmed by the magical atmosphere of Thomas Beach's rooms that he fancied the portraits living participants in the concert he attended there. Though few visitors may have shared the double pleasure of paintings and music together, many must have experienced, like Walpole, a sense of wonder at encountering faces they knew, as well as many more they would have liked to know, 'breathing in canvass' on artists' picture room walls.

## Notes

- 1 D.M. Little and G.M. Kahrl eds., *The Letters of David Garrick* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), Vol. III, p.1005, letter 907, to Hannah More, Bath 4 May 1775.
- 2 An undated typescript 'Index of Bath Artists' at the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, compiled by Reginald W.M. Wright, former Curator at the Gallery, lists the majority of artists associated with the city. I have added a number of artists not recorded by Wright.
- 3 T. Bardwell, *The Practice of Painting and Perspective Made Easy* (1756), p.6.
- 4 Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting* (1760), p.35.

- 5 A. Rouquet, quoted by H. Belsey in 'A visit to the studios of Gainsborough and Hoare', *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. CXXIX (February 1987), pp.107-9.
- 6 Latterly Gainsborough and Hoare set aside more than one room for exhibition purposes. *ibid.*, pp.108-9.
- 7 *Bath Chronicle*, 14 September and 12 October 1786.
- 8 D. Foskett, *Miniatures, Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, 1990), p.609; *Bath Chronicle*, 5 April 1764.
- 9 Charles Dack, *Sketch of the Life of Thomas Worlidge* (Peterborough, 1907), p.11.
- 10 D.E. Williams, *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Thomas Lawrence, Kt.* (1831), Vol. I, pp.86-7.
- 11 M. Woodall ed., *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough* (1963), p.157, letter 87, to James Unwin, Bath 4 December 1763.
- 12 H. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England: 1760-1795*, F.W. Hilles and P.B. Daglian eds. (New Haven and London, 1937), pp.20-2.
- 13 K.E. James, 'Concert Life in Eighteenth-century Bath', unpublished thesis, University of London (1987), Vol. V, p.1033.
- 14 The use of artificial light in display rooms may have been commonplace, see Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head* (New Haven and London, 1993), p.80.
- 15 *Bath Chronicle*, 21 April 1782.
- 16 Rudiger Joppien, *Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, R.A., 1740-1812*, (exhibition catalogue, Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood, 1973), catalogue number 87.
- 17 *Bath Chronicle*, 21 April 1803.
- 18 Philip Thicknesse, *New Prose Bath Guide for 1778* (1778), p.48.
- 19 Mrs Collins travelled the country taking 'profiles' in three minutes for a price of 2s.6d.
- 20 Woodall, *Letters*, p.73, letter 32, to David Garrick, Bath 22 June 1772
- 21 Wright was with Humphry in Florence in June and July 1775, see B. Nicholson, *Joseph Wright of Derby* (1968), Vol.I, p.11. Wright may also have been encouraged to Bath by Josiah Wedgwood who had opened showrooms there in 1772, see B. and H. Wedgwood, *The Wedgwood Circle 1730-1897* (1980), p.54.
- 22 Wright arrived in Bath on 4 November 1775 and 'Enter'd upon Mr Sproules House 9th Nov. 1775', see Nicholson, *Joseph Wright*, Vol. I, p.13, n.2. The house rented by Wright can be identified from the Bath Record Office (BRO), City Rate Book commencing 24 June 1775.
- 23 W. Bemrose, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright A.R.A., commonly called "Wright of Derby"* (1885), p.45.
- 24 *Bath Chronicle*, 10 April 1777.
- 25 *Bath Chronicle*, 14 June 1781.
- 26 *Bath Chronicle*, 14 November 1782.
- 27 *Bath Chronicle*, 5 December 1782. The house taken by Pine would appear to be part of or all of Hetling House, now known as Abbey Church House.
- 28 Woodall, *Letters*, p.157, letter 87, to James Unwin, Bath 30 December 1763.
- 29 Susan Legoux Sroman, 'Gainsborough and the lodging-house way', in *Gainsborough's House Society Annual Report, 1991/2* (1992), pp.23-43.
- 30 Philip Thicknesse, *A Sketch of the Life and Paintings of Thomas Gainsborough* (1788), pp.15-6.
- 31 Thicknesse, *Guide*, p.49.

- 32 Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London 1764-1914* (Aldershot, 1994), p.3;  
James Ayres, *The Artist's Craft, A History of Tools, Techniques and Materials*  
(1985), p.33; *Boddely's Bath Journal*, 5 April 1762.
- 33 *Bath Journal*, 22 April 1745.
- 34 The pediment stones, the only surviving relics of Gainsborough's Abbey  
Street house, are currently in store at the Roman Baths Museum, Bath.
- 35 *Number 1 Royal Crescent Bath, An illustrated guide and souvenir* (Bath, n.d.).
- 36 A. Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors  
and Architects* (1829-32), Vol. I, p.331.
- 37 G.W. Fulcher, *The Life of Thomas Gainsborough, R.A.* (1856), p.61.
- 38 Edward Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters who have resided or been born in  
England* (1808), p.104.
- 39 Ephraim Hardcastle (W.H. Pyne), *Wine and Walnuts or, After Dinner Chit-Chat*  
(1823), Vol. II, pp.12-13 (note).
- 40 Walkley, *Artists' Houses*, pp.9-10.
- 41 See W. Ison, *The Georgian Buildings of Bath* (1948, revised ed. Bath, 1980),  
p.98, fig.24 for a first floor plan of Gainsborough's house at 17 Circus as it  
was originally arranged.
- 42 Woodall, *Letters*, p.55, letter 20, Bath 24 November 1773.
- 43 Marcia Pointon, 'Portrait-Painting as a Business Enterprise in London in  
the 1780s', *Art History*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (June 1984), p.197.
- 44 Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, p.44.
- 45 *Bath Chronicle*, 28 January, 4 February and 11 February 1779.
- 46 Sloman, 'Gainsborough and the lodging-house way', pp.26, 28.
- 47 Hardcastle, *Wine and Walnuts*, Vol. II, p.223.
- 48 G. Vertue, 'Note Books Volume III', *The Twenty-Second Volume of the Walpole  
Society* 1933-34 (1934), p.149; BRO, transcripts of Walcot Church Rate Books  
from 1742-56 show Hoare's name consistently next or next but one to that  
of silversmith and toyman Paul Bertrand whose house is known to have  
been in Queen Square (*Bath Journal*, 10 November 1775).
- 49 Brigitte Mitchell and Hubert Penrose eds., *Letters from Bath 1766-1767 by  
the Rev. John Penrose* (Gloucester, 1983), p.192.
- 50 *Bath and Bristol Chronicle*, 19 October 1769 and 16 November 1786. See J. Ball,  
*Paul and Thomas Sandby* (Cheddar, 1985), pp.182-3 for the pricing system  
for London public exhibitions.
- 51 Bemrose, *Joseph Wright*, pp.45-6.
- 52 Belsey, 'A visit to the studios', p.108; *Bath Chronicle*, 21 April 1803.
- 53 Jack Lindsay, *Gainsborough, His Life and Art* (1981), p.199.
- 54 *Boddely's Bath Journal*, 24 December 1759.
- 55 *Bath Chronicle*, 31 May 1781.
- 56 Thicknesse, *Guide*, pp.48-9.
- 57 R.G. Stewart, *Robert Edge Pine, A British Portrait Painter in America 1784-1788*  
(Washington, 1979), p.23, and Edwards, *Anecdotes*, pp.172-3.
- 58 Thicknesse, *Sketch*, p.30.
- 59 Stewart, *Robert Edge Pine*, p.25.
- 60 Nigel Surry, 'James Northcote at Portsmouth', *Burlington Magazine*,  
Vol. CXXXVI, No. 1093 (April 1994), p.235, note 7.

- 61 Gainsborough's Abbey Street house cost him £150 per annum for the duration of his 14-year lease from 1760-1774. At the Circus he was probably paying in excess of £100 per annum from 1767-1774. The wing of Schomberg House in London which he rented from 1774 cost £150 a year, see William T. Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough* (1915), p.108.
- 62 *Bath Chronicle*, 22 October 1788.
- 63 See note 21 above.
- 64 BRO, City Rate Book commencing 24 June 1779, through to City Rate Book commencing 25 December 1782. See also K. Sloan, *Alexander and John Robert Cozens: the Poetry of Landscape* (New Haven and London, 1986), pp.136-7 and 99-103.
- 65 Thicknesse, *Guide*, p.49.
- 66 Sloman, 'Gainsborough and the lodging-house way', p.28.

## RECORDED VISITS TO GAINSBOROUGH'S PICTURE ROOMS IN BATH

- (a) P.C. Yorke, *The Diary of John Baker* (1931), pp.251-2. On 3 December 1772 Baker visited Hoare and Gainsborough's rooms.
- (b) Lady Llanover ed., *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, (1861), Vol. III, p.605. Mrs Delany's visit to Gainsborough's rooms was on 23 October 1760.
- (c) E. and F. Anson (eds.), *Mary Hamilton* (1925), p.26. Mary Hamilton visited Gainsborough's rooms in May 1774.
- (d) The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, MS Journal of Tours in England and France by Samuel Ireland of Norfolk Street, London, 1753-90, HM 31435, f.41. Ireland records he 'Call'd at Gainsborough'. The same day he attended the opening of the new Upper Assembly Rooms: this event identifies the date as 30 September 1771. (I am indebted to Hugh Belsey for this MS reference).
- (e) M. Elwyn, *The Noels and the Milbankes* (1967), p.37. In a letter of 24 February 1774 Elizabeth Noel recorded a visit to Hoare and Gainsborough's rooms.
- (f) William T. Whitley, *Thomas Gainsborough* (1915), p.107, refers to Eliza Orlebar's visit to Hoare and Gainsborough on 12 April 1774.
- (g) Brigitte Mitchell and Hubert Penrose eds., *Letters from Bath 1766-67 by the Rev. John Penrose* (Gloucester, 1983), p.40. Penrose records that his wife and daughter went 'to see the Pictures' on 18 April 1766. There follows a description of what appears to be Gainsborough's *The Byam Family* (now at Marlborough College). On 22 May 1766 the Penroses 'went to see Gainsborough's Portraits', *ibid.*, p.137.
- (h) Hugh Belsey, 'A visit to the studios of Gainsborough and Hoare', *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. CXXIX (February 1987), pp.107-9, publishes an account by Dorothy Richardson of her visit to Hoare and Gainsborough's rooms in May 1770.

Penrose and Mrs Delany's visits were to Gainsborough's Abbey Street address, all the other references are to 17 Circus.

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