

**EXCAVATIONS AT
THE NEW ROYAL BATHS (THE SPA), AND
BELLOTT'S HOSPITAL 1998–1999**

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Oxford Archaeology monograph 3
Archaeology in Bath

Published for Oxford Archaeology as part of the Oxford Archaeology Monograph series

Designed by Oxford Archaeology Graphics Office

Edited by Ian Scott

This book is part of a series of monographs from Oxford Archaeology which can be bought from all good bookshops and Internet Bookshops. For more information visit thehumanjourney.net

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ISBN 978-0-904220-45-2

Typeset and Printed in Europe by The Alden Group, Oxford, UK

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Summary

Excavations took place in the south-west quadrant of the Roman and medieval town of Bath in advance of the redevelopment on the site of the former Beau Street Baths and Nos.7–7a Bath Street. The deep and extensive foundations of the new Royal Spa building required total excavation in advance of the destruction. Associated hydrological investigations also provided the opportunity to study artefacts derived from the Hot Bath spring. Possible early Mesolithic ritual activity was associated with the Hot Spring, whilst exploitation of the river gravels for flint occurred in the late Mesolithic. Evidence for activity after the late Mesolithic period was absent until the Iron Age. An Iron Age coin had been deposited in the Hot Bath Spring, and represents the first evidence of a pattern of votive offering otherwise confined to the Roman period. In addition a few sherds of Iron Age pottery occurred residually in the Roman contexts, the first such find in central Bath.

During the 1st and early 2nd centuries AD the area of the site appears to have been derelict and overgrown waste ground, cut through by a drainage ditch. In the Antonine period, a substantial and architecturally impressive building, which must have stood somewhere close by, was demolished to make way for a major redevelopment of the area. Materials from the building were incorporated in the new construction, which seems to have been a large public building with at least two wings arranged around a central courtyard. It was bounded by roads to the south and west and may have been associated with a baths complex known to the south. The development may have been built to create a major religious-leisure complex centred on the Hot Bath spring. Evidence for votive offerings at the Hot Spring was recovered in the form of numbers of Roman coins, which ranged in date from the 1st to 4th centuries.

Nineteenth century truncation had destroyed the upper levels of the large building, together with much of the stratigraphy of later periods, resulting in an absence of evidence for buildings until the Georgian period. There is evidence for robbing of the Roman building in the late or sub-Roman periods, followed by its decay and the accumulation of a thick dark earth, possibly indicative of cultivation. Renewed occupation occurred in the 11th century with evidence for the digging of pits, an activity which gradually decreasing in successive centuries. Little trace of earlier post-medieval activity survived, the deposits having been almost entirely destroyed by the late Georgian spa facilities built in 1829–30, which were subjected to various alterations and rebuilds during the 20th century.

At Bellott's Hospital, observation of engineers' test pits had shown that well-preserved stratified deposits of Roman date and a probable post-Roman dark earth were present over the entire site. In 1998 all post-Roman deposits, including the dark earth, were removed by machine with only minimal recording possible. The new construction level largely coincided with the top of the Roman structural layers, in which were also visible the remains of medieval pits following the lines of earlier walls and interpreted as robbing pits. The upper surface of the Roman deposits was planned and limited investigations were undertaken.

Nearly a metre of Roman structural deposits representing three phases of Roman masonry buildings fronting a street were revealed together with the underlying buried soil. Hints of timber buildings preceding the masonry phase were also recorded. The latest building contained extremely well-preserved evidence of a Romano-British blacksmith's workshop, with slag deposits and an anvil base.

Acknowledgements

The Project was commissioned by Bath and North East Somerset Council as a mitigation excavation in advance of the construction of the new Spa complex, now named the New Royal Baths. The project was part-funded by the Heritage Millennium Fund. The authors are grateful to Bob Sydes, both as curatorial archaeologist and as representative for the client, for his constant help and advice throughout the project. We would also like to express our appreciation to Keith Gibson, Clerk of Works for B&NES, who visited the site regularly and was a constant source of useful advice, information and good cheer. He also was responsible for alerting us to the presence of artefacts in the borehole material from the Hot Bath Spring, thereby preserving a vital data set. The council's project manager for the relevant stages of the whole project was Mike Gray to whom we are likewise grateful. The Archaeological Project Manager until well past the post-excavation assessment phase was Michael Heaton, who sweated blood putting together the project design, and kept a tight hold on its financial side. Much of the success of the project is due to him. The project was directed day-to-day by Cynthia Poole, who would like to thank all the staff who worked on the excavation, and especially Margaret Heslop and Leslie Cross, who worked on all three phases of the excavations and were invariably cheerful and helpful. Dom Barker and Bill Moffat were the area supervisors. John Wilson was the Education officer who dealt with the web site, and in particular school children's visits to the site and the setting up of a small visitor centre. Thanks are also due to all the specialists who have contributed to the report and especially to those involved at a late stage and who managed to produce reports within very tight deadlines. Vanessa Straker, the area English Heritage Environmental Advisor was of enormous help in clarifying and prioritising the post-excavation environmental analysis.

The draft manuscript was read by Dr Nick Barton, Prof Barry Cunliffe, Dr Martin Henig, Dr Warwick Rodwell and Dr Vanessa Straker, who all made extremely useful comments on the contents and structure of the report. The authors are grateful for having been made to think harder about what we had written. Nonetheless all errors and omissions are on the authors' heads alone. The volume was edited for publication by Ian Scott and illustrations were prepared by Sophie Lamb and Lucy Martin.

List of contributors

A number of people, listed below, contributed specialist reports on the material from the excavations reported in this volume. A number of the reports have not been included in the publication, although information they contain has informed the published results, and acknowledgement is made in the text. Other reports only appear in summary form. The full specialist reports will be found in the site archive.

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