

**Cai Mason, *Bath Quays Waterside, The Archaeology of Industry, Commerce and the Lives of the Poor in Bath's Lost Quayside District* (Wessex Archaeology Occasional Paper, 2020), A4 paperback, 121pp, 68 figs., 90 plates. Price £15 or online from [www.wessexarch.co.uk](http://www.wessexarch.co.uk). ISBN 978-1-911137-16-0.**

Here at last is a thorough description of a part of Bath by the River Avon which has hitherto been ignored and now almost totally destroyed – an area which can now be seen to have played an important rôle in the development of the city. Fortunately this study was prompted by the archaeological investigations required ahead of the Bath Quays development in the City of Bath World Heritage Site, thereby providing an opportunity to excavate a strip through the heart of what was formerly known as the Avon Street Area. The archaeological work, coupled with extensive documentary research not only allowed the physical remains and artefacts to be linked to the area's industrial and commercial activities but also to some of its colourful and diverse inhabitants. Each chapter follows the chronological development of the area, preceded by an historical outline before reviewing the archaeological remains.

Naturally, the first chapter deals with the earliest periods, when this area merely consisted of meadows and a hot water outfall below the city walls, but the story really starts in the next chapter when the Avon Navigation to Bath was completed in 1729. From hereon the city became an 'inland port' with the ability to import the heavy materials required for building the new Georgian developments. For this purpose Broad Quay was constructed, where timber, roof-tiles, ironwork, &c, could be landed. At about the same time Avon Street was also laid out leading from the city, initially intended to provide well-built town houses for wealthy visitors. However, this was soon superseded by the more fashionable developments further uphill, and the street became better known as a red-light district. At the same time the entire area began to take on the character of a typical 'dockland', progressively filled with a mixture of cramped artisan housing and commercial premises including warehouses, stoneyards, slaughterhouses and light leather and parchment manufacturers. By the 19th century it had already become the home to a large number of the city's poorest inhabitants notorious for crime, disease and poor sanitary conditions - much of it vulnerable to inundation during the river floods.

However, from the 1840s onwards new industrial businesses also began to appear, including clay tobacco pipe manufacturers, a pottery, dye works, sawmills and several innovative foundries and engineering works. Measures were also taken to improve the sanitary and living conditions of the poor of the city, and a most notable find was the remains of a public wash-house in Milk Street, installed in 1846-47 – the earliest well-preserved example of this type of institution to have been archaeologically excavated. Nevertheless, by the early 20th century, water-borne trade had virtually ceased, and the opportunity arose to demolish the whole area. Much clearance was carried out in the 1930s, but any further development was halted by the outbreak of WWII, and it is only now that the Bath Quays development can complete the original plans to turn the area into a riverside park.

All this has been thoroughly and accurately compiled (despite the inclusion of the old myth that the Avon was navigable in the Middle Ages – in its natural state this river was completely impassable) whilst being well laid out and very readable. Good use has been made of a large number of old maps, prints and photographs together with the views of the archaeological remains. This book is not only a valuable contribution to the history of Bath and the study of social and industrial history but also excellent value for the general reader.

**Mike Chapman**