



Trevor Fawcett

Interview by Stephen Bird

In the early 1980s the first floor of the present Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution building was occupied by the Bath Reference Library. Many will recall its high ceilings, regimented shelves and business-like card indices attended by strict but knowledgeable staff. In 1984, almost unnoticed, a new reader appeared on the scene, a quiet man who, day after day, briskly and efficiently worked his way through folios of early Bath newspapers, reading everything and making careful notes. It was Trevor Fawcett.

Trevor's arrival in Bath was typically modest, but he quickly made his mark. In 1986 he was the inspiration behind the History of Bath Research Group, no mean achievement in a city where traditionally there had been resistance to people coming in from outside and telling folk how things should be done. But, despite his unassuming nature, Trevor can be surprisingly persuasive, a trait one quickly discovers in his fluent and engaging prose. Trevor dislikes waste - of time, effort and resources - and he brought clarity, focus and cohesion to the Research Group. From 1990 to 1994 he edited volumes III, IV and V of *Bath History* and here and elsewhere has published a string of articles, many of them unlocking hitherto unexplored aspects of the eighteenth century in Bath.

One of Trevor's greatest achievements has been in creating the right environment for research to take place. Through his organizational skills and rigorous editing he has inspired many to undertake and publish their own research. He sets exacting standards but is generous with his advice and gentle with his criticism, qualities from which I and many others have benefited. Behind the studious exterior is a lively mind, sharp wit and a surprising breadth of interests. Trevor's publications reflect both the breadth and depth of his personal and research interests, but they also reflect his preference for exploring new territory, challenging accepted norms and dispatching sacred cows. In addition to a concise history of Bath written jointly with the present interviewer in 1994, [fig. 1] he has published five other books on Bath, all under his own RUTON imprint. One of them, *Bath Entertain'd*, he told me with a look of wry perplexity, is currently available for £140 on Amazon!

The Interview

SB: *To begin with, Trevor, please could you tell us something about your background?*

TF: I'm a Yorkshireman, the product of a war-time upbringing in Leeds. I attended Leeds Grammar School, before going on to read French and Portuguese at Leeds University. And why

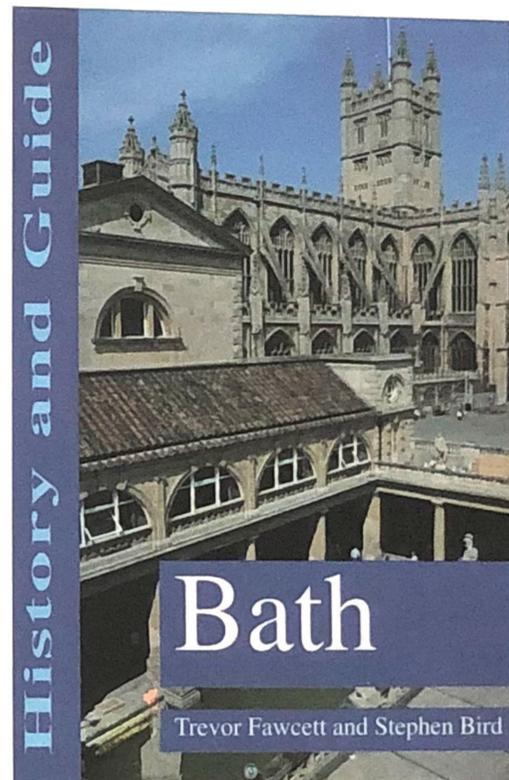


fig 1: Cover of *Bath - History and Guide*, by Trevor Fawcett and Stephen Bird, published 1994
Author's Collection



fig 2: Trevor and his wife Mary near Brown's Folly

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Portuguese? I suppose because it seemed oddly exotic at the time to a provincial teenager. I've made only occasional use of it since, although I can still read it today.

SB: *How soon did you realize you had a flair for writing?*

TF: Probably my first weak effort was a sonnet on chess printed in a school magazine, but my earliest minor research piece was about a Southampton artist, Richard Cockle Lucas, which appeared in a Hampshire magazine. Maybe it was this that whetted my appetite for getting into print.

SB: *Where did your early education lead you?*

TF: After graduating I did my national service in the army. This was during the Cold War period when the country thought it needed a team of Russian-speaking interpreters. So I spent nearly two years at fairly congenial postings in Cornwall, London and Scotland learning Russian at the Joint Services School for Linguists - what the Soviet Union dubbed a 'spy school'. Then I did some supply teaching and led a dozen or so 'Ramblers Holidays' parties in Italy and the Alps.

SB: *What line of work did you go into next?*

TF: I embarked on a library career, but first needed some work experience, which I acquired by serving for nine months on a mobile library travelling round the West Riding of Yorkshire. I took a postgraduate librarianship course at University College London and eventually became a Fellow of the Library Association. My first proper job was at Leicester Colleges of Art and Technology (now De Montfort University). It was here that I really became enthused about the eighteenth century, largely thanks to a series of lectures I heard at Vaughan College, an enterprising adult education centre.

In 1962 I was offered job at Southampton University library, and also got married. [fig. 2] After three years in Southampton, Mary and I moved to Norwich where I took up a senior post in the library of the newly founded University of East Anglia. I sometimes wonder whether the outlandish title, 'Zusammengerhörigkeitsgefühl' of an article I'd just published in the *Library Association Record* helped land me the job. At that time UEA was small, still functioning in pre-fabricated buildings until the permanent campus site was ready. For me it was a privilege over the next nineteen years to help establish a major teaching and research library virtually from scratch.

SB: *How did your other research and publication interests come about?*

TF: Besides heading the cataloguing section, I was subject specialist for the visual arts and music, heavily involved in a large-scale acquisitions programme. I became active too in art librarianship at a national level and in 1969 proposed an organization to bring art librarians together, the origin of ARLIS, the Art Libraries Society. This became something of an 'acorn to oak' story as ARLIS expanded and helped spawn other art libraries associations round the world with regular international meetings. In 1976 I toured France, Netherlands and Germany for the British Library investigating art library cooperation. Divided Germany presented an especially fascinating case study, with West German prosperity and openness contrasting with East German shortages and relative isolation.

During the 1970s [fig. 3] I became much more engaged in art historical research, working on and finally publishing an MPhil thesis on early nineteenth-century English provincial art, writing articles on the history of art reproductions, and helping organise the first exhibition on art periodicals at the Victoria & Albert Museum. Responsibility for the UEA music collections also led me into studying the history of music in eighteenth-century Norwich and Norfolk.

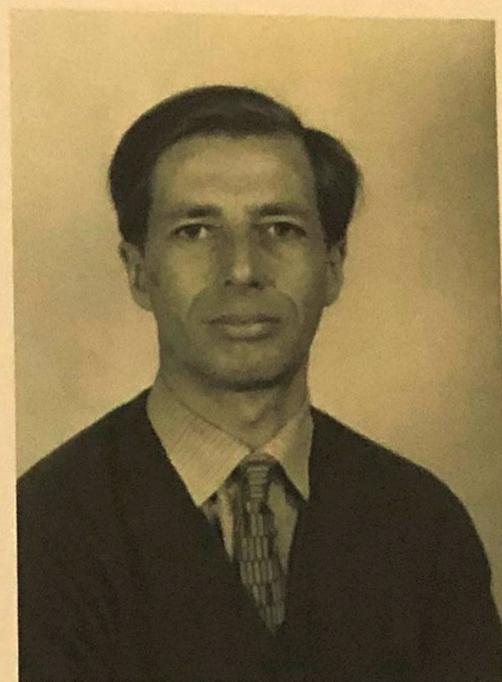


fig 3: Trevor's passport photo from the 1970s

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[41]

[N^o. 11.] *The Bath Chronicle* [Vol. 1.]

A N D

Weekly GAZETTE.

[Price Two-PENCE HALFPENNY.]

Printed and publish'd by G. POPE, and C^o. at the Printing-Office in STALL-STREET: Where PRINTING in all its Branches is perform'd on the most reasonable Terms, and in the neatest Manner.

[The above C. POPE serv'd his Apprenticeship with the late Mr. BODDELY, and has had the sole Management of the Bath Journal for these last five Years.]

T H U R S D A Y , D E C E M B E R 2 5 , 1 7 6 0 .

O N T H E
N A T I V I T Y o f C H R I S T .

A WAKE from Silence ev'ry Voice,
Each cheerful Pipe, and sounding String;
Let ev'ry grateful Heart rejoice,
And ev'ry Tongue in Rapture sing.

On this distinguish'd Day of Grace
Th' eternal Prince of Glory came,
To purge the Guilt of human Race,
And save them by his powerful Name.

Bow down your Heads ye lofty Pines,
Ye Mountains crown'd with Cedars tall;
Be still, ye rude imperious Winds,
Throughout the wide terrestrial Ball.

that Building called the Pump-Room, the Rent was settled at 250l. since which it has had no Advance, notwithstanding it is worth now twice that Money, from the much greater Resort of Company, which has required a further Enlargement of the Pump-Room, the convenient Buildings for the Dry Pump, and the Variety of Treats and Expences that were levied on former Pumpers, (even since I have frequented the Place) which you, Gentlemen, disdain to accept of. But if you were to set a decent Clerk there of your own, to receive the Contributions of the Company, I am persuaded it would be of the greatest Utility to the City. I know it will be objected, if the Corporation should take it into their own Hands the Gentry would not give so liberally as they do now; but that Objection would soon vanish, if it was once put to the Trial; for when it is consider'd that you have divested yourselves of all the

Friday's and Saturday's Posts.

Arriv'd Two Mails from HOLLAND.

I T A L Y .

ROME, Nov. 22.

LETTERS from Messina advise, that six English Men of War had entered that Port, and pretended they would stay there; and that the Viceroy of Sicily had thereupon sent an Express to Court for Instructions how to behave in that critical Circumstance; which, perhaps, is connected with very interesting Designs.

G E R M A N Y .

VIENNA, Nov. 29. By the last Dispatches from Saxony, the Imperial and Royal Army continued to occupy its advantageous Situation upon the Heights of Plauen, and there was no Likelihood

Plantation News.

NEW-YORK, Nov. 10. Wednesday last Capt. Basset arrived here in 21 Days from Quebec: He had very agreeable Weather down the River, and the whole Passage throughout: Before he sailed, Lord Colvill in a 74 Gun Ship, with 10 Transports, having Frenchmen on board, sailed for England; and Monsieur Vaudreuil, Levy, and many other Gentlemen, were soon to sail for France in an English Ship they obtained Permission to purchase at Quebec; that many of the French Inhabitants who had left Quebec during the Siege of that Place, were returned, and had got Possession of their Houses; that a large Ship from England, by some Accident, was lost within a few Miles of Quebec, and many of the Crew drowned.

General Amherst arrived at Albany last Satur-

fig 4: Example front page of a very early Bath Chronicle, December 25th 1760, a rich resource for Trevor's research

Bath in Time - Bath Central Library Collection

SB: What brought you to Bath, and how did you occupy yourself here?

TF: By 1984 Mary and I were looking to move out of East Anglia, in part for family reasons, and the beautiful, well-located city of Bath, with all its eighteenth-century interest, was an obvious draw. Once arrived, I took on various freelance work, but soon got stuck into Bath research as well. Already well aware of the immense value of local newspapers, I began trawling through fifty or more years of the early *Bath Chronicle* and *Bath Journal*, [fig. 4] rich sources for much of my future research. In those days readers could happily work from the original printed copies and were not obliged to use microfilm!

SB: You were instrumental in setting up the History of Bath Research Group. Why did you do this?

TF: It soon became apparent that, while there were various individual researchers busy on Bath projects, they often had little contact with each other. Moreover, there were large neglected areas of Bath history, even in the fashionable period of the eighteenth century that deserved serious study. I'd once been closely involved with the Centre of East Anglian Studies at UEA. This encouraged me to think that some sort of research-minded, local history society might equally work in Bath, so I asked around and quickly found support for the idea from John Wroughton, Angus and Brenda Buchanan, Peter Greening, Roger Rolls, and many others I approached, including your own good self. In fact around thirty people turned up on February 1986 at the

inaugural meeting, hosted by Sam Hunt at 4 Circus. [fig. 5] And so the History of Bath Research Group was born, with the word 'research' in the name to signal that we wished to attract members who were genuinely interested in forwarding research rather than merely attending meetings and talks. I also well remember Mick Aston's timely warning - 'this must not become an ego trip!'

The Research Group soon grew to 80-100 more-or-less active members. It was a propitious moment to start. Colin Johnston had arrived to breathe new life into the Bath Record Office; the Bath Archaeological Trust was sponsoring a new biennial publication called *Bath History*; and sympathetic staff in Bath Reference Library, particularly Maria Joyce and Mary Wills, were keen to promote local research. The Group already had a good nucleus of experienced investigators, including Elizabeth Holland, Marta Oliver and Graham Davis among those not already mentioned, although by then R.S. Neale had, alas, left for Australia. Neale's Marxist analysis had recently enlivened discussion of the city's past and he would surely have been a great asset had he joined the Group.

SB: *How would you assess the progress that has been made since you came to Bath?*

TF: The History of Bath Research Group is nearly 25 years old and still quite active, though perhaps less vigorous than in its earlier years. But there are now other drivers of research. Further local history societies have sprung up around the city. The Building of Bath Museum,

All meetings start at 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday, 1 October, 1986, at the Guildhall

Colin Johnston,
"The Bath City Record Office, its
Contents and Uses"
(chair: John Kite)

Wednesday, 5 November, 1986,
at the Huntingdon Centre

Brenda Buchanan,
"A Forgotten Industry: the
Production of Gunpowder in the Bath Area"
(chair: Dr. John Williams)

Wednesday, 3 December, 1986, at the
Bath Society Room, Green Park Station

Dr. Roy Hope,
"Some aspects of Education Development
in 19th Century Bath"
(chair: Niall Rothnie)

Wednesday, 7 January, 1987,
at the Huntingdon Centre

Judith Samuel,
"The Jewish Community of Bath and
its Wider Context"
(chair: Dr. Mary Ede)

Wednesday, 4 February, 1987,
at the Camden Works Museum, Julian Road

Visit and introduction to the wide-ranging
business archive of the firm of J.B. Bowler
(over 50,000 items, including 19th century
trade journals, catalogues, correspondence,
poster-calendars, etc.)

Wednesday, 4 March, 1987, at No. 4 Circus

Peter Davenport,
"The Interrelationship of History"
and archaeology in Bath"
(chair: John Wroughton)

Wednesday, 1 April, 1987, at the Royal National
Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases, North Borough
Walls, (the old Mineral Water Hospital)

Annual General Meeting:
followed by Dr. Roger Rolls, "Diseases
of Bath: the Health of Spa Visitors in
the 17th and 18th Centuries"
(chair: Dr. Graham Davis)

Wednesday, 6 May, 1987,
at the Huntingdon Centre

Dr. Tim Mowl,
"Henry Edmund Goodridge and a
New Florence in the West"
(chair: Dr. Brigitte Mitchell)

fig 5: The inaugural programme of talks for the History of Bath Research Group, 1986

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the Museum of Bath at Work and the William Herschel Society all advanced historical study in their respective areas. The BRLSI has been revived. The Georgian Newspapers Index, the visual archive of Bath in Time, and computer systems at Bath Record Office have helped to open up the sources. Important gaps in the historical record have been addressed - witness Peter Davenport's and John Wroughton's books on the mediaeval, Tudor and Stuart city - and of course the Survey of Old Bath under Elizabeth Holland has done invaluable topographical work. There have been important archaeological discoveries too on the ground. Altogether it's been a rich quarter-century, as the growing run of *Bath History* volumes only goes to prove. While the University of Bath has never itself had a history department, both Bath Spa University and the Regional History faculty at the University of the West of England include Bath history in their orbit, as do specialist groups like the Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society. In the light of all this, it's a shame that the popular tourist image of Bath often relies more on nostalgia, anecdote and even myth than on solid, widely available research evidence.

SB: *You have published a prodigious amount during your time in Bath. Are there still subjects you want to cover and where do the gaps lie?*

TF: My personal research has mainly centred on the Georgian period, where I've always tried to open up new territory. The history of local printing and private education are two recent examples. I do have other topics still in mind such as the important role of apothecaries at the spa, but it's too late now to undertake pet projects like a biographical dictionary of notable Bathonians. There's vast potential for research by others into Bath's political, economic,

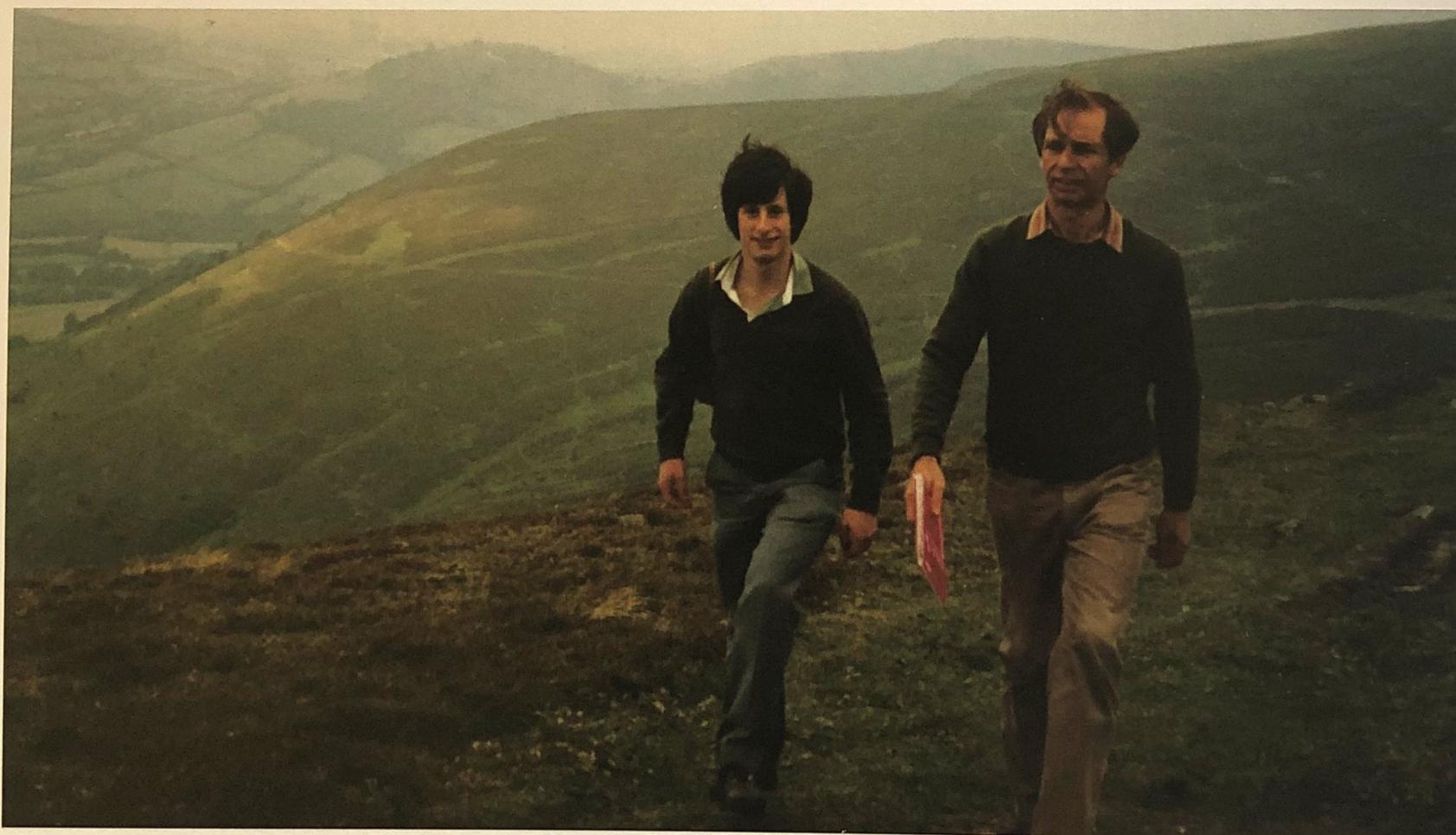


fig 6: Walking with elder son Adrian in the Brecon Beacons, 1985

Author's Collection

administrative, social and religious history. I've explored the history of black people in Bath a little, but many other social groups await close study - including the lives of women, children, and the elderly. Despite the sterling work of Roger Rolls and others on medical institutions, we surprisingly lack a full study of medicine at the spa, or indeed of that second major local industry, tourism. I could go on. All history depends on good documentation of course, and here I might mention the value of oral history, where the Museum of Bath at Work has made useful start in recording the memories of our own contemporary citizens.

SB: *You have been a great enabler of others over the years. Why have you attached so much importance to this?*

TF: History is a collective enterprise, but at Bath it is conducted largely by non-professionals. Inevitably some people need help over their research and writing. At the same time few amateur historians, however scholarly, are in a position to tackle extensive projects, so that here cooperation is usually essential - as in the recent publication of *Innovation and Discovery: Bath and the Rise of Science*, a collaboration of fourteen different authors. I also believe in the principle that serious history is not just for academics but should be available in accessible form to as many people as possible. That's why I've enjoyed contributing many short pieces to the *Bath Magazine* for instance. True, there are pitfalls in local history, especially antiquarianism - the endless piling up of uninterpreted detail - or parochialism - the failure to appreciate the wider context. Comparisons with other times and places, reading widely and talking to fellow researchers are all useful correctives however.

SB: *Of what are you most proud and what do you count as your greatest achievement?*

TF: I don't know about 'achievement' but undoubtedly my family - including my two sons and three grand-children. [fig. 6]

SB: *You must have interests beyond local history?*

TF: Classic literature, art, chamber music, world cinema, environmental matters, natural history. I edited the Bath Natural History Society magazine for a time and monitored butterfly populations on Bannerdown on behalf of the national recording body, Butterfly Conservation. Mary and I have travelled quite a lot around Europe, though we've now given up flying. And we never cease rambling in and about Bath.

Publications

This is not the place to attempt to list Trevor's prolific output, which has been sustained for well over forty years, and which shows no signs of abating. It is possible, however, to give here a flavour of his publication record which covers writings on librarianship, art history, and Norfolk and Bath history, itemised very selectively below in chronological order.

The Rise of English Provincial Art: Artists, Patrons and Institutions outside London, 1800-1830 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974).

'Scholarly journals' and 'Illustration and design' in *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines*, ed. Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot (London, Art Book Co., 1976).

The Present State of Library Co-operation in the Visual Arts in the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, France and the Netherlands, BLR&DD Report Series 5340 (London, BLR&DD, 1977).

'Eighteenth-century art in Norwich', *Walpole Society* v.96, 1976-1978.

Music in Eighteenth Century Norwich and Norfolk (Norwich, Centre of East Anglian Studies, 1979).

'Measuring the provincial Enlightenment: the case of Norwich', *Eighteenth Century Life* v.8, Oct 1982.

'Visual facts and the nineteenth-century art lecture', *Art History* v.6 no.4, 1983.

'Argonauts and commercial travellers: the foreign marketing of Norwich stuffs in the later eighteenth century', *Textile History* v.16 no.2, 1985.

'The compleat art librarian', 'The problem of the artefact: subject limits of the art library', 'Control of text and images: tradition and innovation' in *A Reader in Art Librarianship*, ed. Philip Pacey, IFLA Publications 34 (Munich, K.G.Saur, 1985).

'Graphic versus photographic in the nineteenth-century reproduction', *Art History* v.9 no.2, 1986.

'Self-improvement societies: the early Lit. and Phils' in *Life in the Georgian Town* [Georgian Group Annual Symposium 1985] (London, 1986).

'Reproductions of works of art' in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, 34 vols (London, Grove, 1996).

'Dance and teachers of dance in eighteenth-century Bath' and 'Chair transport in Bath: the sedan era', *Bath History* v.2, 1988.

'Eighteenth-century shops and the luxury trade', *Bath History* v.3, 1990.

'Selling the Bath waters; medical propaganda at an eighteenth-century spa', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* for 1990, v.134, 1991.

Bath: History and Guide, by Trevor Fawcett and Stephen Bird (Stroud, Alan Sutton, 1994).

'The making of Orange Grove' by Trevor Fawcett and Marta Inskip, *Bath History* v.5, 1994.

Voices of Eighteenth-century Bath: an Anthology (Bath, RUTON, 1995).

'Spa dentistry: practitioners in eighteenth-century Bath', *Dental Historian* no.30, 1996.

The Nineteenth Century: Visual Arts and Architecture Special Collection, ed. Trevor Fawcett (Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1988-97) [20 units of microfiches.]

Bath Entertain'd: Amusements, Recreations and Gambling at the 18th-century Spa (Bath, RUTON, 1998).

Northampton Street: an Outline of its Historical Development by Trevor Fawcett, Francis Kelly and Philip Malone (Bath, 1999) [Limited edition of 60 copies.]

'French émigrés at Bath, 1789-1815', *Somerset Archaeology and Natural History* for 1997, v.141, 2001.

- Bath Administer'd: Corporation Affairs at the 18th-century Spa* (Bath, RUTON, 2001).
- 'Wedgwood's Bath showrooms' in *Pickpocketing the Rich: Portrait Painting in Bath, 1720-1800* (Bath, Holburne Museum of Art, 2002).
- Bath Commercialis'd: Shops, Trades and Market at the 18th-century Spa* (Bath, RUTON, 2002).
- "'A silly ridiculous Jack in office': Bath's Town Clerk and the Keppel affair of 1779", *The Regional Historian* (UWE) no.13, 2005.
- 'William Herschel at the Octagon Chapel, Bath', *The Speculum* v.5 no.2, 2006/7.
- 'A brush with the Ancient Regime: French courtiers at Bath in 1787', *The Regional Historian* (UWE) no.18, 2008.
- Georgian Imprints: Printing and Publishing at Bath, 1728-1815* (Bath, RUTON, 2008).
- 'Science lecturing in Georgian Bath', 'Bath scientific societies and institutions' and [with Colin Axon] 'The British Association in Bath' in *Innovation and Discovery: Bath and the Rise of Science*, ed. Peter Wallis (Bath, Millstream Books, 2008).
- 'Butterfly transects on Bannerdown, 2002-2008', *Bath Natural History Society Magazine* 2008/2009.