

A visit to Bath, Somerset, England



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Title page: South African Air Force Dassault Mirage III aircraft at Durban's Louis Botha Airport circa late 1960s early 1970s.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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2024-10-21

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We visited Bath from the Monday 30th September to the Thursday 3rd October 2024. The weather was overcast with very occasional drizzle Tuesday and Wednesday, some sun later on Wednesday and blue sky for our last day, Thursday.

We travelled mostly by train. Left home on an 08:38 National Express X1 bus to Birmingham



The Half Penny Bridge and toll building.

International Airport train station, then Avanti train to Birmingham New Street station for the 10:12 CrossCountry train to Bristol Temple Meads station, then a Great Western Railway (GWR) train to Bath Spa station, arriving at 11:57. Then four minutes walk via the Half Penny footbridge over the Avon River to our Travelodge hotel. We had paid for early check in so we could have the afternoon exploring. The Half Penny Bridge got its name because there was a ha'penny toll to use the bridge. The small toll building is on the south side of the bridge.

Armed with an online Bath tourism and publicity map and public toilet map, during the afternoon we walked north through the city centre to The Circle (a circle of three terraced house/offices with three access roads and a huge tree in the centre) and the Royal Crescent on the north-western edge, passing the Jane Austin Museum/house in Gay Street. Jane Austin was a late 1700s early 1800s English novelist. 9It sounds far in city terms. However, it was only forty minutes walk from the hotel to The Circle and another 10 minutes to the Royal Crescent.



Jane Austin Museum in Gay Street.



Part of The Circle (left). The road to the Royal Crescent (right) is off to the left.

We then walked through the park to its south with an attractive bandstand and followed our noses downhill south to the Avon River where we walked along the river's edge back to the hotel. That evening, we ate in at the hotel's Bar Café where we ate all our breakfasts.

Tuesday, we did a lot of walking. From the hotel, next to the Avon River, we walked north past the St John the Evangelist Roman Catholic church on the opposite bank, then the Avon River North Parade Road Bridge, past the cricket field and Bath Rugby Stadium to the Beazer Garden Maze.



St John the Evangelist Roman Catholic church and the North Parade bridge.



Beazer Garden Maze. Not amazing at all.

Mentioned as worth seeing in a publicity brochure, the Beazer Garden Maze was a big disappointment. Not a maze at all. Simply a maze of stone paths with only one leading to the centre. It is close to the river weir and the Pulteney Bridge completed in 1774. The weir and sluice were completed in 1972 to control flooding. After a week rain, often heavy before we arrived, the river was high and flowing strongly. We had 95mm at home. The Pulteney Bridge is one of only four in the world with shops on either side of the bridge.



The Pulteney Bridge and the weir. Behind the weir, at the same level as the bridge in the City Market.

We then went east along Great Pulteney Street to the Sydney Gardens through which the Kennet and Avon Canal passes, before returning to the bridge via the Henrietta Gardens. By now you will have guessed that Roz wanted to see gardens and parks.



The Kennet and Avon Canal where it passes through the Sydney Garden



The City Market signpost and the Orange Grove obelisk.

Back at the Pulteney Bridge we then went into the nearby Bath Market, very clean with a central signpost giving distances and directions to local and far-flung places. Such as, 6 minutes to the bus and train station, the Royal Crescent 10 minutes, 109 miles to Birmingham, 502 miles to John O' Groats, Sydney 10650 miles and the Moon 238855 miles, although I believe its direction varies.



The abbey statue.

Next to Bath Abbey, in Orange Grove is an obelisk with an information board stating that it was "erected in memory of the happy restoration of the health of the Prince of Orange through the favour of God and to the great joy of Britain by drinking the bath waters 1754. Richard Nash Master of Ceremonies." Personally, at the time I think drinking the bath water was a case of kill or cure.

We did not go inside the abbey. Costs and arm and a leg. On the eastern side of the southern transept next to the vestry, is a statue. The statue, although protected by a high iron fence, appears almost abandoned, as if no longer in favour. There is also no information board. Although, there is a CCTV

camera on the vestry wall behind and to the left of the statue head. Reading the stature, it can be accepted that it is of Jesus Christ at the resurrection. The stature is wrapped in linen bandages with a spear wound in the right side of the stomach, as well as nail wounds on the palms of both hands and the right foot. I cannot fathom the symbolism of the hairstyle and the short beard.

We did not go into the Roman Baths. Costs the other arm and a leg. Anyway, I saw inside when visiting in 1975. I did take a number of photographs of the outside, including one of a trumpet player in a courtyard next to the abbey and the baths where one can just see statures inside. The springs for the baths are heated by geothermal energy about 2700 to 4300 metres (9000 to 14000 feet) below ground level to 65°C to 95°C, rising under pressure from the Pennyquick geological fault to the surface where the water is about 45°C. A new spa bore-hole was sunk in 1983 that produces clean and safe drinking water in the Pump Room. Close by in Bath Street is The Cross Bath spa bathing pool. The building housing the pool was built in 1784 with remodelling in 1789 and restored in the 1990s. The building is Natural Heritage Grade I listed. We came across it by accident on Wednesday evening when meandering back to the hotel after an evening pub meal.



The Roman Bath and trumpeter in the foreground and The Cross Bath.

We then headed back to the hotel, venturing out again in the evening to a pub meal at Kingsmead Square Wetherspoons in James Street West, then meandering back to the hotel, passing the Flan O'Briens pub which reminded us of the Oliver St. John Gogarty bar, and hostel in Temple Bar, Dublin.

An overcast Wednesday morning with occasional Wednesday morning, we set out to Alexandra Park, named in honour of Queen Alexandra. It was opened in 1902 to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII. We were headed to the Beechen Cliff summit view site, supposedly



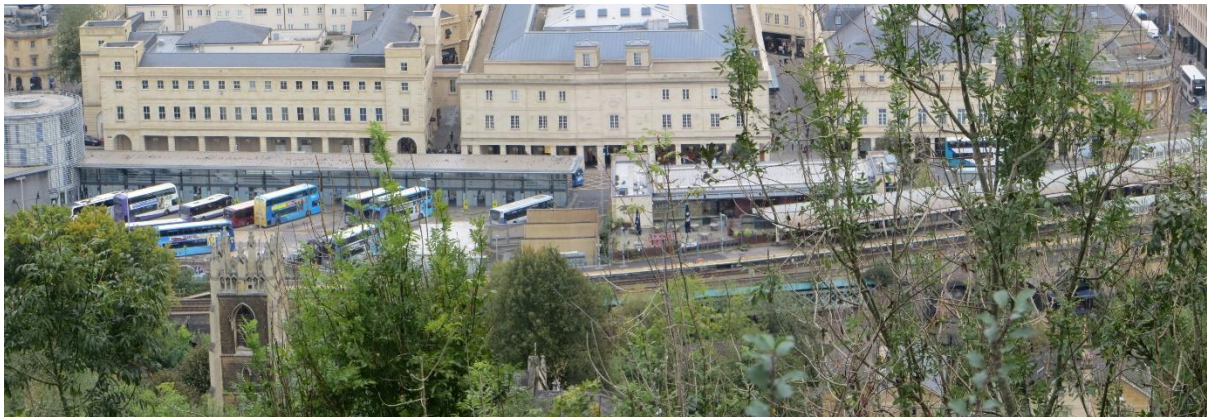
Bath from the Alexandra Park view site.

15 minutes walk south of the Avon River. However, it is first up a steep Lyncombe Hill road then very steep and long flights of steps known as Jacob's ladder to the summit. At one point there is a notice board saying there are only 40 more steps to the top, a small fraction of those already climbed. Probably, in case one has now decided enough is enough and want to go back down. However, in an overcast morning the view was still worth it. I estimated about 100 metres (~330 feet). What I have found is that the Avon

River floodplain is about 18 metres (59 feet) above sea level, the city centre is around 25 metres (82 feet) above sea level and the hills surrounding Bath are a maximum altitude of 238 metres (781 feet) on the Lansdown plateau. Subsequently, Charlotte at Marketing@visitwest.co.uk replied to my email query that the park is 127 metres at its highest. Minus the city centre at 25 metres that a climb of ~102 metres. Pretty chuffed with myself. 100 metres estimate was good.



The Royal Crescent and Bath Abbey seen from the view site.



The Bath bus and train stations, unfortunately no train present. 12-16 minutes by train to Bristol to the west (left). The image was made by merging two photographs.



The Bath Waterside Travelodge Hotel.

From the view site one can clearly discern the Royal Crescent in the far left distance, as well as the Bath Abbey and Roman Baths building in the nearer distance and much closer bus and train stations, plus our hotel below right at the junction of the Avon River and Kennet and Avon Canal. Using the camera zoom these places become much clearer. Obviously even more so when using our binoculars. Our descent was a less steep path down the south side of the ridge to Lyncombe Hill road and back to the hotel via the Widcombe village type shops in Claverton Street.

Not long after midday, we set out along the Kennet and Avon Canal from close by to the hotel where it meets the Avon River. At the Claverton Street bridge we were at the Bath Deep Lock, the second deepest lock in Britain. Here there is a sign post that shows the direction and distance



The Kennet and Avon Canal junction with the Avon River. The signpost top left.



The Kennet and Avon Canal Bath Deep Lock.



The Bathwick Hill pump house chimney.

down river to Bristol Harbour 18 m (miles, 29km), up the canal to Reading 75 m (121km) and upriver to the Pulteney Weir 1 m (1.6km). Further onward and upward past more locks we came to the chimney that is all that remains of pumping station that pumped water up to a pound, or reservoir, above the Bath Top Lock that maintained the smooth

flow of the canal. The pump house was in the posh Bathwick Hill neighbourhood. The residents insisted on an ornate chimney. The light was not a good. The photograph was toward what sunlight there was at the time, so not a good photograph. At its peak operation 200 hundred years ago, before the railway, the canal was vital to the city's economy transporting most of its needed coal and exporting Bath stone to Bristol and London.



The Top Lock pound and a Grey Heron standing in a portion of a lock gate out of the photograph to the left.

At the next lock a Heron was standing motionless in the lock gate staring intently at the water. Next was the Sydney wharf with numerous long boats moored. Most being for hire, but being past the summer season were now moored. Shortly after we reached the Sydney Garden at 13:40, about an hour and a half walk. After a picnic lunch, we headed back down to the hotel.



A GWR 9 carriage train from the east.

About 4pm I went out again to photograph the area where the canal enters the Avon River when I saw the Heron we had seen earlier was now stationed at the Bath Deep Lock gate. Also photographs of GWR trains departing the station to and from the Salisbury direction to the east.

That evening we went back to Wetherspoons to dine. However, before doing so we went further to the Green Park Station, a former railway station. Publicised as “home to many of Bath’s flourishing regular and speciality markets”, it was a complete waste of time. There were a few small shops along the sides of part of the vaulted roof shed like building. Most of it was a construction site,



Sally Lynn's 1482 building.



North Parade Passage shops with Sally Lynn's in the distance.

which will no doubt look better when completed.

After our meal we did another meander back to the hotel, in a narrow lane coming across the oldest house in Bath, circa 1482, now Salley Lunn's eatery in North Parade Passage. A photograph of more of the passage shows bay window frontages that reminded me of York's Shambles with its old butcher's shops. After this we passed The Cross Bath building mentioned earlier.



A Café window Avon River and weir view.

Thursday, our last day, we again headed north alongside the Avon River to Pulteney Bridge, while taking repeat photographs of places seen before including the Bath Rugby stadium. Our target was the Bath Market. Roz wanted to buy some gifts for her sister and friends, including birthday cards. While on the bridge, I sneaked two photographs through the windows of a café of the weir and Avon River below now bathed in bright sunshine.



The Roman Bath balcony view. The bath is below.

We returned to the hotel via the abbey and Roman Baths. Passing by, for amusement, I took a photograph of the inside by holding the camera at arm's length above my head above the wall. Not a very good one. All one can see is a statue and the rears of five people looking down at an out of sight bath pool. We reached our hotel just before midday. We had paid extra to book out late, that is after 12:00, but before 14:00.

After refreshing tea, packing finished and toiletries completed, we checked out then walked to Bath Spa station and a GWR train to Bristol Temple Meads station where we were in time for the 13:35 CrossCountry train to Birmingham New Street station, arriving on time as 14:55. Then an Avanti to London Euston train to Birmingham International station, walked across the concourse to the bus station where our National Express X1 bus home arrived within seconds of us getting there. All very slick timing home.

An enjoyable trip. Our impression of what we saw and experienced of central Bath is of a very clean and tidy city, friendly people and polite drivers. The latter particularly, because of the maze of narrow streets and pedestrianised streets, one was often not sure which was which.