

Sydney Gardens History and Heritage Trail



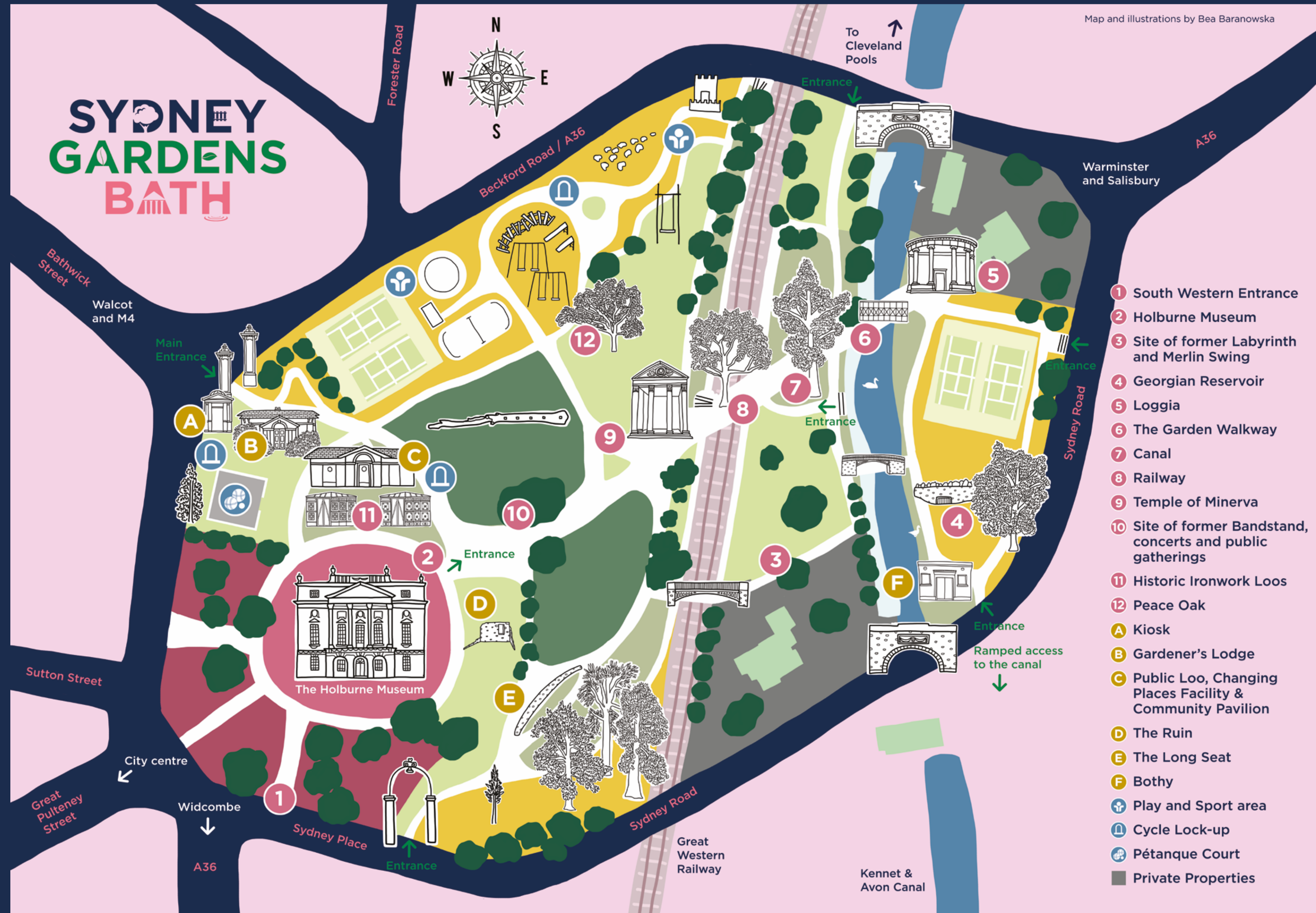
Sketch of the Fancy Fair at Sydney Gardens c 1840

SYDNEY
GARDENS
BATH

Over 200 years of history
from the Georgian Pleasure
Garden to our Public Park

SYDNEY GARDENS BATH

Map and illustrations by Bea Baranowska



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Welcome to Sydney Gardens – Georgian Bath’s answer to the historic Vauxhall Pleasure gardens in London. Designed to be a place of fun, relaxation, entertainment, excitement, wonder and sustenance; they were an 18th Century version of our modern-day theme parks.

Sydney Gardens opened in 1795 to provide an open space for amusements and relaxation for the residents of Bath New Town, the area to the south eastern side of the river and the newly constructed Pulteney Bridge, Great Pulteney Street and Laura Place.

They were modelled on the famous Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens in London. People would come here to eat, drink and make merry. Attractions included a Merlin swing – a forerunner of swing boats seen in some fun fairs today – music and feats of daring from circus-type performers, fireworks, lantern-lit walkways and curious miniature buildings and ruins, intended to add points of interest for the visitors strolling the gravel paths.

The original layout of a 12-acre lozenge-shaped hexagon, was designed by the architect Thomas Baldwin but after he became embroiled in financial difficulty and was dismissed from Bath Corporation, the work was completed under the surveyor and architect Charles Harcourt Masters.



Harcourt Masters Plan

The Gardens took their name from politician Thomas Townshend, 1st Viscount Sydney, after whom Sydney, Australia and Sydney, Nova Scotia were named. He was heavily involved in British Colonial activities and trade, such as the establishment of the British colony in Australia and overseeing the East India Company from 1784-1790. The site and surrounding residential buildings was named after the Viscount in an attempt to gain favour but there is no evidence that Sydney ever visited the Gardens. He died in 1800.

Since their heyday in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, the gardens have gone through many changes and alterations in an attempt to keep up with the fashions of each generation. They have seen times of popularity and abundance and times of deterioration and hardship.

But in the early 21st Century, Sydney Gardens survives and provides a vital green lung for this part of the city of Bath.



Looking up through the park to the Loggia in 2020



1 South Western Entrance (off Sydney Place)

Initially, after the Sydney Tavern - now the Holburne Museum - was opened, entrance to the gardens was through the main building. But those on horseback - both women and men - could begin their trot around the perimeter of the Gardens here. There was also a small beer server, The Sydney Tap, at the start of the Ride, which was destroyed in a gas explosion in 1850.

The Ride, which also had leaping bars, ran the whole way around the outside of the Gardens, and even when the Canal came through not long after the Gardens opened, the Ride was narrowed as it passed over the bridges so riders could continue to enjoy it.



Entrance to Sydney Gardens (Sidney Tap) by Jean-Claude Nattes 1805



Continue on to The Holburne Museum

If the Holburne gates are closed, please enter the park through the entrance on Sydney Place, a bit further round from number 1 on the map.



2 The Holburne Museum

The building opened in 1798, when it was described as ‘an elegant new-built tavern containing a banqueting room, coffee and billiard rooms, elegant orchestra and every other requisite for genteel accommodation.’ Originally known as the Sydney Tavern, it was soon known as the Sydney Hotel.

The wall which encircles the ground at the back of the Holburne dates from 1922. Also in this part of the gardens is a pretty building, which many think must be an original feature. But it is in fact a WW2 air raid wardens post. It was converted into a tea house in the 1980s and is now used by the Holburne.



Rear Elevation of the Sydney Hotel by JC Nattes showing the dinner boxes, 1805

In these early days, Sydney Gardens' fortunes were linked to those of the hotel as they formed part of the same premises. Hotel guests could make use of the gardens and any other visitors would pay to enter either at the gate of the gardens or by procuring tickets from various shops and inns. Cost of entry to the Gardens at this time was 6d.

It was one of three Pleasure Gardens which competed for the patronage of locals and visitors alike; as two more gardens – Grosvenor and Spring Gardens – were still in operation when Sydney Gardens opened in 1795. Spring Gardens had opened in 1737, becoming the pre-eminent pleasure gardens in Bath after 1759, while Grosvenor had opened as a competitor in 1793, but neither survived long after Sydney Gardens opened.

The Holburne Museum itself has been through various incarnations in the past 250 years. A succession of owners struggled to make it pay as a hotel, but their increasingly ambitious plans, devised with much enthusiasm, so often fell victim to the weather. Most proprietors ended up in the bankruptcy court.

Eventually, in 1852, the Mineral Water Hospital – still known then as the General Hospital, tried to buy the hotel and grounds to move out of the city centre.

When that plan fell through, it was turned into a Proprietary College for the sons of gentlemen in 1852. In effect it was a military academy. Many of the students went on to fight in the Crimea and Boer wars.



The rear elevation of the Sydney Hotel about 1800.

In 1891, when the 97 year lease of Sydney Gardens expired, the site (including the former College) was sold. By 1894 plans had been drawn up to replace the College building with a large hotel including 75 guest rooms, a dining room seating 150 people, and a Winter Garden overlooking Sydney Gardens. This plan was abandoned however and the Empire Hotel was built at Orange Grove in the centre of Bath instead.

The building was sold in 1911, finally disconnecting it from the Gardens. Between 1913-15 it was redesigned by the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield. The colonnaded loggia at the rear was removed and the orchestra area (now the outdoor café seating) was landscaped.

It opened in 1916 as the Holburne of Menstrie Museum, housing collections from the late Sir William Holburne, who derived much of his wealth from a bequest of an annuity, paid for by income from the transatlantic slave trade.

The glass extension by the architect Eric Parry was added in 2011. It houses a café, study areas and more of the museum's treasures. The Holburne is now popular with both tourists and Bathonians alike, with exhibitions of contemporary and historic work, a participatory programme and many arts-based events.



Continue on to Labyrinth and Merlin Swing



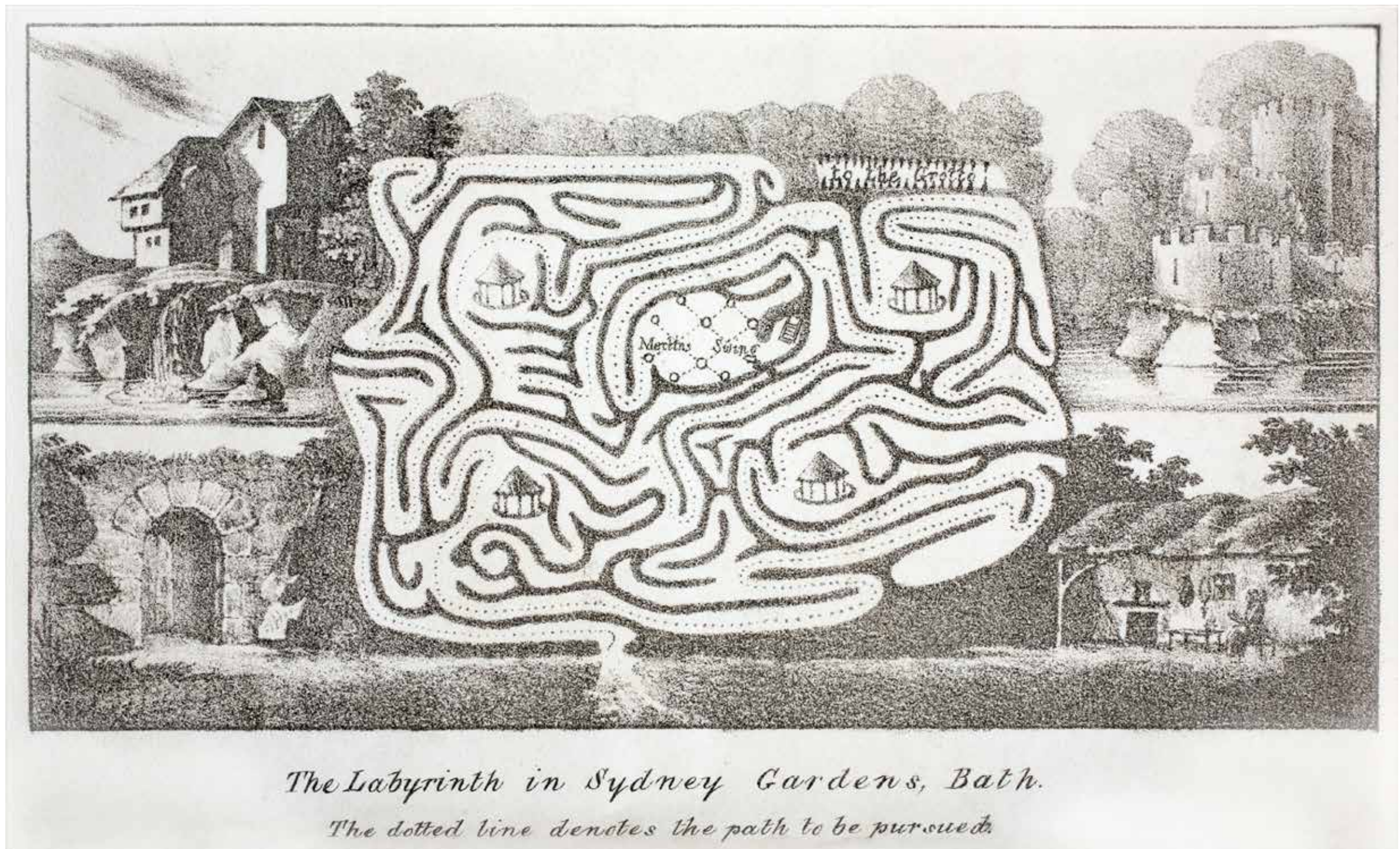
3 Labyrinth and Merlin Swing

On a site now occupied by the garden of a large house, lay the original Labyrinth and Merlin Swing, alongside a stone-built Grotto. These were the fashionable garden features and attractions of their day.

The Labyrinth was a particular source of fun in Sydney Gardens. Described as 'nearly twice as large as that in the gardens of Hampton Court' and frequented by Jane Austen, it was a meandering series of hedges and paths that ultimately led you out into the Grotto. The Grotto was constructed from local tufa stone, giving it an otherworldly air which the Georgians greatly enjoyed. Grottoes were popular in many gardens and estates at this time, through to the Victorian period.

The Labyrinth was surrounded by high hedges and trees and at its centre was a Merlin swing. This was a mechanical invention, devised by the Belgian inventor John Joseph Merlin. It was purported to improve health through the effects of swinging. Exact details of it have been difficult to discover, but an eye-witness account suggests it was the fore-runner of modern fairground swing-boats; Merlin swings were certainly

starting to appear in fairgrounds by 1820. It held up to four people, swinging them high above the Labyrinth and giving passengers a glimpse across the gardens, before plunging them downwards and swinging them up again for a view on the other side. It was a must for thrill-seekers and courting couples alike – an opportunity to get deliberately lost in the maze and have some liberating fun on the swing.



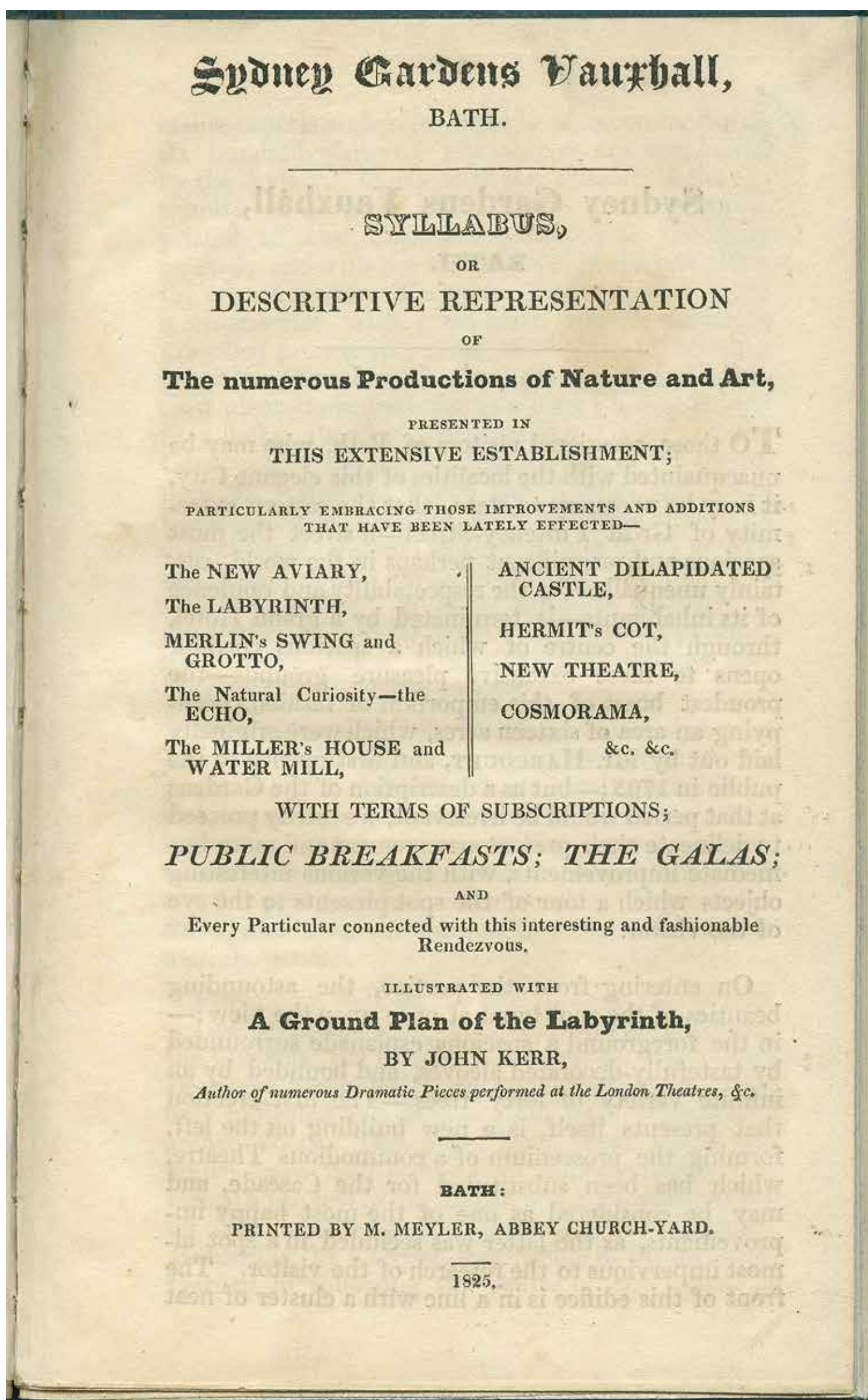
The Labyrinth in Sydney Gardens surrounded by depictions of other garden features including the Sham Castle and Hermit's Cot.

Also situated here was a grotto, built from tufa stone, a porous and decorative limestone and covered in ferns and moss. Such features were popular attractions in Georgian parks and gardens. Its remains have been built over by Lonsdale and Ravenswell Houses. However, there is a Grotto in the grounds of the Bath Spa Hotel (formerly Vellore House). There is evidence to suggest that the original Grotto was re-situated there.

In its heyday, the Gardens themselves would be the venue for a range of different types of entertainment; including theatrical performances – more akin to the

circuses of modern day. Several ambitious events focussed around illuminations and fireworks were held. Some fell victim to the elements (rain!) and it is known that Jane Austen and her family crossed the road from No 4 Sydney Place, to witness these on at least one occasion.

They were a huge spectacle, along with the lanterns and adornments which lit up the pathways after dark. There was also a Cosmorama which delighted crowds with an exhibition of paintings, shown four at a time and changed frequently, of 'the most celebrated spots on the globe'.



Advert for entertainments in Sydney Gardens Vauxhall, in 1825

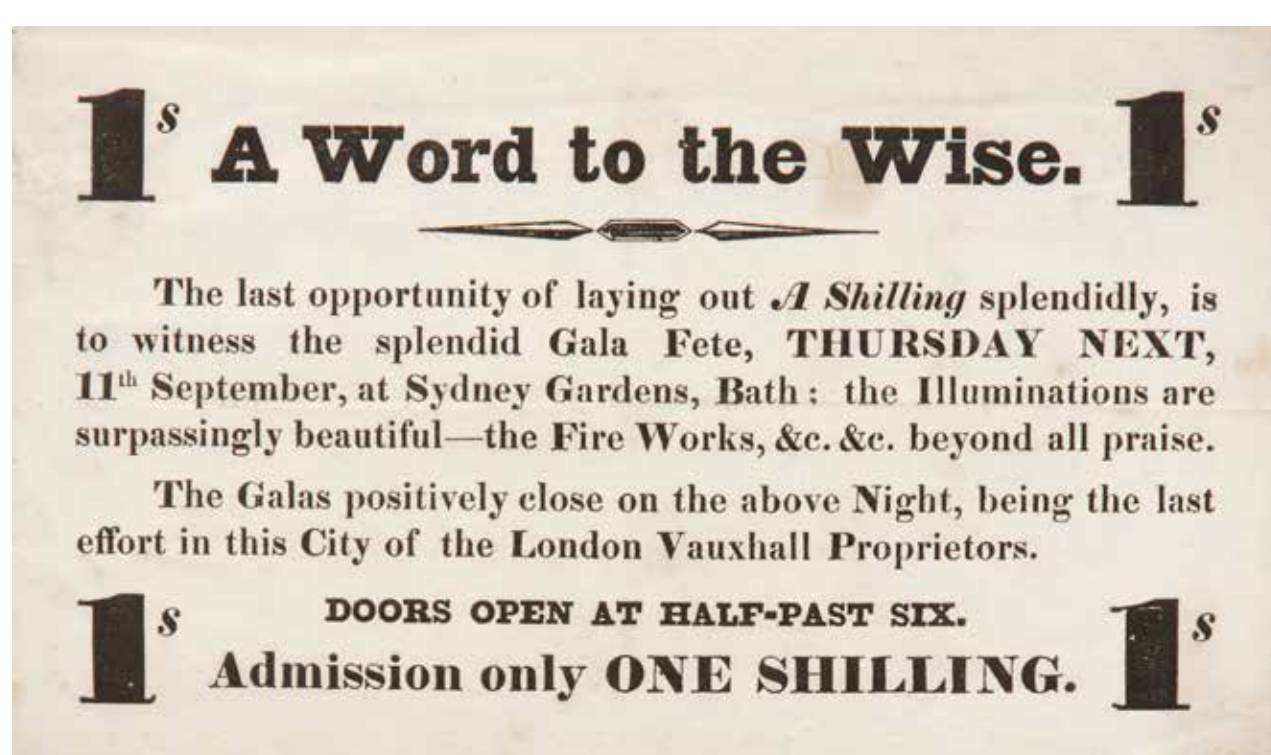
Continue up to the Georgian Reservoirs



4 Georgian Reservoirs

At the top of the gardens lie springs, which feeds two small reservoirs which still exist under the park here, with a beautifully constructed stone-domed roof. The reservoirs were part of the original Bathwick Waterworks, which supplied water to the Pulteney estate houses. After the creation of the gardens, these were also used to feed the rills and cascades which ran down the Northern side of the gardens.

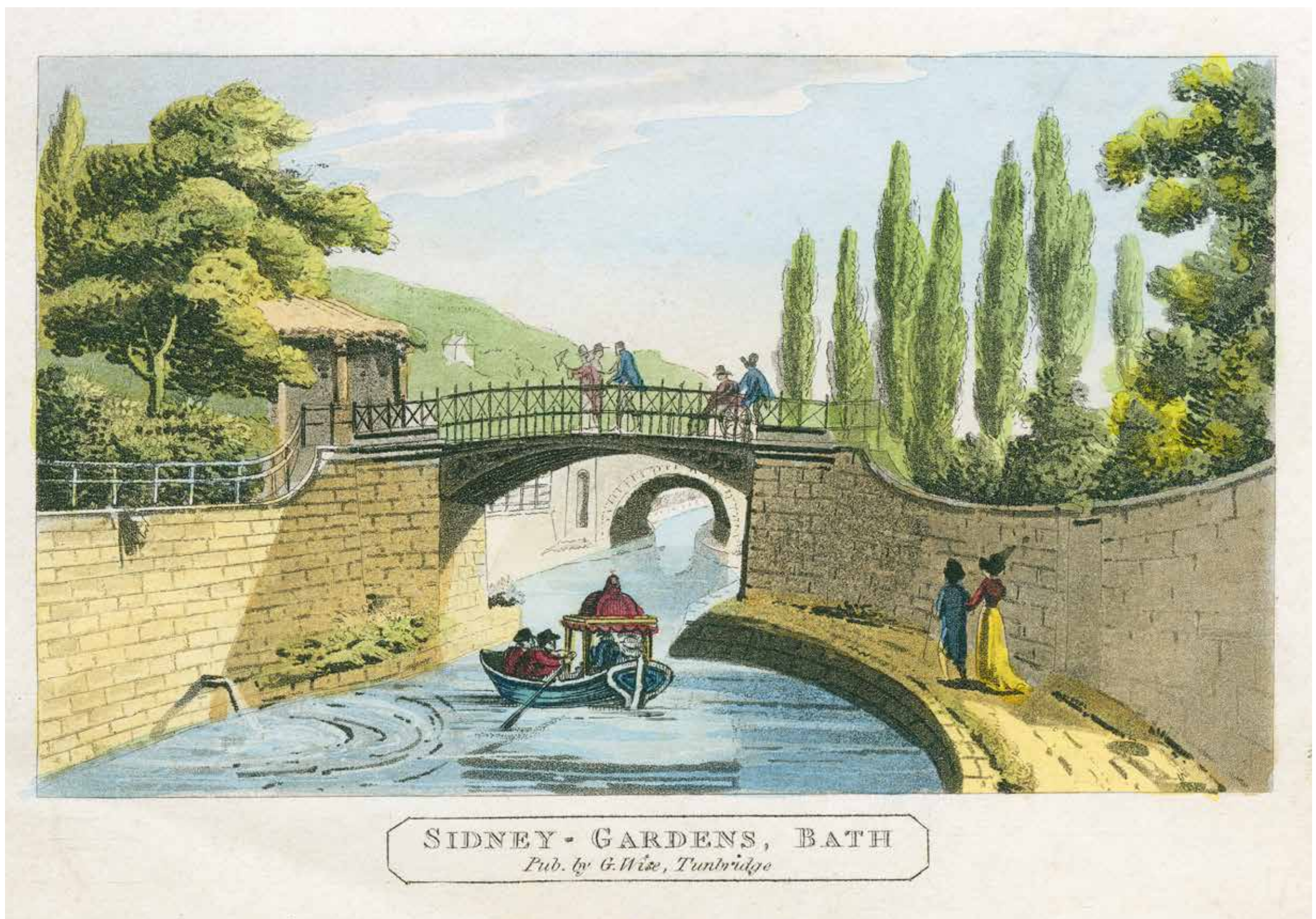
Up here was a Sham Castle, complete with a moat, which marked the start of the cascades down to a pond at the north-western side of the Gardens. They would have been another attractive feature for visitors to stroll around and enjoy – as well as providing a practical use of keeping the gardens irrigated. It was frequently used as a dramatic backdrop for firework displays.



Advertisement For The Gala Fete At Sydney Gardens Bath 1830s/40s'

All of these features have been covered over during the intervening years. But work is continuing to discover the site of a mechanical fountain installed in the 1830s by one of the Sydney Hotel's owners.

In recent years, a sink hole developed above one of the water courses leading from the reservoir. It's been filled in but is a reminder of the multiple springs which well up under much of Bath.



Sydney Gardens with Pavilion in background, published by G. Wise, Tunbridge, circa 1820



Continue on to Loggia



5 Loggia

Also at the top of the Gardens, a stone pavilion or Loggia was constructed to provide shelter for people strolling around the park - remember Bath is notoriously wet! In 1938, the original construction was substantially remodelled to a design by the city engineer because the council did not want to pay the costs of restoring it properly. At the time opinion was divided between those who could not see anything wrong with the 'repair' and those who felt it was an eyesore. Today it is likely that the original structure would have been strengthened rather than demolished.

Elsewhere in the grounds were a miller's house complete with a waterwheel fed by the freshwater springs and well as a 'Hermit's Cot', below the Labyrinth, housing its own model hermit!

The 'castle' which sat just inside the Ride at the top is gone now and was probably badly damaged during the construction works on the railway; the curving path from the Loggia to the railway goes past the site. Beyond it is an area later used as a plant Nursery. This acts as a useful guide to the width of the former Ride.

It is possible the ride was originally covered with bark-type waste from the local leather tanning sites as there were several mentions of it being “dust-free”. It was later “macadamised” with a new surface invented by John Macadam. This was made of two layers of small stones, the upper layer having stones no larger than 2 centimetres. It was cheap to lay but rather hard on the horses’ hooves!

Later, with the construction of roads around the site, and a proposal to build 12 houses around the Gardens, it slowly became carved up, either sold off or amalgamated into the grounds of the gardens.

The twelve houses were never constructed but three sites were built on, reducing the gardens in size to quite a considerable extent.



Sydney Gardens with a cannon in the foreground, circa 1920s.

Continue on to The Garden Walkway



6 The Garden Walkway

The main walkway, or “Vauxhall” through the gardens, would have afforded a fabulous view of Twerton Roundhill or High Barrow Hill. There are those who believe it runs along a ley line. Local legend has it that the High Barrow is the burial site of Bath’s early founder, King Bladud. However, the hill is now known to be a natural feature.



The bandstand in Sydney Gardens
circa 1870



The bandstand in Sydney Gardens
circa 1910

At the time of its construction, the ‘science’ of geometry was at the forefront of city planning (as with cities such as Washington DC in the USA and parts of Paris, France). Lines of roads and walkways radiating out from a central focal point were popular. The earliest plans of the estate suggest a formal, geometric layout of streets, even for the gardens. The walkway, the central axis of the gardens, lay on the

same line as Great Pulteney Street and Upper Great Pulteney Street to the east (eventually the first part of the Warminster Road) which was intended as grand entry into Bath. Pulteney planned a route to cross the River Avon at Bathford, passing through Bathampton, although the precise line seems have been chosen to point directly at Barrow Hill. However, a much softer, picturesque style, which Grosvenor Gardens had chosen, was replacing formal garden layout. There is much to suggest that the proprietors of Sydney Gardens hastily changed their plans to adopt the new fashion. However, keeping the walkway meant that, in the early years before the many trees and shrubs grew up, the views looking across the city would have been spectacular.

A building known as The Middle Bar, an early form of refreshments kiosk, was sited to the south of the walkway but was too close to the line of the railway to be saved when the railway came through.

There was a stone shelter on the other side of the walkway, roughly where the Temple of Minerva now stands. It was an original feature but when the Temple of Minerva was moved here (see 9) it was demolished and the stone re-used to build a store for the gardeners. It was later converted to an electricity sub-station. Reverting to a base for gardening and volunteering, the Bothy (D) has now been restored to a usable building.



Continue on to the Canal



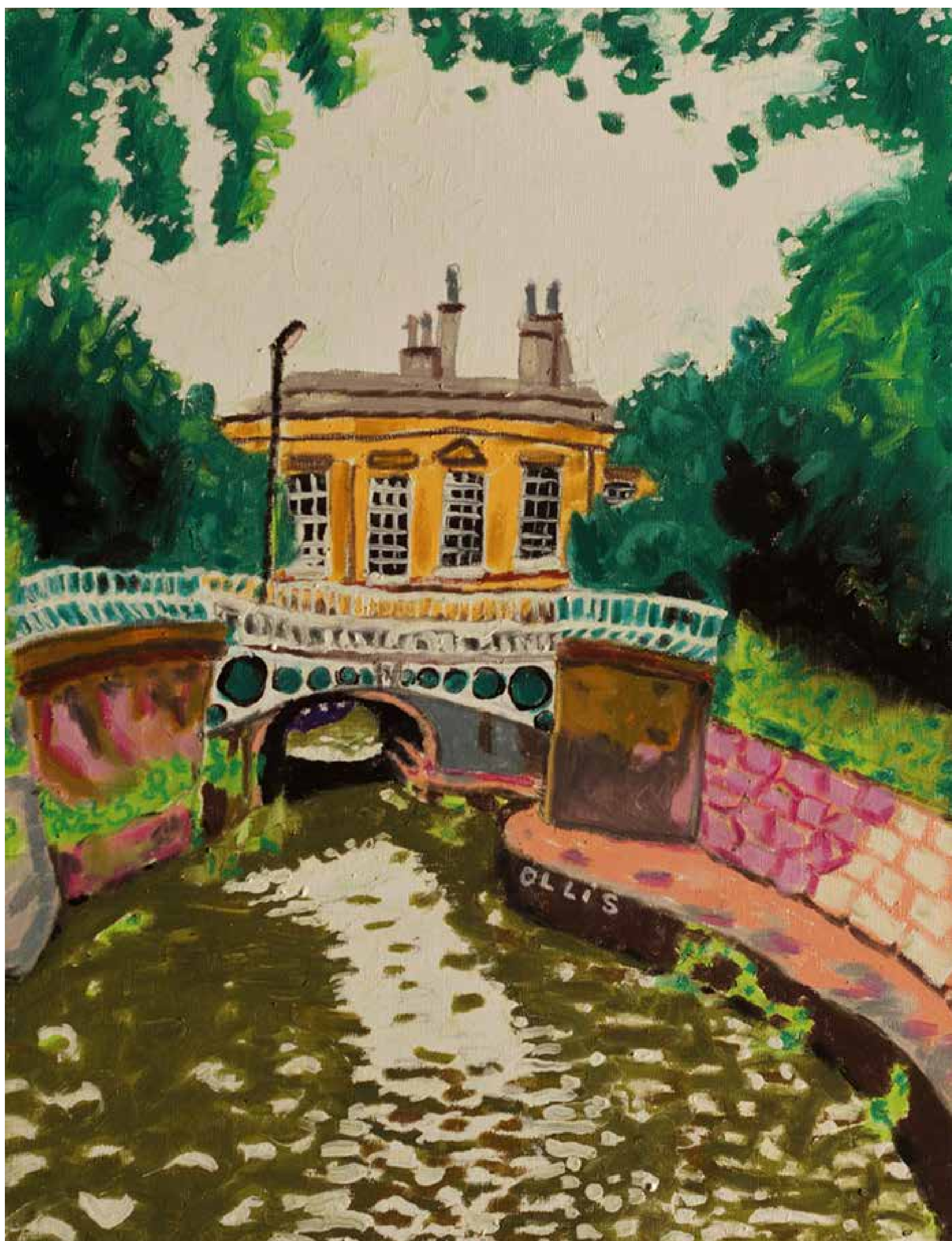
7 Canal

Cutting for the Kennet & Avon Canal began in 1794. Originally it was to have been diverted through a tunnel to the south of the Gardens. But after much wrangling, the canal company agreed to pay £2,100 to the owners of the Sydney Hotel (as it was by this time being called) and to install two Chinese-style ornamental bridges, designed by John Rennie, to allow access to the upper part of the Gardens. They were installed by George Stothert of Bath and made in Coalbrookdale in Shropshire. Mr Stothert had interests in the Gardens and was an agent for the iron works at Coalbrookdale. A win-win for him!

On either side of Sydney Gardens are stone bridges and on each one there is a carved face. The face on the East bridge represents Old Father Thames and on the Western end bridge is a depiction of Sabrina, Spirit of the Severn.

Why are they here? Waterways around the world have long been associated with spirits, deities and other supernatural beings; think of The River Ganges in India. The origins of Father Thames are unknown but archaeological finds along the river in London have thrown up all sort of items related to river worship.

The image of Father Thames appears on buildings along the river in the Capital city. In one famous modern depiction, he is shown rising from the water holding a trident-like object pointing east towards the sea.



Kennet and Avon Canal - by Bernard Ollis
(with kind permission of the artist)

He was mentioned in folk tales and poetry and his image was often used in cartoons and sketches aimed at describing the estate of the river – particularly during the Great Stink of 1855, where he is shown covered in sewage and rubbish.

His image here should not, therefore, be a surprise, due to the fact that decorations on bridges often depicted such mythological characters.

Who is Sabrina? Sabrina is the Latin name for the Welsh river goddess, Hafren (Severn in English).

She is a mythical figure who gave her name to the River Severn which flows from Wales through Worcestershire to Gloucestershire. Legend has it that the third leader of Roman Britain, Loocrinus deserted his wife, Gwendolen and had a child by another woman. The child – a girl called Sabrina, is drowned by Gwendolen in the river, along with her mother, and gives it her name.

Before the construction of the Great Western Railway, the canal was the main transport link between the south east and south west of England. You can access the canal and the towpath directly from the park at the gate between the two white iron bridges.



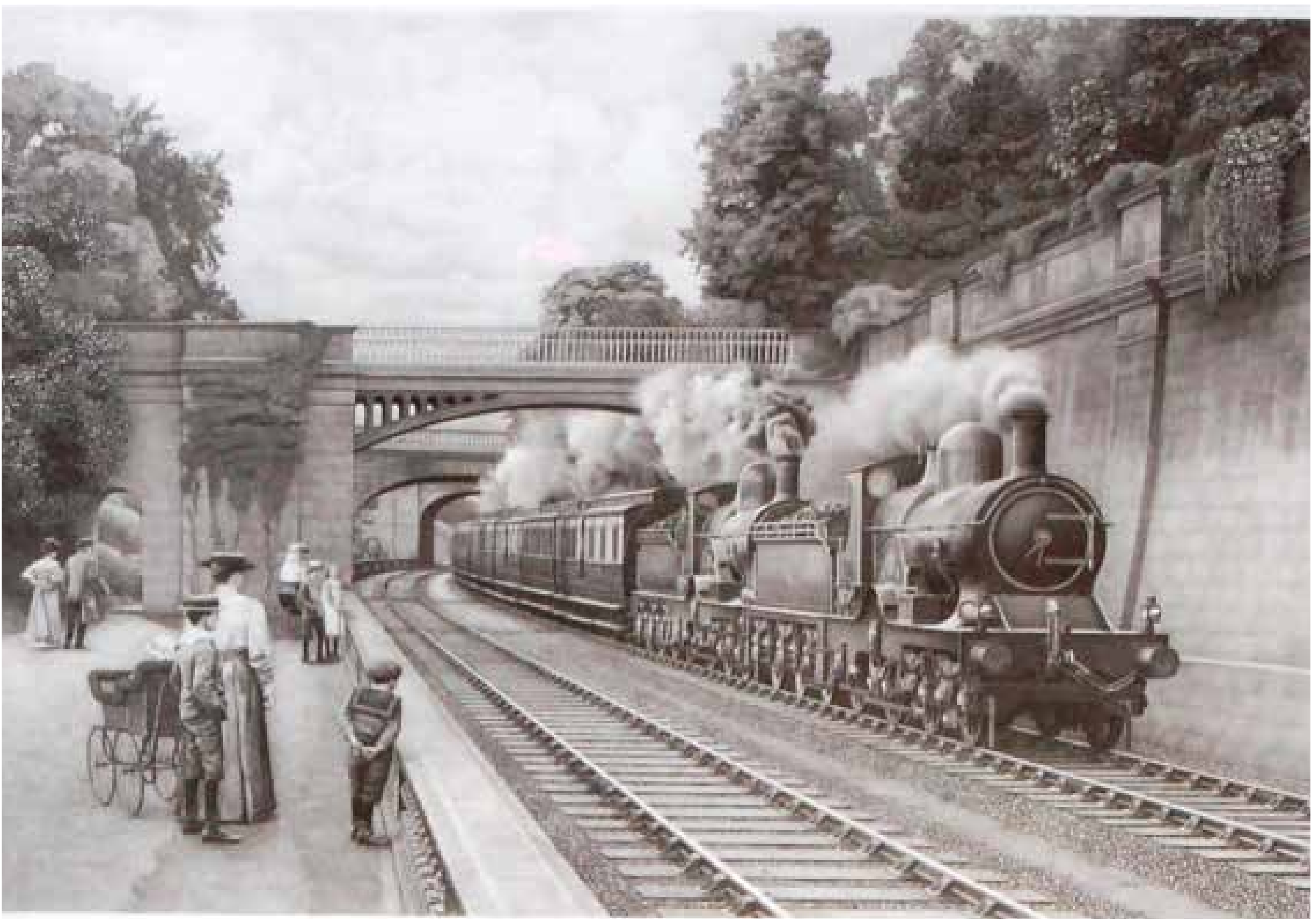
Continue on to the Railway

8



8 Railway

Work on the Sydney Gardens stretch of The Great Western Railway began in 1839. It was designed by the world famous 19th Century engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It effectively cut the Gardens in half.



Steam Train Sydney Gardens Bath by JS Gibb, late 19th Century.

Two bridges were built over the railway to connect the footpaths in the Gardens. The railways were such a marvel that no one gave much thought to the effect

which noisy, smoky steam trains would have upon the tranquillity of the gardens. In fact, a gravel path was laid alongside the tracks to allow visitors to walk alongside and watch in wonder as the trains hurtled past – at this time the Firefly model could get up to 50mph.

In January 1840, Brunel made an enigmatic sketch of a Chinoiserie style building to stand beside the railway line. It may have been intended as a tea house to replace the lost Middle Bar, as a place where people could sit and watch his trains in comfort, or even as a dedicated station for the gardens. It was never built and remains an enigma.



Great Western Railway through Sydney Gardens, 1844



Continue on to the Temple of Minerva



9 Temple of Minerva

A much newer feature of the Gardens, the structure was originally constructed for the Festival of Empire at The Crystal Palace in London in 1911; it was designed as a representation of the Temple of Minerva at the Roman Baths. At this time, the British Empire was at its zenith. Britain had colonised a quarter of the world's land mass and the establishment was happy to celebrate this fact with events like this one, organised to celebrate the Coronation of King George V.



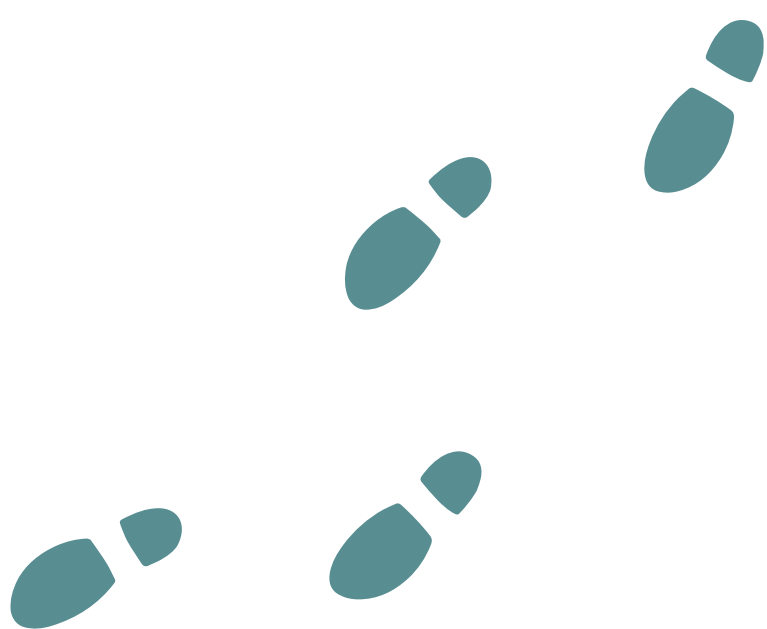
The Temple of Minerva, Sydney Gardens, Bath circa 1915

After the Festival was over, Croydon Council requested its removal. After much wrangling between Bath and Croydon Corporations (local authorities) over the cost of relocating the structure, the temple was brought to the Gardens in 1913.

Minerva is the Roman Goddess of Aquae Sulis, the Roman name for Bath. Its original murals have been painted over. On some mornings, yoga and tai-chi practitioners can be found exercising under its roof taking shelter.



Sydney Gardens, by Samuel Poole, 20th century



Continue on to the Bandstand and Gothic Hall



10 Bandstand and Gothic Hall

Another Victorian structure, whose location is a mystery, is the Gothic Hall, a meeting house and venue for concerts which was much used, according to historian Kirsten Elliott, in the same decade.

However, by this point, the gardens were being frequented by youngsters indulging in anti-social behaviour such as stone throwing at trains, petty vandalism and theft. This, combined with complaints about noise by the Sydney Place residents, meant it did not prove a successful enterprise.



Concert goes in front of the bandstand, Sydney Gardens, circa.1910

The mid 19th century saw a rise in popularity of the gardens, with Victorian tastes coming to the fore. A Floral Fete and Band Committee rented the site and much use of it was made for concerts and outdoor shows. The rent was high at £100 per annum and by the end of the century the Committee often struggled to meet this. The Committee also tried to maintain the gardens though income from the shows and pageants, until the site was purchased by the Corporation in 1913.



Band Stand, Sydney Gardens, Bath, by Charles John Phipps, c.1855

One addition which was to prove a real draw at this time was the iron bandstand, installed in 1861. It housed a Hanoverian (German) Band, which had a summer residency in the gardens at the invitation of the owner of the Holburne. Bath had attracted Hanoverian musicians since the mid 18th century, such as the Herschel family. It was a means of attracting more people into the gardens, which by this time were struggling to pay their way. This type of music was popularised by Prince Albert when all things Germanic were the height of fashion. The bands

comprised of professional musicians who toured Europe playing the popular (now classical) music of the day.

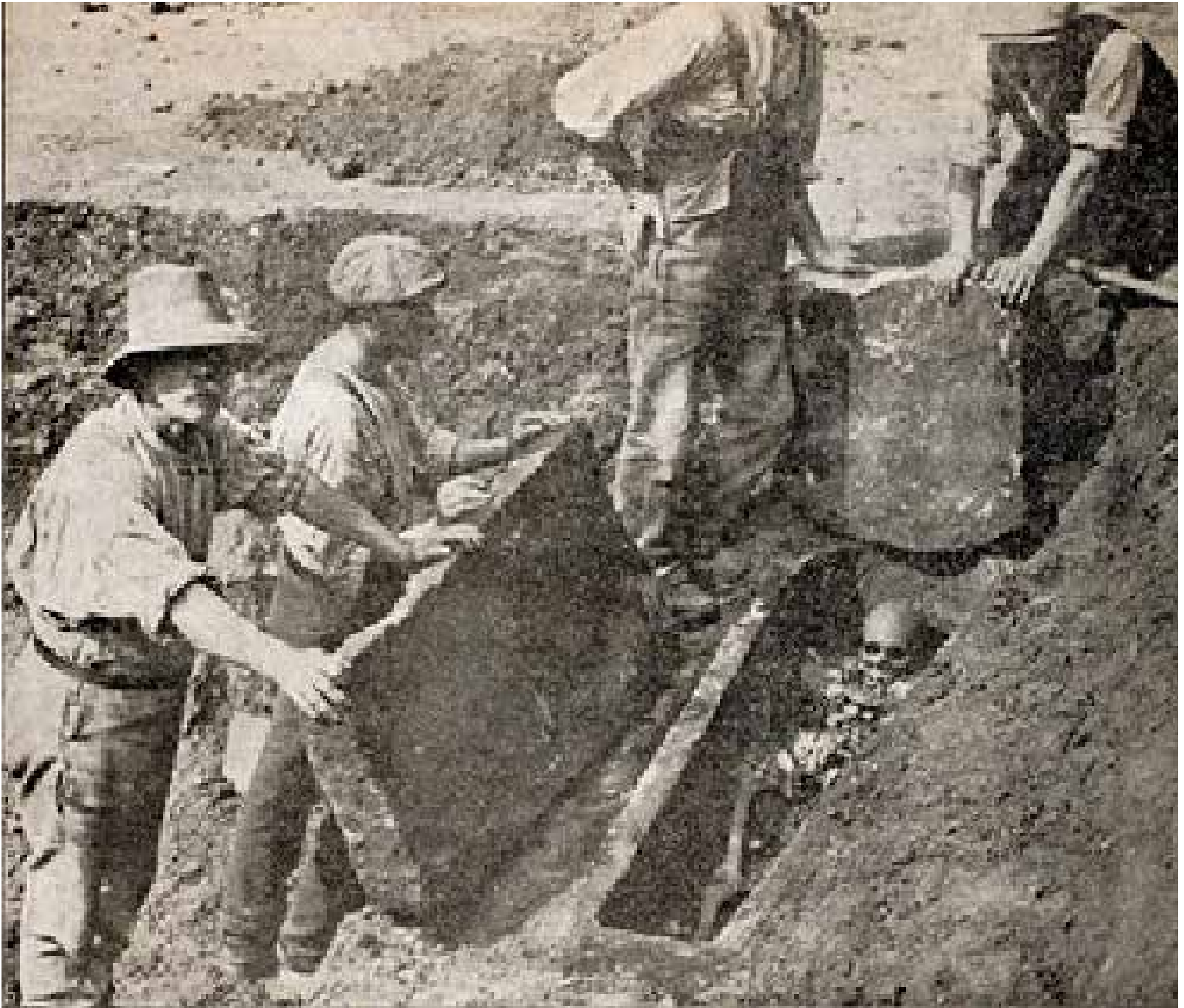
Later, they were replaced by Brass Bands and local colliery bands. There are photographs of injured First World War soldiers in Bath Chairs, knees covered in blankets, enjoying a performance by one of these bands. The bandstand was removed and sold for scrap in 1950. Photographs and drawings still remain of its original design. Perhaps, one day a replica can be put in its place?

Across the green from the bandstand is a raised area, used as a seating area from which to watch concerts. This area was often used for public meetings, including in earlier times, for rallies by anti-slavery campaigners. The Bristol poet and abolitionist, Hannah More, stayed on Great Pulteney Street, as did the politician William Wilberforce, who was married in Walcot Church to his Bath-born wife, Barbara Spooner. The irony of this is that Great Pulteney Street was financed from the vast holdings of Sir William Pulteney, who owned plantations and therefore enslaved people in Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua.

When the slave trade was finally abolished in 1834, slave owners sought compensation for losing their plantation and trade investments. Local records show that there were a couple of families having shares in the slave plantations living in this part of the city. One of them was the Earl of Darlington, later the Duke of Cleveland. He inherited the Pulteney estates after the death of Henrietta Laura Pulteney and with that the plantations in the Caribbean. Cleveland House, on the southern edge of the park over the canal is named after him.

Roman Tomb and 12th Century Tomb

A series of archaeological finds over the past two centuries have led historians to believe that Sydney Gardens was built on the site of an ancient burial ground.



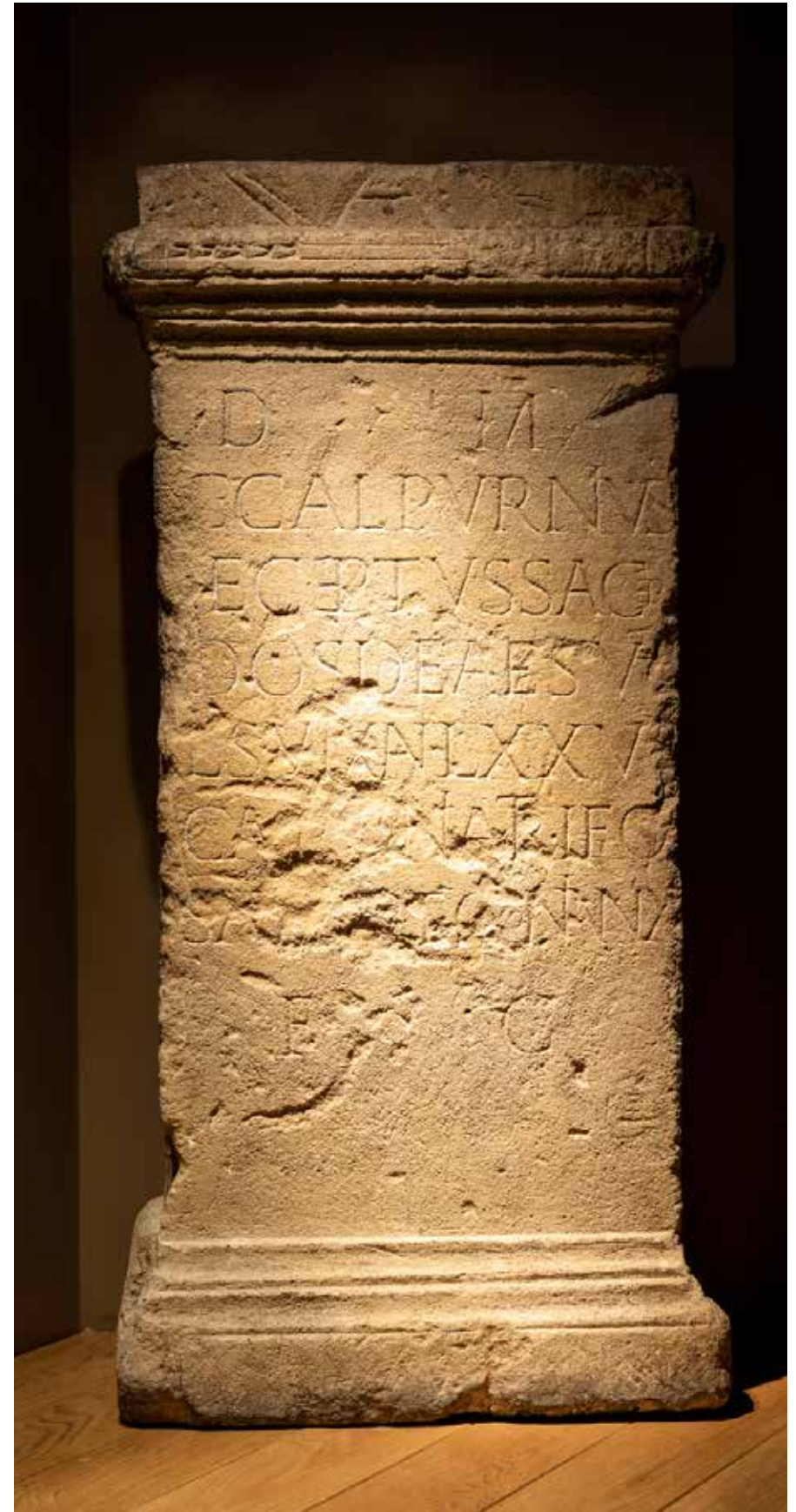
Roman coffin found in Sydney Gardens

One tomb lid, now thought to date back to the 1600s was used as a bridge over the rills and cascades.

During the initial groundworks for Sydney Gardens around 1793, a Roman tombstone was discovered, with the inscription:

*To the spirits of the departed Gaius Calpurnius
Receptus Priest of the Goddess Sulis
lived seventy-five years Calpurnia Trifosa his
freedwoman (and) wife had this set up*

This was the tombstone of a priest of Sulis Minerva, dedicated by his wife, who we can tell from the Latin inscription was a freedwoman – herself a former slave. At the Sacred Spring at Bath there were the Roman Baths, which you can visit today, and the Temple of Sulis Minerva. Priests like Receptus would have officiated ceremonies at the Temple and tended the flames that were kept burning around the statue of the Goddess Minerva.



Tombstone for Calpurnius Receptus

Throughout the 19th and into the early 20th century, other indications of Roman activity were uncovered, including several stone coffins containing human remains, a coin, and decorated Roman pottery. It is likely that Sydney Gardens was once part of a vast cemetery on the outskirts of Roman Bath. A Roman coffin which contained a horse's head was also discovered in Sydney Gardens. Horse burials are not uncommon in the late Iron Age and Romano-British period as horses were incredibly significant, but a lone horse's head is an unusual find.

In the spring of 2021, during groundworks for the new play area, an unusual stone sarcophagus dating from Roman times was found giving a very rare glimpse into local burial practices two thousand years ago. The sarcophagus, a Bath limestone casket and lid, contained two burials. A cremation burial was also recovered which is the only recorded cremation burial from the Bathwick Cemetery to date.

Continue on to the Edwardian Conveniences



11 Edwardian Conveniences

Iron works in parks were very prevalent in the 19th Century. There were railings all around the gardens, until they were removed for use in the munitions factories of WW2.

But metal construction toilets are a rarity. The Gentlemen's toilets were originally unisex, with stalls on one side and a men's area on the left hand side of the entrance. They were designed and manufactured by William Farrer at the Star Works in Birmingham and installed in 1914.

They cost £400, a cast iron structure having been chosen for its economy. It may to surprise you know that these structures are now also Grade II Listed buildings. The reason for this, say Historic England, is that it is unusual to find the complete survival of industrial prefabrication as applied to this specialised and vital building type.

Cast iron toilets were mass-produced structures but in its listing document Historic England note the casting is of good quality, and the building is far more decorative than would be strictly necessary for utility. The structure is based on a rectangular tubular

framework which supports cast iron panels with decorative bands, over a plinth, dado and top; the plinth is articulated by decorative frames, with square decorative panels to dado level; and the top has a pierced ventilation frieze with a foliate motif.

The Ladies Lavatories were cast in 1921, at the Saracen Foundry in Glasgow to McFarlane's patented design. The structure is based on a similar rectangular tubular framework to the Gents' toilets.

Inside, the toilets have moulded cubicles and stalls made entirely of metal. They were screened with metal grills and rumour has it that there was even a sign on the exit of the Gents to remind visitors to button up before leaving!

You may be relieved (yes, the pun is intended!) to know that the Edwardian Gents and Ladies toilets have been replaced with modern toilet blocks, including a new Changing Places facility, but the iron construction units are being restored, with both of them being put to good use – the Gents as a museum of public sanitation and the story of the restoration and the Ladies will be an early learning centre.

Water stands and drinking fountains were to be found throughout the gardens, too.

Looking down towards Bathwick Street from the Edwardian Loos, past the new public loos, the main entrance is situated in the north-west corner of the site on Sydney Place.

Immediately to the south-west of the entrance stands a ticket kiosk, installed in 1913 when the council acquired the gardens, with the Bathwick Street entrance added by Bath Corporation in 1914.



Here too on the left, is the Gardener's Lodge. In the 1840s a small Pavilion was added on the north side of the Holburne Museum building, near what is now the Beckford Road entrance. Built in the style of Sir John Soane, it is likely the architect was his pupil Edward Davis. He had already designed a Pavilion for the gardens about this time and it is strikingly similar to some other works by him in Bath, notably his gates to Royal Victoria Park. It was intended as a Gardener's Lodge and living quarters. In the 1980s, it was remodelled to become an educational and learning space for arts activities programmed by the Holburne.



Continue on to the Peace Oak and play area



12 Peace Oak and play area

This area, now beloved of picnickers and dog walkers, is the area which has undergone the most change. Activities and structures have come and gone.

A Rustic Pavilion, housing flower displays concert and public meetings was here; also serving refreshments.

There was also a pond, which was the terminus of the cascades flowing down from the moat of the sham castle ruin. In the 1830s, one of the Hotel's many proprietors installed a mechanical fountain, for use in hydraulic experiments and displays of aquatic wonder. It was made for him by Blanch and Sons of New Bond Street, who also made gas lights to illuminate the hotel.

Originally set aside with a corresponding area on the other side of the Holburne Museum, as a bowling green, in Victorian times this area was used for fetes, flower, small animal and poultry shows; for archery and target practice for young military volunteers. There were also aviaries and greenhouses used by the Horticultural Society.

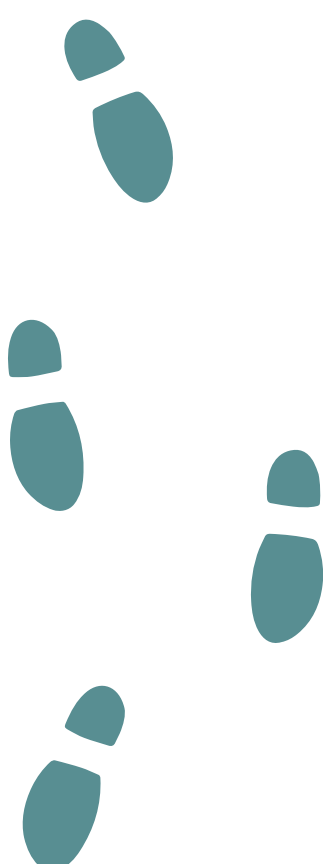
The Society was the instigator of many shows and fetes which took place in the Gardens during the second half of the 19th Century and early 20th.

In 1911 Bath City Council purchased Sydney Gardens, which was then opened to the public in 1913 and visitors were no longer required to pay to gain entry to the gardens except for concerts. This opened up the gardens for a wide variety of uses. In the 20th Century this included Bowling and Tennis.

There are records of the local residents objecting to this decision. Many letters were written to the Corporation expressing concern about the potential for the deterioration of the Gardens both in their upkeep and also in the behaviour of the people frequenting it!

Gradually more features were removed or left to crumble and many of the walkways became overgrown and neglected. The original rare plant species of the early 19th Century were crowded out by the later planting of laurels, pine and fast growing shrubs; presumably put in to reduce the amount of maintenance required and to screen the railway from view.

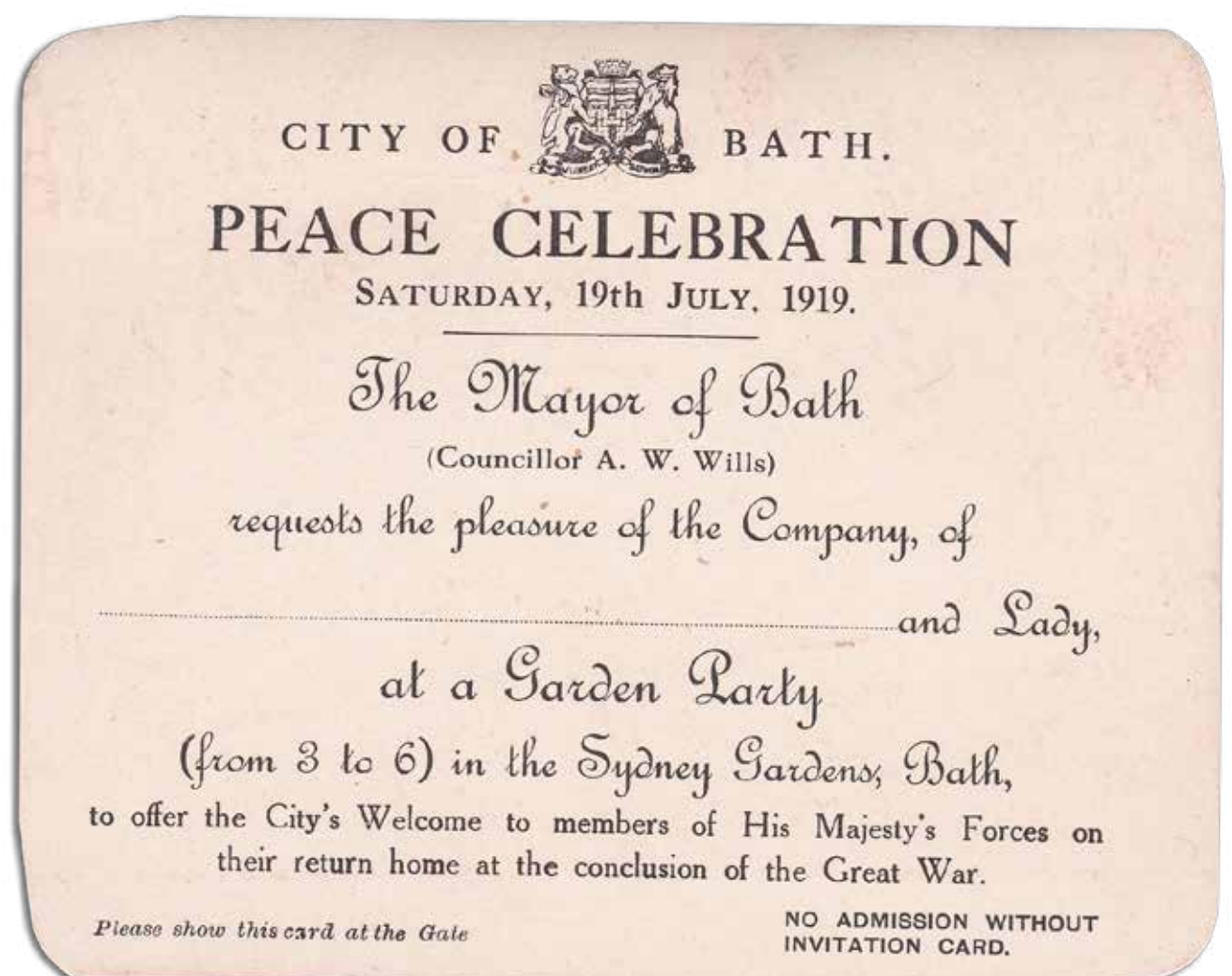
Between 1952 and 1956, a series of illuminated festivals was held at Sydney Gardens, organised by the Spa Committee who also organised the Bath Assembly, a forerunner of the Bath Festival. In the late 20th Century, a formal flower garden, tennis courts, a bowling green, a playground, and new toilet facilities were introduced.





Jane Tollyfield, grand-daughter of Councillor Wills who planted the Peace Oak to commemorate Peace Day in Bath in 1919, gathers with her extended family, to mark the 100th anniversary of the Peace Oak in 2019.

One feature which has stood the test of time, however is the Peace Oak, planted by the Mayor of Bath Cllr Alfred Wills in July 1919, to mark the end of the First World War. The oak – a Golden “Concordia” Oak – was rededicated to the cause of peace by the Deputy Mayor along with Cllr Wills’ granddaughter and family on July 6th 2019. There was a recreation of some of the 1919 celebrations and contributions to the festivities by local school children.



Sydney Gardens in 2021:

Fortunately, our Sydney Gardens story does have a happy ending.

In the early 1990s, Bath City Council commissioned a historical survey and proposals were made for the renovation of Sydney Gardens. It was awarded National Lottery Heritage funding for a restoration project in 2019. The site remains in council ownership and is open to the public for leisure and recreation, seven days a week .

Thank you for your interest and enjoy your visit.

Take our other mobile-friendly trails about trees and about Jane Austen in Sydney Gardens, at:

www.bathnes.gov.uk/sydneygardenstrails

The Friends of Sydney Gardens is a community organization formed in 2013 to promote awareness of Sydney Gardens and to foster the gardens' care and maintenance.

www.friendsofsydneygardens.org

The Holburne Museum is the city's first public art gallery hosting exhibitions of contemporary and historic works with an accompanying participatory programme.

www.holburne.org

Find out more about Sydney Gardens via our website for links, and take a look at Bath historian Kirsten Elliott's detailed account in her book *No Swinging on Sundays - the story of Bath's Lost Pleasure Gardens* (Ackerman, 2019)

www.bathnes.gov.uk/sydneygardens

This trail was researched and written by Alison Dods, resident of Bath. Our thanks to Kirsten Elliott for sources and editorial assistance. Images from Bath in Time.

