Definition: Bath from Collins English Dictionary

1 a city in SW England, in Bath and North East Somerset unitary authority, Somerset, on the River Avon: famous for its hot springs; a fashionable spa in the 18th century; Roman remains, notably the baths; university (1966). Pop: 90 144 (2001) Latin name: Aquae Sulis (ˈækwiː ˈsuːlɪs)

Summary Article: Bath
From The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

Historic city and administrative headquarters of Bath and North East Somerset unitary authority, southwest England, 171 km/106 mi west of London; population (2001) 90,200. Industries include printing, plastics, engineering, and tourism. Bath was the site of the Roman town of Aquae Sulis, and in the 18th century flourished as a fashionable spa, with the only naturally occurring hot mineral springs in Britain. Although the baths were closed to the public in 1977, the Bath Spa Project, due to open in 2003, is intended to bring back public bathing to Bath's hot springs.

History The Roman town of Aquae Sulis (‘waters of Sul’ – the British goddess of wisdom) was established in the first 20 years after the Roman invasion of AD 43. In medieval times the springs were crown property, administered by the church, but the city was transformed in the 18th century to a fashionable spa, presided over by the Welsh dandy ‘Beau’ Nash.

Features The remains of the Roman baths and adjacent temple are among the finest Roman remains in Britain. The Gothic Bath Abbey has an unusually decorated west front and fine fan-vaulting. The city has much 18th-century architecture, including Queen Square (1736) and the Circus (1754), designed by John Wood the Elder; the Assembly Rooms (1771) and the Royal Crescent (1775) were designed by the younger John Wood. The Bath Festival Orchestra is based here and the University of Bath was established in 1966. The Bath Theatre Royal (1805) at Sawclose is one of the UK’s oldest theatres. The city of Bath is a World Heritage site.

Economy Tourism and retail are the chief growth industries in Bath.

Roman baths and temple The remains of the Roman baths and the temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva, established around the hot springs after AD 60 and built over during the medieval period, were not excavated until the late 19th century. Now about 6 m/20 ft below street level, the open-air Great Bath was originally covered and occupied a hall measuring about 34 m/110 ft by 21 m/68 ft; the pillars date from the 19th century, but the bath itself has its original lead floor, and the surrounding pavement is well preserved. The baths complex also includes a tepid bath, a small semicircular bath, a cold circular bath, remains of the hypocaust (floor raised on tile piers, heated by hot air circulating beneath it), and the Norman King's Bath. Excavations in 1979 revealed thousands of coins and 'curses', offered at a place which was thought to be the link between the upper and lower worlds. The museum adjoining the baths displays examples of these offerings; other exhibits include a bronze head of Sulis Minerva.
Minerva and the reconstructed pediment of the temple, with a gorgon's head at its centre.

**Hot springs** Rich in radium emanation, the hot-spring water (46.5°C/116°F) which surfaces at Bath is thought to have medicinal and therapeutic properties, beneficial in the treatment of gout, rheumatism, and skin diseases. The waters may still be taken in the Pump Room.

**Architectural features** The 18th-century buildings of Bath are mostly built of Bath Stone, a white freestone. The shop-lined Italianate Pulteney Bridge (1769–74) was designed by Robert Adam. The Pump Room dates from 1792–96. The Assembly Rooms were destroyed in an air raid in 1942 and re-opened in 1963; they now house the Museum of Costume. The Royal Crescent, to the northwest of the city centre, comprises an arc of 30 houses overlooking a sloping lawn. The Guildhall (1768–75) includes the Victoria Art Gallery. The astronomer William Herschel, with his sister Caroline, discovered Uranus while working in Bath, in 1781; their house is now a museum. To the northwest of the city on Lansdown Hill is the neoclassical Beckford's Tower (1827), built for the writer William Beckford, who retired to Bath in 1822.

The city suffered heavy aerial attacks during World War II, particularly in the ‘Baedeker raids’ (April 1942). Over 200 buildings of architectural or historic value were either destroyed or seriously damaged.

**Bath Abbey** The present abbey church, a fine example of Perpendicular Gothic architecture, was begun in 1499. It was built on the site of a Saxon abbey (founded in 775), in which Edgar, the first King of All England, was crowned in 973. The carved decoration on the west front of the present Abbey depicts angels ascending and descending ladders on the turrets on each side of the window. The Bath Abbey Heritage Vaults recreate 1,600 years of history beneath the abbey.

**Museums** Museums in Bath include the Building of Bath Museum and the Museum of Bath at Work. The American Museum at Claverton Manor shows how Americans lived in the 17th–19th centuries, and the 4,000-year-old story of communication can be traced at the Bath Postal Museum, where the world's first stamp, the 'Penny Black', was posted. The Jane Austen Centre presents the story of the author's life in Bath.

**Parks** Bath has many parks and gardens including the Royal Victoria Park, laid out from 1830, and Sydney Gardens, laid out in 1795.

**Famous people** Bath was the birthplace of the Arctic explorer William Parry, and the painter Thomas Gainsborough settled here in 1760. Visitors to the city included the novelists Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding, and Jane Austen.

**Charters** Richard I granted the town its earliest existing charter in 1189; this was confirmed by Henry III and extended by George III.

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