

## The City of Bath – World Spa and World Heritage

Bath is the best known of English spa cities. The natural waters and cultural activities associated with them define the very essence of the place and give the city its name. The title of this paper suggests some of the different roles that the city plays: spa city, international cultural heritage tourist destination and a living working settlement for 85,000 people. These roles can be conflicting and challenging, and the same pressures and opportunities are felt by other historic spa cities across Europe.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. Firstly, it briefly describes the history of Bath. Spa culture is an international phenomenon, and examining the evolution of the city enables the custom and practices of spas to be compared, and places the city in its European historical context.

Secondly, modern-day Bath is described, again aiding comparison but also describing how the city is reinventing itself as a 21st century European spa in a rapidly changing market place.

Thirdly, the experiences of Bath as both a spa city and World Heritage Site are outlined. Bath has been a World Heritage Site for 24 years, and has faced the conflicting challenges of an urban heritage centre with the protection of UNESCO status. Lessons and observations of this experience may be of interest to others considering World Heritage nomination.

### Location

Bath is located in the west of England, approximately 100 miles west of London and 13 miles east of the larger port city of Bristol (Fig. 1). It lies at the southern end of a Jurassic limestone belt forming the Cotswold Hills. These hills provide the dramatic landscape setting and the building stone which is almost universally used for the construction of Bath buildings.

The city was founded where the River Avon creates a hollow in the hills and a natural river crossing point. At the heart of this site are the only natural hot springs in Britain, where water issues from the ground at 45 degrees Celsius.



1: Bath, Location Map

The topography of the site defines the character of the city. The hollow created by the river and the steep valley sides have limited the physical expansion of the city and added to its beauty. Views from almost all places in the city centre show wooded hillsides, giving an impression of a compact country town. This location gives the city beauty and an air of relaxation; important components in a resort based on health and healing.

### History

Summaries of Bath history are almost always told in phases, as the city has experienced distinct peaks and troughs of significance. The Roman settlement is the first significant phase.

## Roman

Following the Roman invasion in AD 43, the army pushed west and established garrisons stretching across England. This included the settlement at the River Avon, which became named *Aquae Sulis*, "the Waters of Sulis". The potential to harness hot springs was known to the Romans, and attendance at public baths was an important part of daily Roman life. As security in Roman Britain increased, the settlement became less of a garrison and more a centre of heal-

ing, recreation and pilgrimage. By the end of the first century AD the city had a grand range of buildings: a temple, an inner and an outer precinct and baths. The temple was dedicated to *Sulis Minerva*, a combination of the Celtic *Sulis* and the Roman goddess of healing, *Minerva* (Fig. 2).

Crathorne describes writings by Ptolemy of Alexandria in the second century AD and Solinus a century later, showing that the baths were known throughout the ancient world, and recent archaeological investigations have found human

2: Bath, The Roman City 'Aquae Sulis'



remains on the site which have been traced to Syria.<sup>1</sup> The British Government nomination report for Bath described the Roman heritage as being “with the exception of Hadrian’s Wall, the best preserved, most famous and most impressive architectural monuments of the Roman era to be found in Britain, and indeed among the most remarkable remains of this kind to be found north of the Alps”.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of the Roman Empire at the end of the fourth century, the systems of drainage and water control fell into disrepair and the buildings were engulfed in mud, abandoned, and virtually lost for centuries.

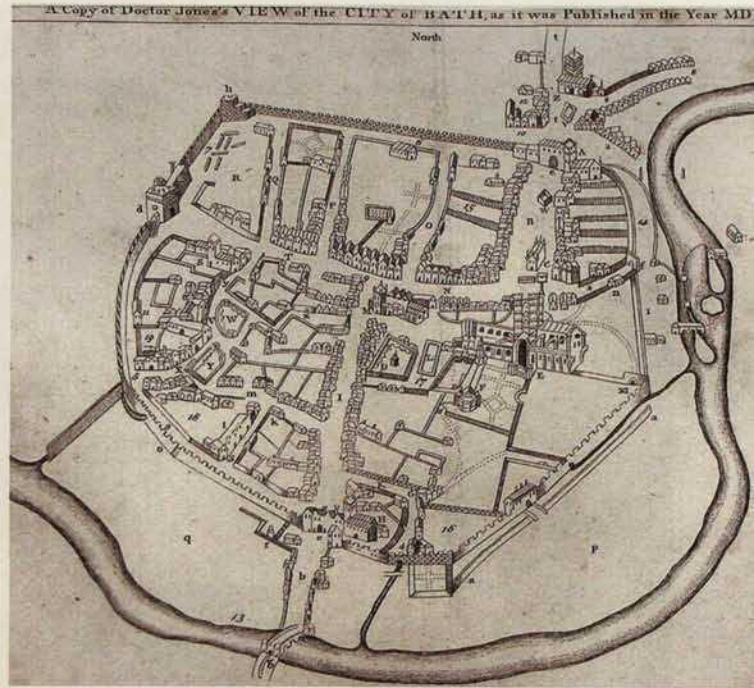
### Mediaeval

The next notable phase of history is the mediaeval period, and requires a leap forward of around a thousand years. Despite this significant time gap, the size of the city, constrained within defensive walls, had expanded very little since Roman times (Fig. 3).

The forgotten and buried Roman complex now became the site of an abbey church complex, dominating the town, and with new architecture and new religion taking charge. The city, however, remained a centre of healing and pilgrimage. An unattributed twelfth century manuscript reads: “Sick persons from all over England go there to bathe in the healing waters, as well as the healthy who go to see the wonderful outpourings of water and bathe in them.”<sup>3</sup>

The baths during the mediaeval period are seldom described as fashionable. Visitors were drawn by a mixture of healing, mythology, religion and relaxation. The mediaeval baths are generally portrayed as a crowded, poorly organised jumble of both people and buildings.

At a time of rapid growth of urban populations, the reputation of the waters for healing grew. Physicians made many unsubstantiated claims regarding the powers of the water, although real results achieved were more likely attributable to patients being away from unhealthy, crowded cities and from lead poisoning caused by drinking from vessels and pipes.



3: Bath, The Mediaeval City, 1572

### The 18th Century

It was not, however, the medical, healing properties of the spa which were to make the city famous, but the recreational opportunities. In the 18th century Bath entered its most significant phase of history, reinventing itself as a sophisticated resort for the elite of society. Visits of Queen Anne to the baths in 1702 and 1703 gave Bath Royal approval, at a time when an emerging wealthy and fashionable middle class society followed Royal example and had the financial means to escape London and indeed Europe to take the waters, socialise and gamble.

In the first quarter of the 18th century Bath was still a small walled city, but by the end of the century it had expanded dramatically. It became a “valley of pleasure”, no longer just a resort for the sick. Its reputation attracted a host of famous visitors. Artists including Gainsborough and Lawrence found it salubrious and profitable. Poets, actors and novelists knew it well, including Pope, Wordsworth, Shelley, Jane Austen and later Charles Dickens; scientist William Herschel and musicians Haydn and Rauzzini were visitors, as were heroes Admiral Nelson and General James Wolfe. Almost every famous figure of 18th century England visited Bath at one time or another, including European aristocracy, especially French. New, cutting edge classical Palladian architecture was employed to re-model the entire city. Very lit-

1 CRATHORNE 1998.

2 UK Nomination – The City of Bath 1987.

3 CRATHORNE 1998, p. 19.



4: Georgian Bath, Royal Crescent and the Circus

tle of the mediaeval city was left untouched. Clean well-lit streets, wide pavements for promenading, and Assembly Rooms for dancing were provided (Fig. 4).

5: Richard "Beau" Nash (1674–1761)



Three men led this revival, and it is worth brief examination of their contributions, as the roles they played have lessons for contemporary city management. The first was Richard 'Beau' Nash (Fig. 5), master of ceremonies and instigator of new rules of the fashionable resort. Nash, the son of a Swansea bottle maker, arrived at Bath in 1705 aged 30 and is described by Crathorne as being "without money and without the useful talents for acquiring any".<sup>4</sup> Nash was attracted by the rising fame of Bath and keen to try his luck at the gaming tables. His luck was good, he made money and was appointed aide to the master of ceremonies. When the master was killed in a duel, Nash became 'King of Bath', a confident civic leader and larger-than-life figure. He set about reform, upgrading the city from mean provincial manners to a place of fine appearance and behaviour. Duelling and wearing of swords were banned, gambling regulated and rough country customs such as cock-fighting driven out. Dances became polite affairs, with finishing times strictly enforced, even in

4 CRATHORNE 1998, p. 46

the presence of (and against the wishes of) royalty. All had to comply with rules of decency and etiquette.

The second man was John Wood, visionary architect (Fig. 6). Wood was born in Bath in 1704 and followed his father into the building trade. Working for the Duke of Chandos in London, he became familiar with the growing popularity of English Palladianism, based on Andrea Palladio's 16th century style of classical architecture. Wood produced designs for enlargement of Bath in the classical style. Again Wood was the right man in the right place at the right time, and his ideas fell on fertile ground. Unlike in Europe, where cities were being developed under single patronage in a grand controlled manner, the rise of the English middle classes prompted individual landowners to undertake speculative developments in individual schemes. Wood's earliest triumph was Queen Square, the first application of Palladian architecture to an urban square. This square influenced squares and terraces built during the 18th and early 19th centuries throughout Britain and North America. The eccentric and obsessive Wood then went on to build the Circus, a circular ensemble thought to be inspired by Stonehenge and the Colosseum in Rome. He was succeeded by his son, also called John Wood, who went on to build the spectacular Royal Crescent.

The third man was Ralph Allen, again a self-made man of common birth, but sober, efficient and modest (Fig. 7). He arrived in Bath at age 18 in 1712, and as Deputy Postmaster made his fortune in improving the postal service. He saw however the business opportunity in the need for building stone and bought the stone quarries at Combe Down on the edge of Bath. He improved stone production and in a move to prove the qualities of Bath building stone to sceptical London architects he employed John Wood to design and construct the Palladian villa of Prior Park, overlooking the city. The value of the stone was proven, the building boom took off, and as Allen's fortunes increased he became Mayor and Member of Parliament for Bath. Allen was a patron of many fine buildings and again a strong civic leader.

All three of these men were risk takers, entrepreneurs and shapers of society. There were of course many others, but these three working together demonstrate the ingredients which went into creating a beautiful and prosperous city, which was to become recognised through World Heritage status as being a key cultural achievement of mankind.



6: John Wood the Elder (1704–1754)

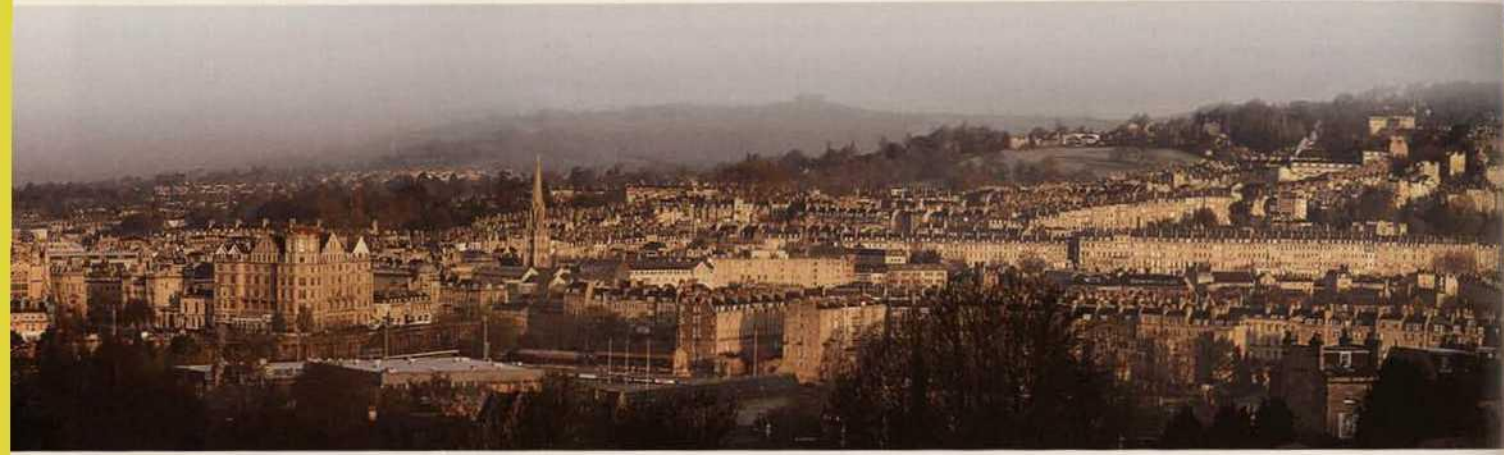
### Gentle Decline to the 21st Century

The 18th century was therefore, after the Roman period, the second heyday of Bath, and after that fashions changed. Beyond 1800, visitor numbers declined as people preferred instead the seaside resorts of Brighton or Weymouth. Despite the arrival of the railway in 1841 the declining money meant that the city entered a gentle and sedate decline, becoming a preferred destination for the retired. The one benefit of this was that the 18th century city did not undergo significant 19th century redevelopment, and a complete Georgian city with a high degree of authenticity remains today.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw industrial expansion, with enlargement of the suburbs, the arrival of the railway and with industrial use on the river plains. These periods do not however feature as a major phase of the city's history.

7: Ralph Allen (1693–1764)





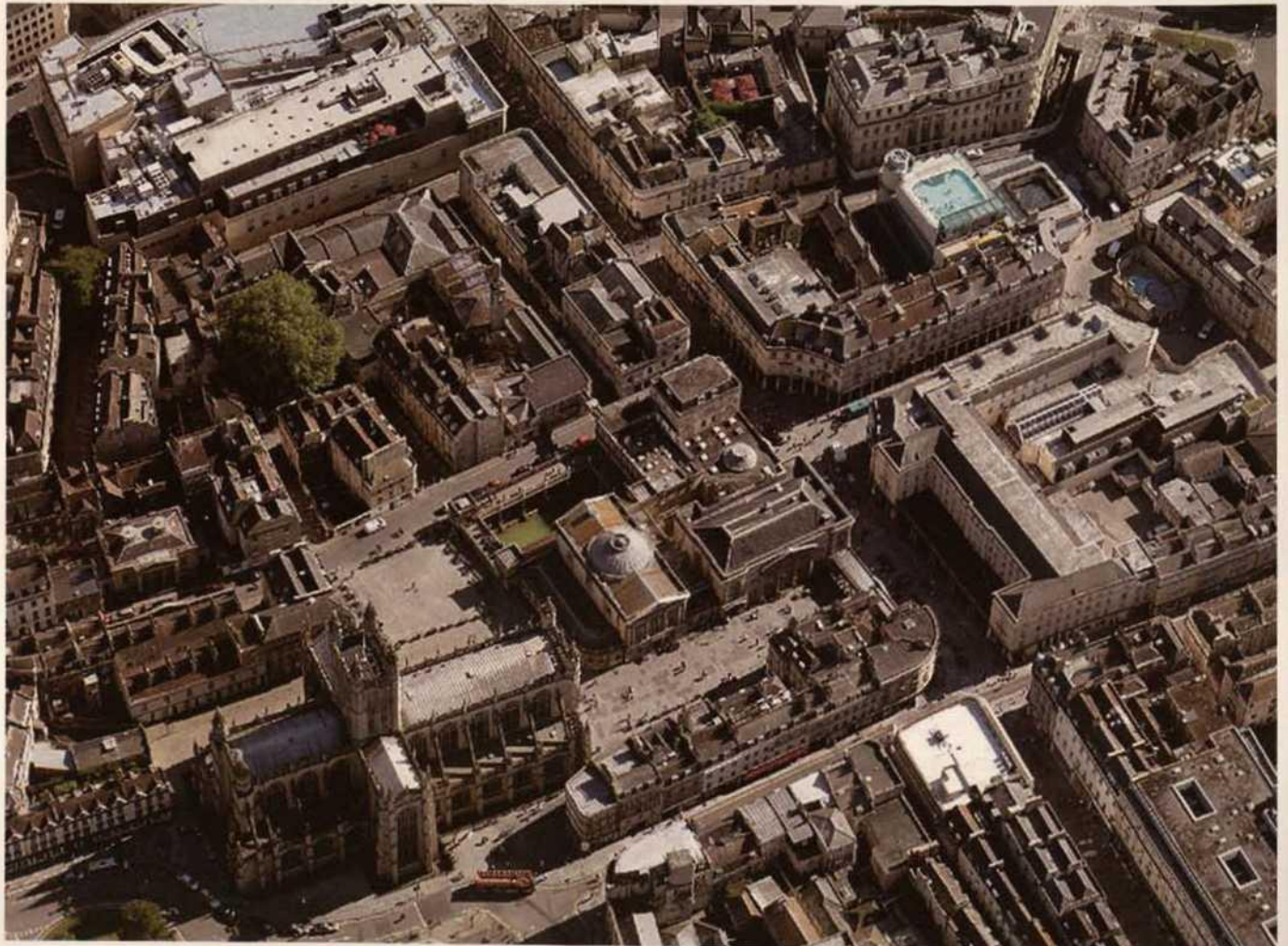
8: Elegant modern Bath

### Modern Bath (Reinvention of the Spa)

Contemporary Bath is a thriving modern city of great elegance and beauty (Fig. 8). It is home to around 85 000 people, and welcomes around 4.4 million visitors per year. The principal

industries are tourism and the public sector, notably the ministry of defence. It has two universities and faces significant challenges in areas such as affordable housing and in transport provision, with major road networks still running through the heart of the city and little scope for a road by-pass.

9: Bath, 1st and 21st century spas in the heart of the city



## Continuous Spa Culture

The history of Bath shows a continuous spa culture, attracting visitors for over 2000 years (Fig. 9). The only notable break came in October 1978, when a girl died from a rare strain of meningitis after swimming in the Roman Baths. The death was linked to a pathogenic amoeba in the spa water, which subsequently forced the closure of the baths to bathers, although the Roman Baths as a museum remained a leading tourist attraction.

This closure put Bath at a crossroads, in danger of losing its identity. With the economy in gradual decline, the city needed a vision to instigate a revival. The answer lay in re-establishing the city as a spa settlement, playing to the strengths of Bath and seeking to become a new genre of spa, encouraging international cultural tourism and the growing fashion for spa recreation. Essential cornerstones of this vision are the new Thermae Bath Spa, and validations of quality demonstrated by World Heritage Status.

### Thermae Bath Spa

After a gap of 28 years without a spa, the opening of the new Thermae Bath Spa in 2006 was therefore more than a new tourist attraction (Fig. 10). It signified the restoration of a historic cultural tradition, restoring the life blood of the hot waters and reaffirming Bath as a destination for healing and leisure.

The financial benefit of the spa is significant. Thermae Bath Spa opened in August 2006 employing 85 people, which has now risen to over 170. 2010 estimates are that spa customers spend £9.95m in the city, and 60% of spa visitors say that the spa was the principal reason for visiting Bath. The spa culture and economic benefit extend beyond the springs themselves, and there are now five luxury spa hotels in Bath, plus four day spas offering spa services. It is also notable that nearly half of the spa visitors were on an overnight stay, breaking the cycle of the day tripper<sup>5</sup> who does not stay long enough to aid the local economy.



10: Thermae Bath Spa, opened 2006

### Bath as a World Heritage Site

Bath was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1987 for the following outstanding universal values:

- Roman archaeology;
- The Hot Springs;
- Georgian town planning;
- Georgian architecture;
- The green setting of the city in a hollow in the hills;
- Georgian architecture reflecting 18th century ambitions.

The site fulfils criteria i (masterpiece of human creative genius), ii (interchange of human values) and iv (outstanding example of a building, ensemble or landscape) of the UNESCO criteria for assessing outstanding universal value.<sup>6</sup> Bath was not submitted under criterion vi (directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance), and this is today considered regrettable, as the site could easily fulfil this criterion and this element of

5 As explored by TOURTELLOT 2010.

6 UNESCO 2008, p. 20.

7 BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL 2010.

the story remains untold. The full justification for inscription is shown in Appendix 3 of The City of Bath World Heritage Site Management Plan.<sup>7</sup>

A question for other spa cities seeking World Heritage status is: Has Bath already provided an example of spa culture on the World Heritage List? Have they taken this place, effectively barring others? It would appear not, for the following reasons:

Firstly, Bath is predominantly nominated for 18th century history, and not 19th century as is the case with most European spas. Bath undoubtedly compliments the story of the evolution of spa culture as a forerunner to the European spa boom, but it can be divided into a separate chapter if required, allowing room for other sites to be represented alongside.

Secondly, as mentioned above, Bath's nomination does not focus on intangible elements of spa culture. The religious significance of the site, pilgrimage, the culture and practice of bathing, healing, social customs of the 18th century such as standards of behaviour, traditions, etc are not explored. If Bath applied for World Heritage status today, it would undoubtedly emphasise these elements, but in 1987 this was considered less important. The inscription was principally designed to protect tangible elements of the site, and the nomination papers were written with this in mind. Therefore, again there is room for other sites to fill this gap and to emphasise the culture of spas rather than the physical remains.

### A World Heritage City

It is important to note that the whole of the city is inscribed. This makes management of the site a different challenge to others, and places Bath amongst only a handful of other such sites worldwide (Venice, Vatican City and the City of Cuzco / Peru provide other examples). There is good reason for this: the built heritage and landscape setting of parks and gardens are inseparable, and there is little choice but to throw a blanket designation over the whole.

This has however caused issues. The 1987 nomination boundary was not clearly defined, and it took many years to clarify this matter. Careful thought should be given to the boundary during nomination and also to the difficult issue of setting and buffer zone, which can again become signifi-

cant subsequent projects in their own right. Despite the generous boundary of the Bath site and the difficult topography surrounding the city, development pressure is being pushed into the setting and Tourtelot confirms other examples of this worldwide.<sup>8</sup> Bath has stopped short of designating a formal buffer zone, but has produced a paper identifying where the setting is and an approach to safeguard it.<sup>9</sup>

### World Heritage Benefits

In terms of the lessons learned as a World Heritage Site, there are notable advantages, four of which are discussed here. Firstly, it is a source of great civic pride. It enables a site to share its story with the world, validating the fact that the story is worthy of sitting alongside the greatest achievements of mankind. It is a difficult accolade to obtain, and regeneration can be based on this. In the case of Bath, citizens are very proud of the status, and other English provincial cities are envious of it.

Secondly, it helps protect physical heritage. Although in many countries no new legal protection powers follow World Heritage inscription, the overview provided by UNESCO and ICOMOS is very useful. Local politicians may focus on local issues, but they also need to be reminded of their wider responsibilities with regard to conserving global heritage. Being required to produce and endorse a management plan and having international bodies looking over their shoulder is useful. The UNESCO Mission which visited in 2008 was a positive experience for Bath; it made local civic leaders examine and improve the way they operated and raised the profile of World Heritage.

Thirdly, World Heritage as a "hallmark of cultural quality" helps shape identity. If the desire is to regenerate the city along the lines of cultural tourism, a high quality tourist offer is needed. Visitors know that World Heritage signifies the highest global accolade in conservation terms, and expect high standards in other areas too.

This leads into the fourth point, tourism. It must be noted that World Heritage status is not accompanied by a pot of gold. A study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers concluded that on average British sites can expect to increase tourist visits

8 TOURTELLOT 2010.

9 BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL 2009.



by between 0-3% in following inscription, although of course this depends on how famous the site is to begin with.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Bath, visitor numbers are healthy, and whilst (in the absence of any “control experiment”) it is impossible to say how many visitors would have come without World Heritage status, it is safe to say that it will not have driven numbers down. Reebanks, in a global study of sites, concluded that benefit depends on how the status is used.<sup>11</sup> Sites which did not previously enjoy strong tourism have used the status to “put themselves on the map”, and have shown greatest benefits. It should also be noted that as the number of World Heritage Sites grow, so does brand recognition, especially amongst richer nations. The July 2010 UNESCO World Heritage Session added 21 new sites and the 2011 committee is considering 42 more. It is almost inevitable that in the near future, with increasing tourism from emerging nations such as China, World Heritage Sites will become increasingly popular destinations as foreign visitors look for a recognisable brand.

### World Heritage Drawbacks

World Heritage status can have drawbacks, and again four examples are discussed below. Firstly, there is an element of “sacrificing local on the altar of the global”. Local politicians, when accepting World Heritage status, should be aware that they are handing a degree of power over to UNESCO. There have been questions raised over this in Bath, particularly when local views on new development do not accord with UNESCO views. This is mostly a philosophical point however, and has not manifested itself as a major difficulty. What is equally difficult perhaps is overcoming the feeling amongst local people that World Heritage is a benefit for visitors only. This point is exacerbated by the fact that thousands of ordinary households without heritage significance are included within the boundary of the site and caught up in protection measures designed to protect key cultural assets.

Secondly, World Heritage focuses heavily on those aspects carrying outstanding universal value – in the case of Bath

the Roman and Georgian periods. This is demonstrated in this paper by telling the history of Bath in phases, and can cause frustrations in ignoring the rich tapestry of other historic periods, and lead to a distorted view. Active management measures are needed to overcome this.

Thirdly, costs of achieving and sustaining World Heritage Site status should not be underestimated. The Price Waterhouse Coopers report gives cost estimates of this.<sup>12</sup> Based on UK figures, nomination has taken an average of 4.8 years, and typically costs around € 470,000. A trans-national nomination can be expected to be higher. Annual management costs for a large site are estimated to be between € 150-250,000 per annum. Production of a management plan typically costs around € 110,000.

Finally, in a modern city such as Bath economic development is essential alongside conservation. Developers value certainty and can view World Heritage as another level of bureaucracy and complexity. Also, those opposing new developments are increasingly using UNESCO as a body for complaint, after exhausting the usual avenues through the national planning system. This is becoming increasingly apparent in Bath, and it was anxiety over new development that instigated a UNESCO Mission in 2008. These complaints result in extra cost, work, and can hinder the city’s ability to attract investment.

### Conclusion

I do not, however, want to finish on a negative note. Bath is a proud city and for such a small city it has had a disproportionately large impact upon world history. World Heritage status compliments the city’s ambitions and demonstrates to both tourists and residents that this is a world class environment and destination.

The comparison with European spas is an important exercise, and Bath is very pleased to be associated with Baden-Baden and the other spa cities involved in the conference. All best wishes go to these other cities in their on-going work to protect and promote their historic settlements, and to have their exceptional spa towns recognised with World Heritage status.

<sup>10</sup> PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP 2007.

<sup>11</sup> REEBANKS 2009.

<sup>12</sup> PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP 2007.

## Bath – Weltbad und Welterbe

Dieser Aufsatz befasst sich mit dem berühmten Kurort Bath in England. Zunächst beschreibt er die Geschichte von Bath, wobei es um die Einrichtung der römischen Bäder, den Ausbau zu einem Vergnügungsort im 18. Jahrhundert, die Hauptakteure, die für den Erfolg verantwortlich waren und den allmählichen Abstieg im 19. Jahrhundert geht. Anschließend stellt der Aufsatz die heutige Stadt Bath vor, die sich auch

mittels Errichtung neuer Kuranlagen neu erfinden will als europäische Kurstadt im 21. Jahrhundert. Zum Abschluss werden die Erfahrungen vorgestellt, die Bath in 24 Jahren als Welterbestadt hat sammeln können. Die Lehren und Beobachtungen, die sich aus diesem Status ergeben, könnten für andere Kurorte, die sich um eine Welterbenominierung bemühen, von Interesse sein.

## Bath – station thermale de renommée internationale et patrimoine mondial

Cet article traite la célèbre ville d'eaux de Bath en Angleterre. D'abord, il décrit l'histoire de Bath, ayant pour sujet la création des bains romains, l'expansion au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle pour devenir une ville de plaisir, les personnages moteurs de son succès et le déclin progressif au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ensuite, l'article présente la ville de Bath actuelle, qui veut se réinventer en tant que ville d'eaux européenne du 21<sup>e</sup> siècle en créant

entre autres de nouveaux espaces de cure. A la fin sont présentées les expériences de 24 ans que Bath a pu faire en tant que Patrimoine Mondial. Les leçons et les observations qui s'ensuivent de ce statut pourraient être d'un grand intérêt pour d'autres villes d'eaux aspirant à une nomination de Patrimoine Mondial.

## Bibliography

- BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL: Bath World Heritage Site Setting Study. 2009. Available from: <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/worldheritagesite/Pages/worldheritagesitesettingstudy.aspx> (14.10.2011).
- BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL: The City of Bath World Heritage Site. Management Plan 2010-2016. 2010. Available from: <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Environment%20and%20Planning/WH%20endorsed%20plan%20Feb%202011.pdf> (14.10.2011).
- CRATHORNE, James: The Royal Crescent Book of Bath. London 1998.
- REEBANKS, James: Brave New World. How a growing number of places around the world are building their future economic development around UNESCO World Heritage site status. In: World Heritage Status. Is there Opportunity for Economic Gain? A preview of unique research commissioned by the Lake District World Heritage Project into the economic impacts of World Heritage Status around the world. Kendal 2009, p. 9–10. Available from: <http://www.lakeswhs.co.uk/documents/WHSEconomicGainSupplement.pdf> (14.10.2011).
- TOURTELLOT, Jonathan B.: Part Threat, Part Hope, The Challenge of Tourism. In: World Heritage 58 (2010), p. 6.

- PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS LLP: The Costs and Benefits of UK World Heritage Site Status. A literature review for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. 2007. Available from: [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/PwC\\_literaturereview.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/PwC_literaturereview.pdf) (14.10.2011).
- UK Nomination – The City of Bath. Prepared by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England on behalf of the Department of the Environment. WH Committee 9 December 1987 (Unpublished archive document).
- UNESCO: Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, WHC. 08/01, January 2008. Available from: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/opguide08-en.pdf> (14.10.2011)
- WHITE, Giles: Hot Bath. The Story of the Spa. Bath 2003.

## Credits for images

- Fig. 1, 3-4, 9: Bath & North East Somerset Council  
 Fig. 2: Barry Cunliffe / John Ronayne  
 Fig. 5, 7: Wikimedia  
 Fig. 6: Bath Preservation Trust  
 Fig. 8, 10: Tony Crouch