

Bathwick Villa.

George Hobson c.1890



The Victoria Art Gallery topographical collection is extensive and covers from the 17th century to the present day.

There are detailed early drawings, elegant Georgian watercolours, and rather large Victorian oils. Many are of the famous views but there are some great rarities.

This simple watercolour is one such rarity and shows Bathwick Villa towards the end of its life.

The villa was built in 1777 for Alderman Ferry and the house and gardens designed for public entertainment. It was visited, in 1780, by Fanny Burney who clearly was not impressed. The cheap ornamentation gave the appearance of, 'unsuccessful attempts at making something of nothing'. '...after parading through four or five vulgarly, showy closets, not rooms, we were conducted into a very gaudy little apartment where the master of the house sat reclining on his arm, as if in contemplation. She also described one of the, 'puerile wonders he delighted in. This was a strange device that causes the dining table to rise up through a trap door in the floor and a carved eagle to descend from the ceiling and take up the table cloth revealing a rich display of confectionary'.

I must say that I am on Alderman Ferry's side in this and that it is a matter of regret that he was heavily mortgaged. He sold the house in 1782 and although it remained a place of retreat for Bath socialites who assembled for Pleasure, leisure and entertainment, it gradually declined due to competition nearer to town.

The villa stood to the right of the approach road to the later constructed Cleveland Bridge, roughly on the sites of 10-15 Forester Road. It closed in 1790 and by 1851 was subdivided and used as a poor house. It became derelict and was finally demolished in 1897.