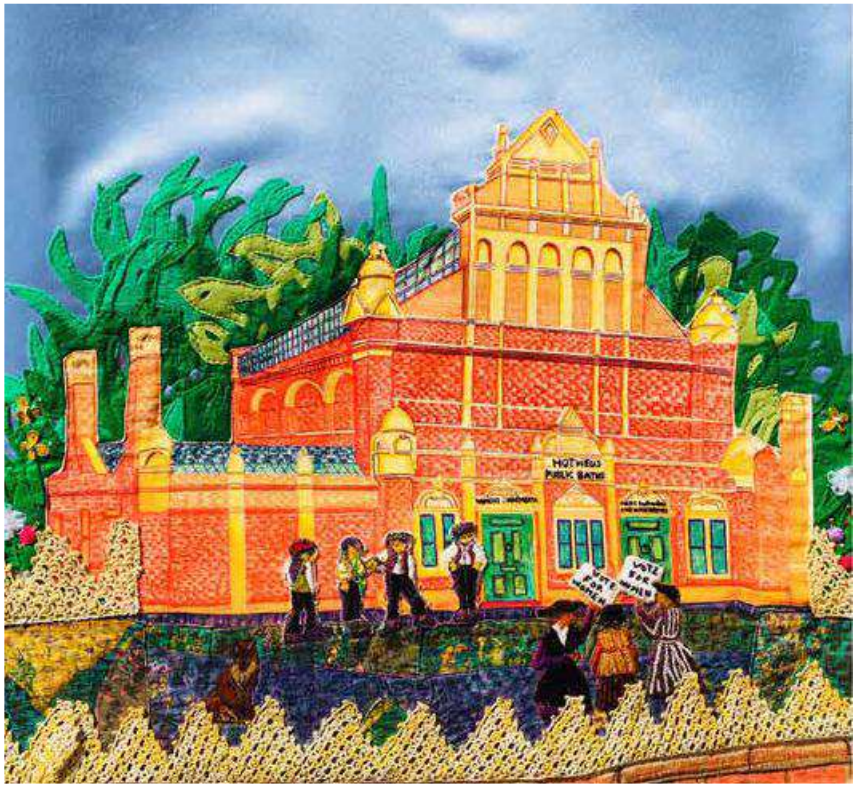
Jacobs Wells Baths

Conservation Plan



February 2026

Table of Contents

Executive Summary **4**

1. **Introduction** **6**

2. **Summary of the Heritage** **9**
- 2.1 Describe the Heritage **10**
- 2.2 Local Context **16**
- 2.3 History **17**
- 2.4 Wider Heritage Context **26**
- 2.5 How the Heritage is Looked After **27**

3. **Assessment of the Value of Heritage** **29**
- 3.1. Evidential Value **30**
- 3.2 Historic Value **30**
- 3.3 Aesthetic Value **32**
- 3.4 Communal Value **33**

4. **Risks and Opportunities** **34**
- 4.1 Risks **34**
- 4.2 Opportunities **36**

5. **Policies** **38**
- 5.1 Maintain Beneficial Occupation **38**
- 5.2 Retain Integrity of the Building **38**
- 5.3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the building its role and qualities **38**
- 5.4 Improve access to the building for all users and visitors **38**
- 5.5 Preserve or enhance the primary architectural forms **39**
- 5.6 Improve the legibility and signage respectfully **39**
- 5.7 Initiate routine maintenance (quinquennial) inspections and records **39**
- 5.8 Aim to reduce energy footprint and consider alternative green strategies **40**
- 5.9 Collect and collate all existing drawings and records and commit to fully referenced archive .....
- 5.10 Initiate oral history projects **40**
- 5.11 Building environmental sustainability into the operation of the building **40**
- 5.12 Manage and maximise the presence of
- water on the site **40**
- 5.13 Share and develop this conservation

plan via regular reviews 40

6. **Bibliography** 41

7. **Appendices**
   - Appendix 1: Timeline 42
   - Appendix 2: Map Regression 45

Version Control

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	January 2026	2015 document first revision for Heritage Fund mid-stage review Internal consultation
2.0	March – May 2026	To be reviewed following Heritage Fund mid-stage review for final Phase 2 Delivery application Significance workshop

Executive Summary

Built in 1889 to serve the working poor, Jacobs Wells Baths in the Clifton & Hotwells Conservation Area is a Grade II Listed building encompassing a wealth of architectural and social heritage, from its time as a public swimming baths to its 30- year history as a dance hub. The building's future came under threat in December 2022, when plans to reinstate the pool and convert it into a leisure facility fell through.

As an asset guardian of The Trinity Centre, Trinity Community Arts Ltd (TCA) worked with interested parties to support the establishment of a democratic legal structure and framework that can ensure long-lasting community ownership. TCA are committed to working with Bristol City Council, Councillors, partners, and stakeholder groups to develop and deliver a repair and renovation scheme that is both in keeping with the venue's dance heritage and responds to consultation and the desperate need for community and youth provision within the locality. The long-term future of Jacobs Wells Baths in Hotwells became one step closer to being secured, when the Council's CAT Group announced its decision to offer TCA a 35-year CAT lease, subject to receipt of a satisfactory business plan. TCA subsequently received a six-month occupational license during the transfer phase, to enable a detailed series of specialist surveys to be undertaken, funded by the Bristol-based Nisbet Trust. This programme of work was supplemented with Historic England (HE) funding, and as a result surveys and some urgent and enabling works were undertaken in early 2025. A critical milestone was achieved in September 2024 when, following the completion of urgent & enabling works, TCA were awarded a 35-year lease.

£1million was awarded by the Community Ownership Fund (COF) in December 2023 towards a £1.2million programme of works including asbestos decontamination in the Pump Room and repairs to the South Studio and Main Studio roofs (Phase 1). This work will make the building watertight and safe for 'meanwhile' uses pending a complete internal refurbishment (Phase 2). Phase 1a (decontamination and South Studio roof) was completed in autumn 2025, with Phase 1b (Main Studio roof) mobilising in November 2025 and due for completion by December 2026.

In parallel with Phase 1a and Phase 1b works, work has progressed with developing Phase 2 works. These will focus on the internal works to bring the whole site into use, including the North Wing. A Stage 1 (Development) grant for £252,877 was received from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (Heritage Fund) in December 2024, and (together with £78,850 from the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF)) this grant has enabled TCA, with their professional team, to develop plans in line with a target date of May 2026 of a Stage 2 (Delivery) stage application to Heritage Fund. This revised Conservation Plan, together with documentation listed in section 6 below, has been developed during the Heritage Fund supported Development Stage in order to fulfill the required outcomes as stated in the Permission to Start document, and will be submitted as part of the Heritage Fund Delivery Stage application in May 2026.

This Conservation Management is a revised, expanded, and updated version of an original prepared in February – March 2015 by Peter Carey RIBA SCA of Donald Insall Associates. Extensive parts of the following text have been retained from the earlier document. Amendments have included updating in respect of the current status of the baths and where available additional archival resources (including oral history work undertaken since 2015) has been incorporated, and adding substantial additional information taken from the research of Judy Goldsmith, local resident and historian. The original document was undertaken in response to proposed works at the Bath, then operated under lease by Bristol Dance Centre.

This Conservation Plan seeks to identify the essential and special qualities of the building, those that make it particularly distinctive, and propose policies to assist decision making to best care for these aspects for its future.

This plan has been updated to reflect current advice in respect of understanding heritage values and attributing significance to them as stated in Historic England advice,[1] namely historic, evidential, aesthetic, and communal value. In addition, ecological value is also considered. The significance of these values is assessed from exceptional (highest) to detracting/ uncertain as follows:

Communal value: this is of exceptional significance. The building was in public use by the people of Bristol from 1889 through to 2016, and research and consultation undertaken by Trinity Community Arts has uncovered strong feeling in contemporary communities that the Baths is of exceptional value in terms of its historic public use and its potential to remain in beneficial use for modern needs.

Historic value: the Baths are of moderate significance with some considerable elements. Its well preserved Victorian 'Queen Anne Revival' style exterior and impressive roof structure are attractive and characterful features, whilst the later adaption of the swimming pool to incorporate a remarkable sprung dance floor is of particular interest. There is little industrial archaeology left within the buildings, however the three magnificent water tanks over the pump room are of considerable significance.

Evidential value: whilst much of the pool machinery has been lost and the original decorative tiled scheme has been obscured by later additions, there is likely to be more evidence relating to the original appearance and function of the baths revealed during proposed works to adapt it for community use. It is therefore assessed as having some significance.

Aesthetic value: the Baths are a highly significant landmark in Hotwells, with an imposing façade that epitomises Victorian civic pride in both constructional detailing and in providing sanitation to the local community. As such, it is of considerable aesthetic value.

Ecological value: the Baths have, during a vacant period immediately prior to Trinity Community Arts took the lease, been used by bats. A series of bat surveys[2] were undertaken and a bat licence obtained from Natural England. Works on site continue to take place in consultation with the Project Ecologists, although it is understood that use was limited and is unlikely to continue now that the building is occupied by contractors prior to completion of Phase 2 works.

This Conservation Plan is a live document and will be subject to further revision and updates as works progress. A version control table is shown below.

[1] Drury, P and McPherson, A *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* (English Heritage, 2008)
[2] Insert reference

1 Introduction

The 2015 Donald Insall Associates Conservation Plan (CMP) was commissioned by Bristol Dance Centre to develop conservation policies to inform the longer term future conservation of the building generally but in time for the current development plans in particular. The present revision has been undertaken by Nicola Dyer PGDipCHE (RICS) CertOxon IHBC on behalf of Trinity Community Arts Ltd (TCA).

The 2015 CMP was compiled by Peter Carey RIBA SCA of Donald Insall Associates with reference to Sean Redmond of ph3design and much assistance, advice and enthusiasm from the Artistic Director, Alan Roberts. Documentary research was carried out by Andy Foyle and has provided an enhanced timeline as well as further information about the architects and other relevant personnel, and in the general understanding of the building and helping to define the significances in more detail. It is understood that, at the time, important archival material that has since become available was not accessible at Bristol Archives.[3] The CMP therefore had major gaps in terms of the operational history of the site, as opposed to its inception and its later (closure and beyond) history.

The site was, as of September 2024, taken on a 35-year lease by Trinity Community Arts as aprt of a Community Asset Transfer (CAT). This followed the collapse of a proposed scheme to return the Baths into use as a pool and leisure centre by Fusion Lifestyle, who withdraw in early 2023.

Since this time, further community research has been undertaken by Dr Edson Burton, Heritage Curator at TCA and Jude Hutchins, former Heritage Project Manager. A series of reminiscence sessions were held including 'I danced at Jacob's Wells,' for which a call had been put out to those who had memories to share of their experiences at Bristol Dance Centre.[4] Further community consultation undertaken in November 2025 (primarily to review development proposals) was also useful in understanding the perceptions of a wide variety of stakeholders towards the significance and value of the Baths.[5]

The revised CMP has been amended to reflect the format required by the Heritage Fund in their guidance. As indicated in the introduction, the first revision of the 2015 document substantially reuses the original text, adjusted to fit the Heritage Fund format and with updates and revisions reflecting both the increased knowledge of the site derived from undertaking Phase 1 works and the opening-up that they have necessitated, and the community consultations and reminiscence sessions as outlined above. The CMP will be adopted as a working document by TCA as part of the Heritage Fund Phase 2 Delivery Stage application in May 2026, and thereafter will be updated on an ad-hoc basis throughout Phase 2. It will be comprehensively reviewed and updated at least six months prior to the site opening for operation in November 2028, and again at least three months prior to the end of the Heritage Fund-supported operational phase in September 2029. This proposed revision schedule does not preclude the possibility of additional reviews in between these key dates.

The Conservation Plan does not sit in isolation; rather it is a key element within an overall suite of documents which it is designed to work in tandem with as follows:

[3] Sean Redmon Ph3 – personal recollection
[4] Ref reports and documentation
[5] Placed Report

Design Proposals: these have evolved in line with understanding of the significance of the building and the requirements of TCA in terms of delivery a financially-sustainable operating model. The proposals received planning and listed building consent in June 2024 (23/04191/F and 23/04192/LA). The heritage statement which accompanied these applications, and which formed the basis on which officers granted permission, have been considered and reflected within this revised CMP.

Cost Plan: however sensitively the scheme is prepared, with due reference to the need for the completed scheme to be viable, it is unlikely to succeed without robust cost planning on which to base fundraising efforts. In order to ensure the maximum deliverability of the scheme, professional cost management services have been procured such that cost reports have been available as the scheme develops. This ensures that the scheme, and the benefits it secures for the heritage, has the greatest chance of delivering those benefits.

Business Plan: the business plan has been prepared by an external consultant in close collaboration with TCA. This has been done in tandem with reviewing design proposals to ensure that a) the proposals deliver a building that can accommodate the essential community uses and financial returns necessary to ongoing viable operation; and b) the uses do not involve unacceptable levels of harm to the significance of the Baths.

Activity & Interpretation Plan: the activity plan has been prepared by the TCA team. It has taken the findings from community and stakeholder consultation to arrive at a brief for a series of interpretation and signage interventions around the site which will make it easy and accessible for users to navigate, ensuring that the significance of the site is harnessed as a power for good in both its everyday operational use and in democratising access to its rich and diverse history. Digital interpretation will be used and physical interventions will be limited to those that are genuinely effective, meaning that harmful physical impact on the fabric is limited, and intellectual access is as broad as possible. It is recognised that the documents retained by Bristol Archive are in themselves an exceptional and complete record of the Baths from their earliest inception through to the plans to extend its life via modernisation in the 1950s and 1960s. The opportunity to incorporate this material into the interpretation and presentation of the site will be explored by the Interpretation Consultant in collaboration with the TCA team and wider community.

Maintenance & Management Plan: this document is currently in preparation. It will follow the Heritage Fund guidance and reflect, under the required headings, how the business plan, activity plan, Conservation Plan will together contribute towards the sustainable management & maintenance of the completed building post-Phase 2.

Whilst the 2015 CMP cites extensive source material, including important oral testimony in respect of the Bristol Dance Centre, and whilst this has more recently been supplemented through reminiscence sessions and consultation held by TCA as part of their Heritage Fund-supported Phase 2 Development work, there remain at the time of writing some areas which would benefit from greater understanding. In particular, these include the system by which the spring water was managed on site (how it was brough on, how it was disposed, to what extent this system is still operating). Whilst the remaining pipework in the North Studio has been exposed as part of the asbestos decontamination works, it will require further recording and understanding prior to Phase 2 works commencing. Excitingly, there is likely to be extensive further evidence of the original decorative tiling and potentially original features behind later accretions around the site. As well as tangible heritage, it can safely be assumed that more archival and intangible heritage such as oral histories will be revealed during the course of the Heritage Fund project.

As part of its commitment to a truly democratic approach to sharing the heritage, the interim conclusions on significance within this document will be shared with stakeholders groups and their feedback incorporated into the next and subsequent revisions. All TCA's design work is guided by their Design Principles of practicality (affordability, flexibility), inclusivity (involvement, iteration), possibility (deliverability, continuity), sustainability (reuse, adaptation), and longevity (accessibility, maintenance).[6]

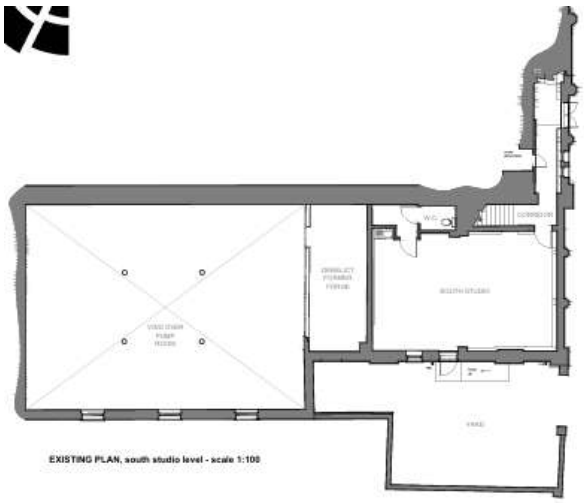
TCA's philosophy for approaching Jacobs Wells Baths is best summarised below in the vision and mission statements:

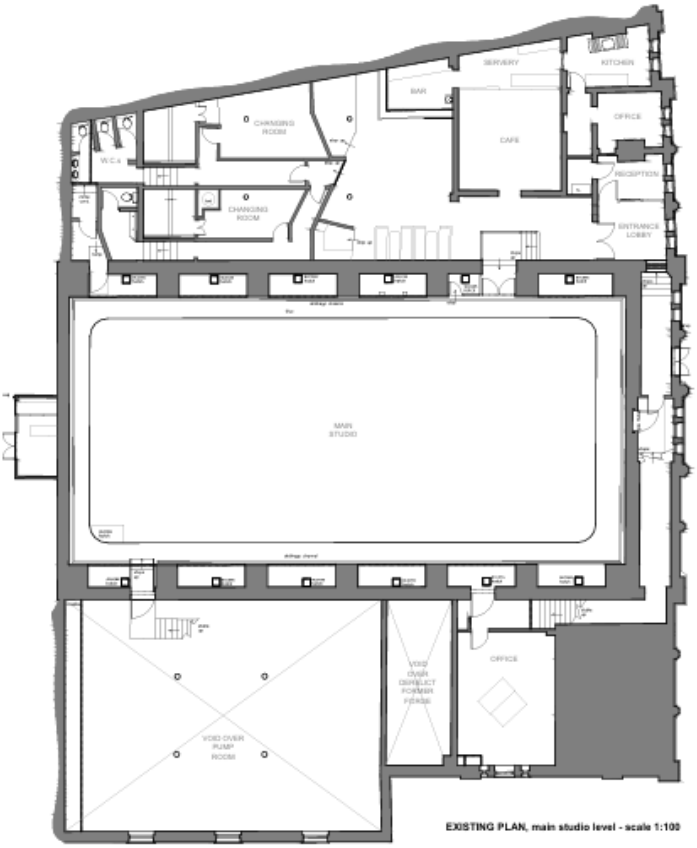
Vision: Trinity's vision is creative expression for all. In pursuit of that vision, we will preserve, protect and improve for the public benefit JWB, (formerly Bristol Community Dance Centre – BCDC), and promote its heritage to the people of Bristol and beyond.

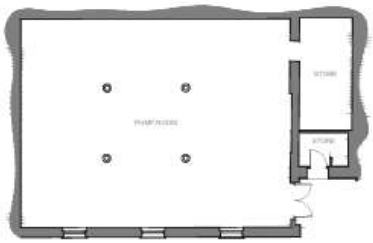
Mission: Our mission is to empower communities through the arts and ensure everyone has an opportunity to access, take part and lead our city's cultural and creative offer. We will work with BCC, citizens and stakeholders to develop a viable and sustainable future for JWB as a multi-use hub for Central Bristol, delivering an intergenerational programme of vibrant, accessible and inclusive dance, youth and community activities.

[6] https://my.trinitybristol.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Trinity-design-principles.pdf (accessed 16th February 2026)

2. Summary of the heritage







(clockwise from top) fig.X: location plan of Jacobs Wells Baths; fig.X: plan of the upper ground (Main Studio) level; fix: plan of the basement (Pump Room) level; and fig.X: please of the lower ground (South Studio) level (Ph3 Design)

2.1 Describe the heritage

Jacobs Wells Baths was listed Grade II (List Entry Number 1292890) in March 1977, possibly in response to the perceived risks attached to its looming closure. Formally named Hotwells Public Baths, it has become known as Jacobs Wells Baths and this is the name used within this document. Interestingly, at the time of construction, the pump rooms associated with the formerly middle-class, glamorous Hotwells Spa further to the west had only relatively recently (1867) been demolished when the construction of the Baths was first considered. Could it be that the nomenclature was designed to evoke something of the cache once attached to Hotwells Spa and apply it by association to the new Baths? The list entry is as follows:

Former public baths, gymnasium, now dance theatre. Designed 1881, opened 1889. By Josiah Thomas. Red Cattybrook brick with buff terracotta dressings, gable stacks and slate roof. Central swimming pool with lateral blocks and front cross passage. Northern Renaissance Revival style. Single storey; 12 bay front, with 3-storey 5-bay pool gable behind. The front is divided into 3 sections by brick pilasters with terracotta domed octagonal caps, the sections between articulated by octagonal terracotta pilasters with smaller domed tops. The central section has a terracotta panel with HOTWELLS PUBLIC BATHS beneath a raised panel with the City arms, and a pediment with foliate decoration. Central tripartite window, flanking doorways inscribed WOMENS WARM BATHS to the left, and MENS SWIMMING AND WARM BATHS to the right, and outer paired windows, all have shouldered architraves and segmental pediments; the central window has a raised panel between consoles to a segmental pediment. 3 left-hand bays are blind, the 4 to the right have paired windows. Each side block has an end gable with a stack with terracotta panelled and gableted top. The large pool gable has outer brick pilasters to domed caps, and a raised central section to a stepped pedimented gable. 2 lower strings, and a frieze and dentil cornice between the pilasters; the middle section is divided by terracotta strips, with 5 shell-head niches above the cornice, a cornice above them, and a terracotta pediment with foliate decoration and the date of opening, under a ball finial. The sides of the pool have 6 deep semicircular arches under a corbel table. Full length ridge lantern. To the rear right-hand side is a decapitated square chimney with chamfered sides and terracotta bands.

INTERIOR: a covered pool with a semicircular steel truss roof carried on steel corbels, side blocks, and boiler house to the left, with cast-iron columns with octagonal bases and moulded capitals. The baths were converted into a dance centre c1980 and comprise a very fine example of their type.[7]

The style adopted at Jacob's Wells Baths was a loose interpretation of the Queen Anne Revival which had developed in Britain from c. 1870. It had relatively little in common with the style of Queen Anne's reign (1702-14). Its characteristics were;

- Renaissance details but asymmetrical compositions with un-classical proportions
- high rooflines; vertical decorative chimney-stacks, pinnacles and turrets, of Jacobean influence
- gables, either straight or Dutch/Flemish (with pedimented tops and curved outlines)
- red brick and tile-hanging

[7] https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1292890 (accessed 9th January 2026)

- Dutch or Flemish door surrounds i.e. pilasters and segmental pediments
- three-sided bays, sometimes projecting above ground-level as oriel bays
- broken wall surfaces, with pilasters, ribbed details, aprons below windows, etc
- white painted woodwork
- sash windows with small panes in the upper half or casement windows with leaded lights
- wrought iron work
- decorative terracotta with designs such as sunflowers
- occasional Japanese motifs (e.g. chrysanthemums) following the Great Japan Exhibition of 1867 and the Aesthetic Movement

Its main exponents were architects such as Philip Webb, Norman Shaw, W.E. Nesfield, Sir Gilbert Scott and G.F. Bodley. It was highly publicised in Shaw's development of housing around Prince's Gate and the Royal Albert Hall, and by the mid-1870s became the preferred style for the London School Boards through their principal architects E.R. Robson and J.J. Stevenson.

In Bristol it was little used. In c. 1875-6 Stuart Colman designed a Clifton house for a Mr Norris (now Clifton High School for Girls) in the Queen Anne Revival style and in 1884 Foster & Wood employed it for their offices of the Bristol Municipal Charities, Colston Avenue. It was employed for Board Schools only fitfully in the 1890s (e.g. St George Higher Grade Technical School, 1894-5, by F. Bligh Bond). Given that Josiah Thomas as City Surveyor designed the first version of Jacob's Wells Baths in 1877-9, it must be regarded as an important early instance of the style in Bristol.

The hard red brick used at Jacob's Wells Baths is Cattybrook brick; the brickworks in Over Lane, Almondsbury was established in 1865 by Charles Richardson, engineer of the Bristol & South Wales Union Railway, to utilise the local clay for the nearby Patchway tunnel. In 1871 he went into partnership with Ernest Street and Edward Grover, the business being incorporated in 1877 as the Cattybrook Brick Company Ltd. Its high quality deep- red engineering bricks were used extensively in Bristol buildings; some 30 million of them line the 1872 Severn railway tunnel.

The Building Today

The building was constructed on the site of earlier housing which appears to have been of the back-to-back type. No archaeological remains relating to this have been encountered to date; the brick voids of the pump room floor suggested by a GPR survey have not been explored but relate the Baths construction rather than any earlier occupation of the site.

The Baths were built in a single stage, opening in 1889 occupies a highly compressed nature of the site, backing onto the cliffs of Clifton behind and constrained by (initially) earlier buildings to each side which were replaced over the years. It can be divided broadly into four key components plus circulation space:

North Studio; Main Studio; South Studio; Pump Room and Tanks

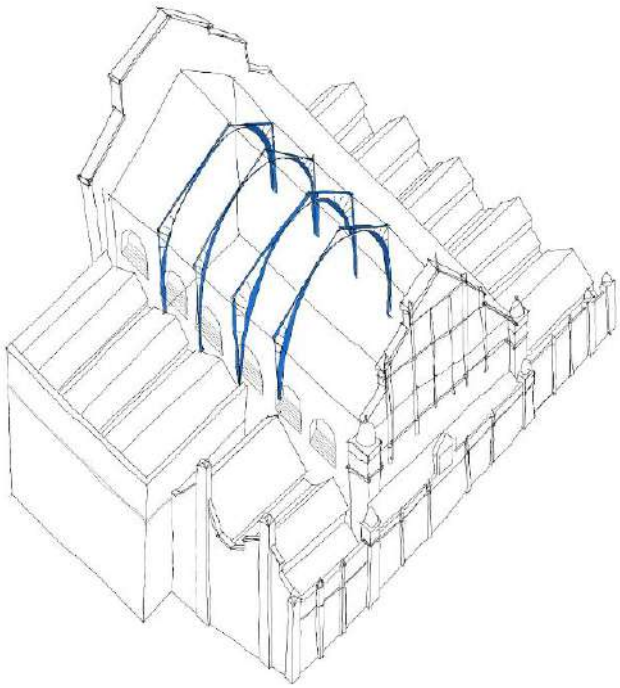


Fig.X: diagrammatic plan of the Baths indicating the location of the main elements i.e. North Wing, Main Studio, South Studio, and Pump Room (Ph3 Design)

As a relatively modern building, constructed by the City of Bristol, it is well-understood in many respects owing to the extensive documentary sources created and maintained by the City Planning Department and later accessioned by Bristol Archives. A comprehensive timeline of information relating to the building is included as Appendix XXX, based on documentary sources held by Bristol Archives. This was supplemented in the 2015 CMP by interviews with Alan Roberts, former Manager of the Dance Centre, whose knowledge of and evident passion for the buildings continues to be invaluable in supporting the present project team. Oral testimony from leading figures in the Dance Centre has been sourced and continues to be available with the numerous personal contacts built and maintained between the TCA team and former Dance Centre personnel. There is an active and enthusiastic voluntary group, the Hotwells & Cliftonwood Community Association (H&CCA). The Baths are fortunate to have been thoroughly researched by a near neighbour, Judy Goldsmith, whose online article is a detailed and well-illustrated resource summarising the history of the site right up to 2018 (the date of publication) including links to oral testimony recordings.[8]

The Baths are therefore fortunate in the documentation available both in respect of its physical development, but also the exceptionally rich resource available which sheds light on its exceptional communal significance. This documentation has been added to and updated as the project has developed. There is now a comprehensive set of documents summarised as follows: updated asbestos surveys, GPR survey of pump room floor, measured images of removed fittings

[8] https://www.bathsandwashhouses.co.uk/archive/your-local-buildings/bristol/bristol-jacobs-wells-baths/ (accessed 17th January 2026)

such as the contaminated original remaining louvres to the forge, complete photographic record of pump room before and during the decontamination, full set of measured drawings, drone surveys and structural surveys of the roof (where accessible), and ongoing photographic surveys recording the appearance of the site prior to and during the Phase 1 works. This has been supplemented by further reminiscence work with the community. As understanding of the site and its history develops, this will be captured in further revisions of the CMP. Most significantly, the final CMP revision prior to opening will further summarise and link to the outcomes of further activity and engagement work planned as part of implementing the activity & interpretation plan.

Fig.X: Old White Hart, Jacobs Wells Road – a photograph taken by Fred Little, a Bristol-based commercial photographer, publisher, and manufacturer of hand-made 'rea photographic' postcards (fredsbristol, Flickr[9])

2.2 Local context

Jacobs Wells Baths sits at the south end of Jacobs Wells Road, towards the Floating Harbour – the stretch of the River Avon arrested at a permanent high tide since 1809 when a system of locks and sluices were constructed to enable the commercial port of Bristol to operate outside of the mercy of the tidal river. Today, it sits at the easternmost perimeter of the Clifton Conservation Area adjacent to the Park Street and Brandon Hill Conservation area.

The name Clifton derives from an Anglo Saxon origin, Cliff and tun (an enclosure).The whole area of Clifton on the hill was dotted with springs. Jacob's Well was fed by a spring and used in the 11th century as a Jewish bath. The precise ritual function of the bath is not known; it has been described as a Mikveh Bath, used by Jews for ritual bathing. However, more recently it has been suggested that it is a 'Bet Tohorah' for the cleansing of the dead, a theory that has gained ground in part owing to its adjacency to the Jewish burial ground on the site now occupied by Queen Elizabeth's School.[10] Jacob's Wells Road was historically a rocky and wooded valley with a lane

[9] https://www.flickr.com/photos/120528204@N07/13205569673/ (accessed 19th January 2026)
[10] Hillaby, J and Sermon, R *Jacob's Well, Bristol: Mikveh or Bet Tohorah?* (Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2004) https://www.bgas.org.uk/tbgas_bg/v122/bg122127.pdf

beside that followed the Sandbrook Stream to the Avon.[11] In the 18th century, nearby Hotwell Spa became a popular destination for those in society circles, but this declined and associated facilities (Hotwells House, and a pump room) were demolished by 1867. Lower Clifton had become an industrialised area by the 17th century with shipping trades, a brickyard, and lime burners. There was a vast disparity between the life and society of the inhabitants of Clifton on-the-Hill compared with the Hotwells area, where the rate of mortality was more than double that of Upper Clifton. Interestingly, the death rate in the area will have been exacerbated by the present of the nearby Stranger's Cemetery, where those unfortunate people who travelled to the Hotwells Spa already unwell and in search of a cure succumbed to their illness far from home.

Today, the Baths forms a key component of the Conservation Area boundary alongside the starkly contrasting neighbouring St Peter's House (unlisted, built 1950s). The latter is, together with Brandon House, identified in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CAAC) as a landmark of local significance. The contrast between the colourful red brickwork and florid detailing of the Baths and the cool white modernity of St Peter's House is a particularly striking feature of Character Area 7 (Clifton Wood Slopes) in which they are situated.

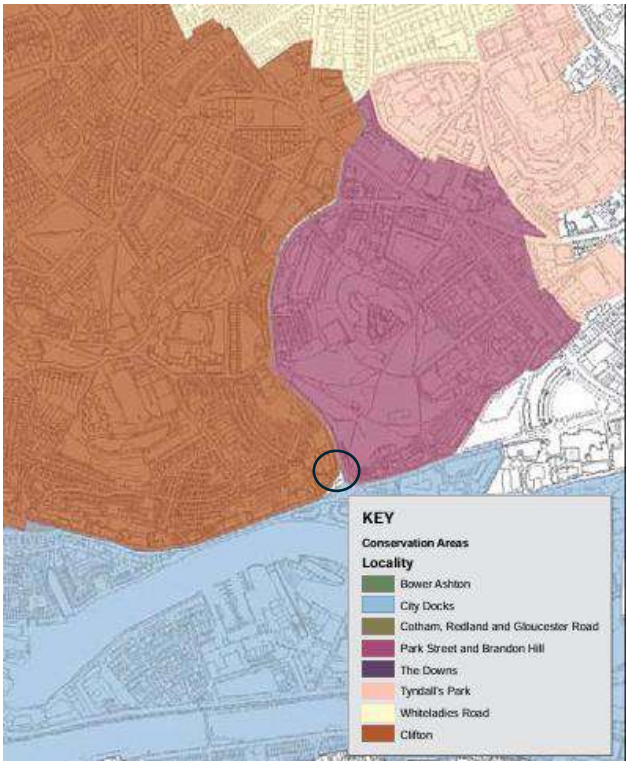


Fig.X: the location of the Baths at the gateway to the south of both the Clifton and Park Street & Brandon Hill Conservation Areas (Bristol City Council[12])

[11] https://cliftonhotwells.org.uk/resources/clifton-and-hotwells-character-appraisal.pdf (accessed 9th January 2026)

[12] City Design Group *Clifton & Hotwells – Character Appraisal & Management Proposals* (Bristol City Council, June 2010)

2.3 History

The following section is substantially taken from Andrew Foyle's Historic Building Report: Jacob's Wells Baths, Bristol (February 12th, 2015). Foyle's report acknowledges the following: Bristol Record Office; Peter Carey, Donald Insall Associates; Alan Roberts, Bristol Community Dance Centre; Sarah Rubidge; BRO Bristol Record Office; Bristol Central Reference Library; and John Latimer, Annals of Bristol, vol. 4, 1901.

Bristol's Swimming Baths and Hot Baths facilities were developed from mid-Victorian times in response to the dual needs for hygiene and healthy exercise. Housing for the working and artisan classes was routinely built without plumbed in bathrooms until c. 1919. By contrast, middle and upper class housing almost always had plumbed bathrooms and upstairs WCs from around 1870. In poorer districts it was common for the young, especially boys, to swim in local rivers, ponds and lakes for recreation, and even in the City Docks. The waters were both dangerous and unhealthy, being the receptacle for industrial waste : the City Docks inflow via the Feeder Canal was contaminated with the outfall from both Butler's Tar Works at Crew's Hole and Netham Chemical Works, amongst many others. Sewage was also pumped into rivers and the docks, so bathing was highly hazardous to health.

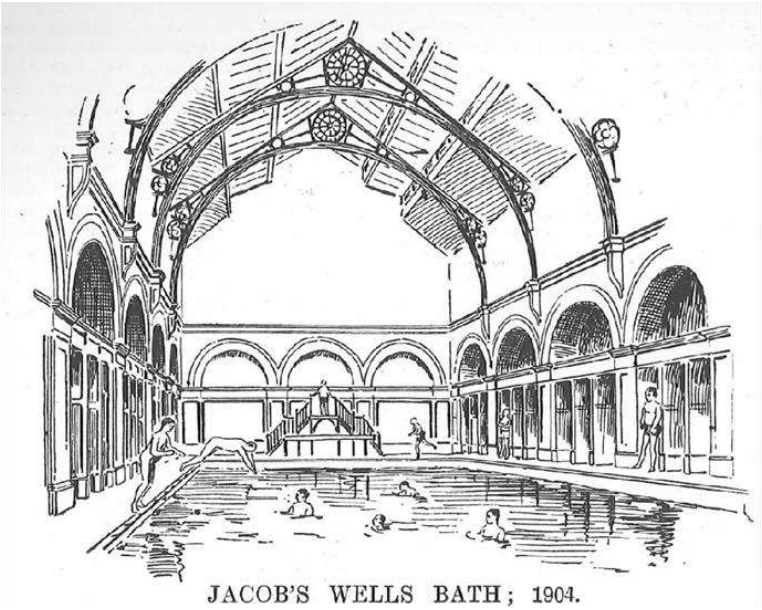


Fig.X: Samuel Loxton, Jacob's Wells Swimming Pool, 1893. Note that in this image the bathers appear to be nude, confirming that it pre-dates the 1896 resolution that all bathers over 14 were required to wear bathing drawers (Bristol Central Library/ Know Your Place)

The following information, once held on the Barton Hill History Group website, is quoted:

Town Councils came under increasing pressure to improve public health facilities. In 1846 the Baths and Wash Houses Act was passed forcing Councils to form a Committee to provide washing facilities for the poor. The first washhouse put into Bristol was at Broad Weir in 1849 after two severe cholera epidemics. This was followed by the Mayor's Paddock Baths in 1870 which provided for first and second class bathers. These early baths were used mainly by women for washing clothes and by young boys, most men and older boys from this area would have used the Feeder and other parts of the River Avon.

During the 1870s and 1880s sport as a form of recreation became important. Schools began to use the Baths. In 1883 of the 10,305 boys in Elementary Schools in Bristol only 384 could swim but it wasn't long before many more learnt to swim. Soon Swimming clubs were formed outside school hours and competitions between different parts of Bristol developed. During this time the water supply improved in quality and the number of houses that had running water increased. The City Council recognised these improvements and made a radical change in their approach to public health. They moved away from the idea of just improving the health of the community to the development of the physical health of the individual through exercise and leisure. The first major project was the opening up at great cost of Jacobs Wells Swimming Baths in 1889.[13]

The presence of Jacob's Wells Industrial Dwellings nearby (on the site now occupied by Brandon House flats) was a significant local factor in the need to provide bathing facilities. The three blocks of four-storey flats were intended to provide 'Industrial Dwellings' for the working poor who were too poor to afford the high rents pertaining in the area. There were eventually 131 flats, but they were built without bathrooms, and indeed only had gas on the stairs and landings, not inside the flats.[14] Hot Water was only provided in small amounts via coal fired ranges. It is likely that the residents formed a significant proportion of the users of Jacob's Wells Baths in its early years. The flats were demolished c. 1957.

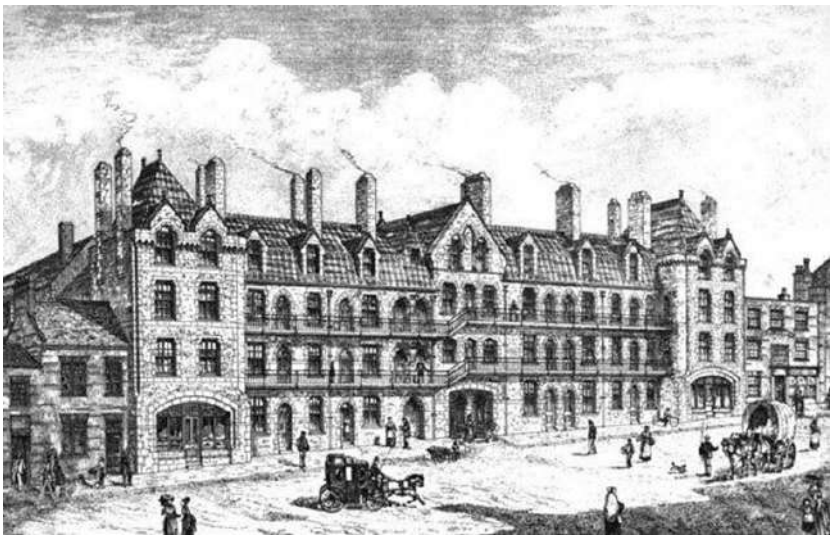


Fig.X: Jacob's Wells Industrial Dwellings, designed by Elijah Hoole, 1875-7. Illustration from the Architect, August 21, 1875 (Archiseek[15])

Jacobs Wells Baths

The following section is substantially taken from the article 'Bristol – Jacobs Wells Baths' by Judy Goldsmith, published on the website 'Baths and Wash Houses Historical Archive.'[16]

The site chosen was famous for its springs in Jacobs Wells Road, then known as Woodwell Lane. In an 1850 Bristol "Report to the General Board of Health" a Hotwells resident, Mr J Hyde,

[13] Original link given in the DIA Conservation Plan as follows - Barton Hill History Group; http://bhhg.co.uk/showfiles.php?files=Barton%20Hill%20Baths n.b. as at 5th January 2025 this link is not found and the BHHG website is no longer accessible.
[14] Latimer, J *Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century, Volume 4* (William George's Sons, Bristol 1901)
[15] http://archiseek.com/2009/1875-2/#.VNjzE_msVV0 (accessed 15th January 2026)
[16] *Ibid.*

commented 'I also beg to say there is a considerable quantity of water running to waste through Jacob's Well, that may, with a moderate outlay, be used in a public bath, similar to the one now erecting at the other end of the city" (in Broad Weir). The site was, prior to the construction of the Baths, occupied by a complex of high-backed residential buildings situated around courts at the rear; glazed bricks stamped 'Farnley Iron CO – Leeds' were discovered during parapet works in early 2024 which may have come from the original buildings on the site and been reused as rubble infill in the construction of the Baths.

In 1886 the Dean and Chapter of Bristol Cathedral offered the spring water for the use of the baths at a nominal rent, to be used together with the Water Company's supply. Springwater was fed by gravity through the old Cathedral Pipe, the Abbey Conduit, at the junction of Constitution Hill. This conveyed fresh spring water from the bottom of Brandon Hill, with a ball valve system controlling the flow to the tanks. Surplus water was redirected.

Plans for the baths were well under way by 1876. An offer was made for the land on 20th March 1877. Plans were submitted to the Baths Committee by Josiah Thomas in April 1879. These were unanimously approved. Most original plans and drawings still exist in Bristol Archives. An estimated cost of £20,000 was considered too much by ratepayers and cosmetic cost reductions were made, such as the removal of stone dressings, leaving high quality deep red Cattybrook Bricks as the finish. Colour wash drawings exist showing some of the, very superior, changing cubicles which were pared down in the final design. A very fine early detailed plan of a wash-house, offices, (including ironing room) etc. next to the swimming pool is held in Bristol Archives. Early plans all use the address Woodwell Lane.

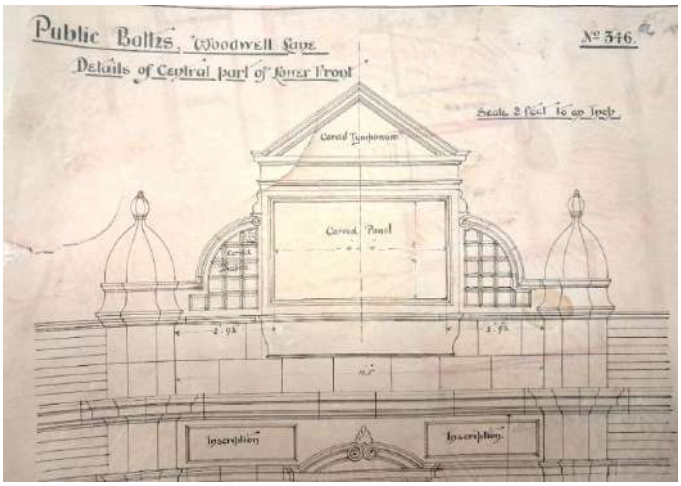


Fig.X; City Surveyors Office detailed sketch of the west elevation of the Baths. It is dated 1st March 1889 therefore must relate to the final construction detail once the works were already on site as they were nearing completion by this point. Note the address shown as Woodwell Lane (Bristol Archives)

An overhead cast iron tank, supported on 4 large cast iron columns 21' high still exists in the boiler room to store spring water. It is in three sections and is 48 feet by 30 feet, 6 feet deep. "one of the largest tanks ever constructed, holding 60,000 gallons" (Western Daily Press 26th April 1889). Two 'Cornish' Galloway tubular boilers heated the water. These were later replaced in 1929, still with coal fired boilers and scrapped when the baths closed. However much of the original pipework remains visible in the boiler room and is in place under the floors throughout the building. Levers, Spindles, India Rubber Joints and Valves referred to by the Superintendent in a letter dated Sep 1890 are illustrated in meticulous and beautiful detail in fragile plans held in Bristol Archives.

The 1933 Bristol Corporation Baths Brochure (held at Bristol Archives) still stated 'the outstanding attraction of Jacob's Wells Baths is that the physical benefits of swimming as an exercise are enhanced by the fact that the greater quantity of water used is obtained from two natural springs, rising on Brandon Hill, known as Jacob's Wells Springs, the tonic and medicinal properties of which have long been recognised. This water, which is of a consistent quality and clarity, is conveyed to the Baths and stored in large-capacity tanks. Bathers at Jacob's Wells, therefore, obtain the benefits usually associated with expensive treatments at English and Continental Spas.'

In 1889 after long delays, Josiah Thomas' building officially opened. It consisted of 6 First Class men's' warm baths, 18 second class; 6 women's' warm baths all of one class; Waiting rooms; attendants' rooms; office and storeroom; towel washing room; boiler room and smithy; pool 80' long and 35' wide. It was 6 feet deep at the deep end and held 80,000 gallons of water. The Western Daily Press in Sep 1888 boasted that the Baths were 'considered to be one of the finest in the kingdom. The bottom and sides are of glazed brick and the building is exceedingly lofty and well ventilated.'

Only men could use the "men's swimming baths", and the separate but adjacent entrances for men swimmers and women warm bathers were divided by a ticket office blocking the entrance corridor. A Superintendent, Mr Higham, was employed. Towels with Jacobs Wells Baths woven in white letters down the centre on a red stripe were purchased, together with soap, soda brushes and other sundries.

Various teething problems were sorted out with things such as lack of draught in the boilers and so no hot water. A disgruntled client tried to see the source of the problem and complained 'the boiler room was completely enveloped in smoke, whilst the large amount of sulphur was most unendurable. On opening the furnace doors, I found that the fires were almost devoid of flame, and on stirring the coals, dense volumes of flame and smoke came out of the fire grate doors with such force as to drive me back from the boilers.'[17] He demanded a refund.

On 21st July 1896 two resolutions were recorded by the Baths and Wash Houses Committee: "That the Superintendents report that the use of bathing drawers at Jacobs Wells Baths be made compulsory and that a months' notice be posted to that effect...That male persons over the age of 14 years be required to wear bathing drawers.' This followed an 1895 decision that female swimmers were allowed to use the baths one afternoon a week with Miss Read (the money taker) in charge. From 1921 Children were allowed to use the warm baths with special arrangements by the education committee for "verminous children". Later in the 1930's reduced price baths were offered to the unemployed.

A long campaign, started by 1901, led to mixed Bathing happening in other pools in Bristol in 1922, but not Jacobs Wells. This was probably due to the lack of female changing facilities other than poolside, lack of separate women's toilet facilities plus the women's entrance not giving access to the pool at all. In 1927, Henleaze Swimming Club asked to use Jacobs Wells Baths for one evening a week for mixed bathing as an experiment. The superintendent reported he could provide changing accommodation for a limited number of ladies in the gentleman's slipper baths. The City Engineer was asked to submit estimate of the cost of making an entrance to the swimming baths in the wall opposite the entrance to the ladies slipper baths. Plans dated 12th April 1930 show an opening made from the main pool into a women's communal changing room with two toilets on the same upper level as the swimming bath. Stairs from ground floor separate

[17] 11 April 1892, Bristol Mercury

women's entrance corridor were part of the 1960s modernisation, but until then women and girls had to walk round the side of the pool to get in.

There is some uncertainty regarding whether or not, and of so from what date, a temporary flooring was introduced over the swimming pool floor to enable winter use for gym equipment and/ or dancing. James Kane pursued the 1892 suggestion of flooring over in winter for gym use at a cost of £290 for flooring and £290 for apparatus, further resolved in 1895 after a visit to see such a scheme at Newport Baths. The cost of an alternative way of creating gym space - erecting new building instead on the adjoining land - was rejected as it was £700. Jacob's Wells Baths swimming baths were the first in Bristol to have winter opening in 1924 however, so it would appear that the window of opportunity for creating a seasonal floor space was closed at this point. The winter opening was certainly a repeated exercise. By the 1930's condensation was a problem as a result ealdong to decay and damage of timber elements of the baths. Front supports of original wooden doors to the cubicles were badly affected by condensation and doors were replaced with curtains. In 1933 a piece of wooden moulding from the now dangerous glass lantern fell into the pool. As a result, in 1933 a reconstruction of the lantern was completed by Bray and Slaughter.[18]

Fig.X: St Brendan's College boys at Jacobs Wells Baths, 16th July 1936. The original tiling and terracotta decoative scheme can be seen in the background, as can the memorial plaque recording the gifting of the spring water from Jacob's Well by the Dean and Chapter 'for as long as it ay be needed for this purpose.' It is possble that the plaque remains below the later 1960s cladding. (Know Your Place)

Wartime blacking out was done with curtain materials and paint. An air raid in December 1940 caused considerable damage to the glass roof and tiles so after that the baths operated as an open air bath, with the water heated to 70 degrees. Repairs were not done until March 1944, when it was accepted that this work would be paid direct to the contractor by the War Damage Commission. Miss Burgess the cashier left to do munitions work in 1942. Spring water was an asset in wartime. Bristol Waterworks Company made arrangements for emergency drinking water supplies with a temporary connection with the spring water supply to the baths. (By this date the

[18] The practice of covering over pools during winter months was widespread amongst baths of a similar type – for a discuss see https://www.bathsandwashhouses.co.uk/archive/your-local-buildings/birmingham/birmingham-baths-assembly-halls/ (accessed 19th January 2026)

£1 payable each year to the Dean and Chapter for use of the water had ceased to be paid). A University Air Squadron used the baths for training on Sundays and many troops washed at the baths. Our allies caused a small problem when an American army lorry damaged a pillar and gate.

In the 1950s the land adjoining the baths was considered for building new flats (now St Peter's House) together with an extension to the baths, including offices and a Turkish Baths Suite. This extension wasn't built but the baths committee at a meeting in October 1955 were still discussing Turkish Baths at an estimated cost of £65,000. In January 1958 a less expensive hydrotherapy unit, called a "Mini Turkish Suite" was accepted. By 1959 this had replaced the men's 1st class hot baths, with Aerotone, steam cabinets ,showers and Zotofoam on offer.

The boilers were at this time were still coal fired despite a report on the advantages of switching to oil. In 1960 an ambitious and modernising young Assistant, Thomas Mogg, was employed. He took over as Superintendent two years later. A qualified engineer (formerly a marine engineer) Thomas Mogg supervised repairs to the spring water supply and settling tank chamber at the bottom of Constitution Hill in 1963 and 1973 to keep supplies clean and flowing. in 1967 Tom Mogg produced a report on comparative costs of hand stoking, mechanical stoking, oil and gas firing of the boilers. He recommended converting the boilers to oil firing. In 1965, not long before final closure, the swimming pool was refurbished with laminated wall cladding fixed on tantalised timber battens over the still existing tiled walls and semi-circular arches and new non slip floor tiles fixed. A lower ceiling was fixed under the still existing two tier main ventilated lantern running East to West.

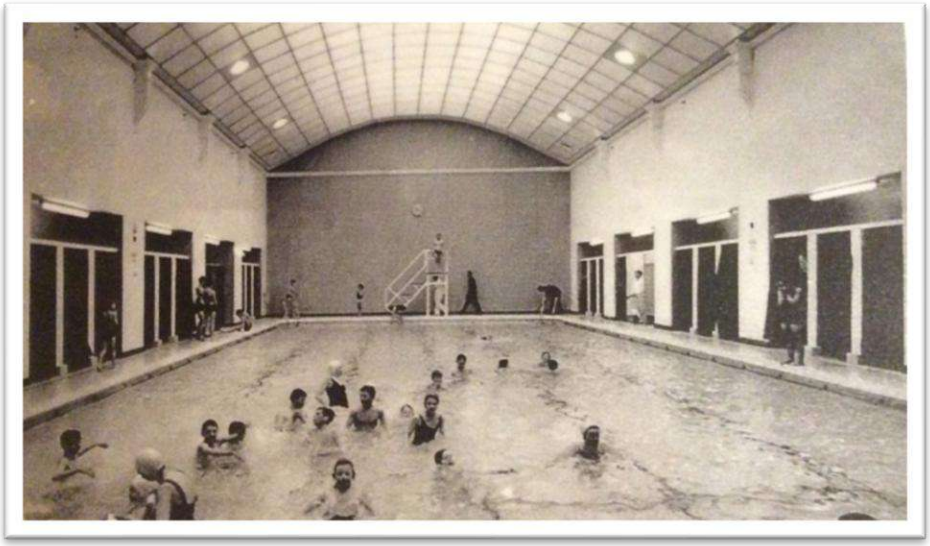


Fig.X: The swimming pool looking east, taken soon after refurbishment of 1965 had modernised its appearance, Note the false roof and infilling of the original arched openings to provide more utilitarian changing niches (image taken from Judy Goldsmith article)

Closure of the Baths

The following section is substantially taken from Andrew Foyle's Historic Building Report: Jacob's Wells Baths, Bristol (February 12th, 2015). Foyle's report acknowledges the following: Bristol Record Office; Peter Carey, Donald Insall Associates; Alan Roberts, Bristol Community Dance Centre; Sarah Rubidge; BRO Bristol Record Office; Bristol Central Reference Library; and John Latimer, Annals of Bristol, vol. 4, 1901.

It is clear that all of Bristol's Victorian baths were not self-financing, and required subsidies from the rates. The financing of Bristol's four public baths was described thus in 1897:

"Baths and Wash-Houses. The cost of establishing four sets of baths and arranging two bathing pools was £47,060. Income from Weir baths and wash-houses last year, £888; payments, £1,344. Mayor's Paddock Baths and wash-houses : income, £815; payments, £1,065. Remusian [sic - misprint for Rennison's] baths: income, £190; payments, £342. Jacob's Wells baths : income, £542 ; payments, £715. A maintenance grant of £2,100 is obtained from the District Rate."

In 1973 Thomas Mogg reviewed the Casson Report on Bristol City Docks which proposed indoor recreation facilities next to the SS Great Britain site. These would include a free form leisure bath, shelved beach, wave making machine, indoor solarium catering for 600 to 1,000 people under one roof, intended to generate sufficient income to offset running costs. (By this stage he was also supervising other indoor non swimming leisure facilities, plus towel washing for the hospitals...). The review stated within the next 5 years the Baths and Leisure committee would have to consider replacement of the Jacobs Wells roofs and the decision that the Education Authority would move a number of schools from the pool when the Bishopsworth Pool was open did not help its viability.

"The proposal in the Casson Report could therefore be considered in the light of the replacement of the Jacobs Wells facilities"..."layout and restricted area make it extremely difficult to improve the situation up to modern standards any further".

In December 1976 there was a request from the new Open Spaces and Amenities Committee that the Baths Manager examine the four least used swimming baths to decide which one could be closed as a money saving exercise. Jacobs Wells was chosen as the oldest, in need of regular roof repairs and current brickwork repairs to the boiler surrounds, plus repair to a leak in the deep end of the main pool. A recent fire safety inspection had said the baths also would eventually need another fire exit. It was reported that "Under the circumstances, bearing in mind the low attendances and the accessibility of the nearest premises, the least inconvenience would be caused to the public by the closure of these premises from 1st April 1977"

The hot baths remained open for another six months as a service to transport drivers who had parking facilities at Canons Marsh and consideration was given for an alternative use if the building, including subdividing the boiler house into an amenities area at first floor level, with a licensed bar and ancillary rooms on the ground floor. It was suggested that a modular gas fired boiler could be installed in a storage area and a Learners Pool could be incorporated in the main pool area. The Bristol Sports Association was asked to submit suggestions for use of the building. The 1929 boilers and 1932 filter plant were sold for £600 scrap value. In the end however the baths never reopened. On 4 March 1977 the building was listed grade 2 by English Heritage.

The broad trends in housing and public health which led to the closure of the Baths were:

- Depopulation of the inner city in favour of the suburbs
- Improved provision of bathrooms in all housing after 1945
- Localised improvement in the quality of old housing stock as Clifton and Hotwells became desirable places to live
- Better provision of swimming baths in the suburban population centres from the 1930s (see below), leading to decreasing numbers swimming at Jacob's Wells
- Victorian bathing facilities aged and became unfashionable: those that were not upgraded were increasingly at risk of closure

A comparative table for the use of public baths in 1963, 1966 and 1977 appears in the Council Baths Manager's Report for 1977, showing that the use of public hot baths and showers dropped by over two thirds in 14 years:

Comparative figures for use of Baths facilities across Bristol – 1963 to 1977 (source, BRO; 38059/5, Baths Manager's Report, 21.4.1977)

Year End (31.3)	Hot Baths	Swimming	Laundry	Total
1963	107,042	1,010,125	13,732	1,130,899
196	78,854	1,097,916	6,510	1,183,280
1977	31,070	1,165,990	713	1,197,773

Comparative figures for the use of public hot baths in Bristol, 1974-74

	Men	Women	Children	Pensioners	total 1976/7	total 1975//6	total 1974/5
Barton Hill	709	183	9	1227	2128	3297	2505
Bristol South	939	155	28	1059	2131	2812	4342
Broad Weir	11445	765	195	4345	19947	23876	27054
Jacob's Wells	5498	138	22	405	6651	7301	12655

Jacob's Wells Baths, being in an inner city area, was particularly affected by the decline in numbers. The numbers of hot bath users at Jacob's Wells decreased by 52 % between 1974 and 1977. By comparison Broad Weir Baths (its site is now part of Cabot Circus shopping centre) was much more heavily used, especially as it had a large sauna suite.

Bristol Community Dance Centre (BCDC)

In 1981 the Bristol Dance Centre Project leased the baths. Its condition by the time was very poor:

"... Although the swimming baths presented major problems the site was seen as having great potential. An enormous amount of voluntary work went into cleaning up the years of neglect and disrepair, and the task was formidable. All the roofs leaked, guttering collapsed, and every room was full of rubble, but eventually the work was done, and the Dance Centre opened for classes in February 1982."[19]

"The space was wonderful but in drastic need of renovation. The biggest difficulty has been that up until the last three months [i.e. May 1984] the facilities have been poor – no hot water, no showers, primitive changing conditions, continuous building work and no heat – the café in St Mary's provided this. This has changed since we had the foyer, changing rooms and showers and the place is beginning to renew its social element – people are again sitting round talking to each other." [20] Many sources agree on the large reliance on voluntary work in the initial conversion of the Dance Centre – e.g. Sarah Rubidge remembers "personally sanding and varnishing the floor, and getting rid of what amounted to a Jacuzzi to give us a cafe space."

Works undertaken by BCDC included taking out the original Victorian slipper baths which had been in regular use until late 1977. Unfortunately no photos were taken first. They also sent slate

[19] BCDC archive: Gala Dance Programme notes, Bristol Hippodrome, February 19, 1984.
[20] BCDC archive: Three Act Scenario, Venue, August 3-16, 1984.

from the baths to Bristol Zoo. An article in the Western Daily Press, 21st June 1982 reported 'when Tricia Hulse took on the job of being administrator of Bristol Community Dance Centre, she didn't realise she was going into the plumbing disposal business as well… "We've got everything going for us" she says, standing in the jumbled mess that was once the slipper baths.' Bristol Community Dance Centre were granted a 30 year lease in 1981, rescuing and re-utilising a pre-existing hardwood floor from Bristol South Baths, complete with a support structure of scaffolding trestles and springs. The sprung floor finishes flush with the tiled pool surround.

Adaptations during this time included the creation of level access into the South Studio via a ramp running south from the main entrance. Including physical access for those in wheelchairs at this date was considered innovative, particularly yin the context of dance. The refurbished studio was opening by Ian Drury.[21]

BCDC's adaptations ensured the Baths enjoyed a successful second life for 35 years until keys were handed back to Bristol City Council at the end of August 2016.

Artspace Lifespace, took over as temporary tenants and continued to encourage regular dance use of the top-class and very large sprung dance floor. Production rehearsed here included Billy Elliott, which was performed at the Hippodrome.

Jacobs Wells Community Hub opened up the building on 15th October 2016 for the first time for many years, to immediate neighbours and people of Bristol and elsewhere and ran guided tours, a memory swap, a small heritage display and chance to comment on what the local community, for whom it was built, want from the building. During this time, a community project was undertaken by the Community Hub which included oral history, research, and work with local schools. A key output of this was the publication *Washing in the Well, Bathing in the Past – Remembering Jacob's Wells*. An initial feasibility study directed by Helen Bone from Vivid Regeneration was prepared,[22] and the results were discussed at Bristol City Hall on 28th February 2017 at an event hosted by Bristol City Council.[23] A preferred developer, Fusion Lifestyle, was subsequently identified. Their scheme included the reinstatement of the pool as part of a leisure and wellbeing complex. Sadly, owing to rising costs, Fusion pulled out in early 2023.

An Expression of Interest process was initiated by Bristol City Council who asked organisations interested in taking on the site as a Community Asset Transfer to come forward. Trinity Community Arts, with their experience in regenerating the Trinity Centre from a once-redundant Grade II* listed church, were successful in obtaining an initial twelve-month licence. Following submission of a robust business plan demonstrating how the Baths scheme would be taken forward, TCA were awarded a 35-year lease in September 2024.

[21] Corinne Fitzpatrick, anecdotal

[22] Myers, M Streich, L et al *Washing in the Well, Bathing in the Past – Remembering Jacob's Wells* (2017) – (https://www.locallearning.org.uk/washing-in-the-well/ accessed 6th February 206)

[23] Vivid Regeneration *LLP Future of Jacobs Wells Baths – Frist Stage Feasibility Study* (January 2017)

Fig.X: Contact Gonzo perform at Jacob's Wells Baths during Mayfest 2018 (Paul Blakemore)

2.4 Wider heritage context

Jacobs Wells Baths is the earliest and the most stylistically flamboyant of the nine swimming baths constructed by Bristol City Council from 1889 to 1962.[24] It is perhaps closes in style to the nearest one of these in age – Gloucester Road Baths, opened in 1922 and closed in 2005, and since converted into an office and community hub. As described above, it is a prominent and characterful feature at the lower end of Jacobs Wells Road, punctuating the paler modernist edifices of St Peter's House and Brandon House with its façade of bright red Cattybrook brick and cream terracotta dressings. It contrasts starkly with the more 18th century character of Hotwells and Park Street & Brandon Hill Conservation Areas, thus occupying a space all of its own in the local setting.

Locally therefore, the Baths are in a category of their own. The history of their development, including the requirement to value-engineer to bring within an acceptable budget, indicates the ambition of its design and perhaps the nature of it as a monument to civic pride and the City Council's ability to care for and meet the needs of the people of Bristol, in keeping with the city's role as a major port. The history of its decline is reflective of other baths both in the city and nationally: fast-paced development of technology and of private bathroom provision meant that what was cutting-edge at the time of construction became, in hardly more than a century (and despite best efforts at re-configuring and adapting for modern audiences), obsolete.

[24] The others are Bristol North (Gloucester Road) 1922; Broad Weir (rebuilt 1929 with swimming pool); Bristol South Dean Lane, Bedminster) 1930; Shirehampton c.1931; Speedwell 1937; Jubilee Pool, Knowle 1937; Filwood Broadway, Knowle West 1962; Bishopsworth c. 1962

Fig.X: Bristol North Baths, Gloucester Road. Constructed of the same materials as Jacobs Wells, it is nevertheless in a more restrained (though no less eclectic) architectural language – more Tudorbethan than exuberant Queen Anne (Bristol Post[25])

Nationally, the Baths sit within a wider movement replicated across Britain whereby other authorities, following the legislation of 1846 and the 1878 amendment, wished to improve public health through the provision of indoor baths for health and leisure. Over sixty indoor baths are identified on the Baths & Washhouses Archive,[26] many of which are in the industrial north and midlands; in Birmingham alone there are 18 indoor pools, and in Manchester and Salford there are 22. Membership of Historic Pools of Britain (formed 2015 and defining as historic any pre-1945 pool), stands at 14 indoor pools plus 13 outdoor pools. Whilst these lists will include pools that are of a distinctly different style and age to Jacobs Wells Baths, the majority are those which resulted from the 1878 amendment and its call to provide better leisure and hygiene opportunities for the working classes.

The scale and quality of these pools varies widely, from the small and utilitarian to serve a hyper-local community, to the grander ones designed as monuments to civic pride. Jacobs Wells Baths undoubtedly sits in the latter category, both in terms of the scale of the innovation and quality of design and fit-out, but also owing to its relatively early date. Its nearest comparators in scale and quality are probably the Grade II* listed Moseley Road Baths, Birmingham (opened 1907) and, more directly, Manchester Victorian Baths (Grade II* listed, opened 1906). Based on opening-up works to date, whereby elements of the later 1960s adaptions have carefully been removed, it is possible that Jacobs Wells Baths has the potential to have a substantial amount of original decorative tiling surviving, which would make it sit even more comfortably in the pantheon of outstanding historic pools alongside these others.

[25] https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/gallery/stunning-transformation-bristol-north-baths-4443707 (accessed 19th January 2026)
[26] https://www.bathsandwashhouses.co.uk/archive/your-local-buildings/ (accessed 19th January 2026)

2.5 Describe how the heritage is looked after

Today, the Baths are in the care of Trinity Community Arts Ltd. They have been a live construction site since Phase 1 began in April 2025, and as such are not subject to a regular programme of 'business as usual' maintenance and management. The phasing of the works was designed in order to gradually, and safely, reveal further information regarding the building with the initial target that at the end of Phase 1 (replacement of the Main Studio roof), the building would be decontaminated and largely weathertight such that TCA could take on the insurance of the site from within Bristol City Council's portfolio policy as per the terms of the 2024 lease agreement

The work have been designed such that the significance of the sit e (both physically and in terms of its intangible heritage) is a key consideration in the initial work and the ongoing maintenance in order to ensure that the completed project is viable in operation and that there is sufficient surplus in order to maintain the fabric of the building.

As the site is a live construction site, it is in the possession of the principal contractor for the Phase 1b (Main Studio) roof works. All access to the building is organised in conjunction with Carrek, and is largely within one of the following two categories:

- Professional team access for the purposes of overseeing works on site and undertaking/ commissioning further surveys and inspections as required; and
- Access to TCA for the purposes of sharing the site through creative & public engagement and stakeholder visits e.g. funders.

All work on site has to comply with the consents in place e.g. the Listed Building Consent, all attached conditions, and the various Certificates of Lawfulness subsequently issued in order to allow works to proceed.

The contractor has been selected for their expertise in historic environments, and are fully briefed on the significance of the site and the particular statutory and moral obligations that apply.

This section will be substantially updated and revised to reflect the operational stage of the completed site.

2 Assessment of the value of the heritage

In this section, the value of the heritage is considered in terms of the following areas:

- Evidential: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.
- Historic: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. It tends to be illustrative or associative.
- Aesthetic: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.
- Communal: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

The significance of the Baths is then assessed according to the following criteria:

- Exceptional Significance: elements which are of key national or international significance, as among the best (or the only surviving example) of an important class of heritage asset, or outstanding representatives of important social or cultural phenomena, or are of very major regional or local significance.
- Considerable Significance: elements which constitute good and representative examples of an important class of asset (or the only example locally), or have a particular significance through association, although surviving examples may be relatively common on a national scale or are major contributors to the overall significance of the heritage asset.
- Moderate Significance: elements which contribute to the character and understanding of the heritage asset, or which provide an historical or cultural context for features of individually greater significance.
- Little Significance: elements which are of individually low value in general terms or have little or no significance in promoting understanding or appreciation of the monument, without being actually intrusive.
- Uncertain Significance: elements which have potential to be significant (e.g., buried archaeological remains) but where it is not possible to be certain on the evidence currently available.
- Intrusive: items which are visually intrusive or which obscure understanding of significant elements or values of the monument. Recommendations may be made on removal or other methods of mitigation.

3.1 Evidential Value

Evidence of earlier mechanical systems

The relationship between the boilers and the great chimney flue still remains a puzzle. It is not part of the current site boundary or responsibilities yet is considered to have been directly linked. Its location, if/when requiring maintenance poses a risk to the building. The boiler room is surely the location of any previous boilers due to the accessibility of the area for fuel deliveries and maintenance. However the link between this and the great chimney is a mystery as no simple routing has been identified. Such and other un-charted voids are potential risks to the integrity of the complex itself.

The surviving evidence of underground services are assessed as having **moderate significance**.

There is the possibility that further work to understand the chimney and Pump Room may yield archaeological deposits but this is considered unlikely. It is therefore of **little/ uncertain significance.**

3.2 Historic Value

Spring Water

The original Jacob's Well is located up the hill from the Bath. It is believed to have been used as a Jewish ritual 'Bet Tohorah' for cleansing of the dead prior to burying them in the Jewish cemetery which was situated on the other side of the road where the Queen Elizabeth School is now situated. Ater, the spa water was transported across the city via underground pipes. One belonged to the City Corporation, another to the Cathedral. It was this latter supply that was given in perpetuity to Jacobs Wells Baths by the Dean and Chapter in 1886, and which still appears to rise to this day and discharges into the tanks over the Pump Room. The spring water is significant for multiple reasons: as a visible, accessible reminder of the Jewish community in Bristol and the potentially internationally significant presence of the Bet Tohorah; evidence of the clean water source which united communities in their daily activities across the city, and the reason for the naming of multiple locations adjacent to other springs in the area (cols Baths Court, Woodwell Lane, Lambwell Court, etc). Further research would be beneficial in this area; however on the basis of the present evidence, the existence of the spring water still supplying the tanks to this day is of **considerable significance**.

Much original structure survives.

The overall structure and form of the complex remains remarkably intact. This original format is still easily identifiable, despite the removal of most of the slipper baths and bathing paraphernalia. The ventilated lanterns are a particular feature where much of the original structure, columns, trusses, timber lantern framework, louver mechanisms (and possibly glass) is still dominant however these are in poor condition throughout and required substantial if not complete replacement wing to years of little maintenance. A major contributory factor to this lack of maintenance has been the logistical and health & safety challenges of undertaking it; any regeneration scheme must address this safely and sustainably such that maintenance can be carried out in future. The contribution that the design and functionality of the original structure overall makes towards the Baths is assessed as of **considerable significance.**

Important early example of the ornate Victorian 'Queen Anne Revival' style in Bristol

The formal style of the building is a relative rarity in Bristol and as such the baths are an early example. This style was quite well established in other areas of the country and championed by Norman Shaw and other prominent architects of the time, leading to a wider adoption by Local Authorities and particularly for public buildings. Indeed the great Victoria Baths in Manchester have a strong resemblance, despite being some 18 years later. However for Bristol this high Victorian style did not catch on as readily as in other towns and cities with a more predominantly brick built heritage. In this respect, the Baths are assessed as having **moderate significance.**

20th century alterations and additions

Of the detrimental alterations to the original fabric the boarding out of the side walls and insertion of a curved ceiling to the main pool space is the most damaging to the original conception. Both were no doubt carried out for reasonable intentions, and both would appear to be reversible, although probably with some unintentional collateral damage in the process. However the most

unnecessary damage has been caused by the wilful removal of the decorated centre-pieces in the iron frame roundels. These appear to have been removed despite the principal central elements being concealed above the new ceiling line.

Some later accretions related to the Dance Centre have now been removed as part of the decontamination work including the demolition of later partitions in the North Wing. These have revealed the impressive original scale and dimensions of the men's slipper baths.

Where they remain (e.g. the cladding to the Main Studio both at ground and ceiling level), these elements are generally of **intrusive i.e. detracting significance.**

There is an exception to the generally intrusive/ detracting nature of much of the 20th century intervention to the building – the dance floor introduced by BCDC which created of the largest quality dance rehearsal studios in the country with a fine fully sprung, quality hardwood floor. When the Dance Centre undertook their adaptations they were able to rescue and re-utilise an pre-existing sprung hardwood floor from an abandoned roller-skating arena (believed to be another Council re-use of a public baths, those in South Ville). Adapting the support structure to fill the empty pool, the floor finishes flush with the original tiled pool surround. This provides a mechanically suspended timber floor area of approximately 10.5m x 23.8m (just short of an Olympic short course length) with a 1m margin. The space measures 9.7m to the sloping ceiling and 12.6 m height in the middle (still somewhat below the original roof lantern) (34'7 x 78' with 3'3margin and 31'10 to eaves and 41' height in centre). The dance floor is considered to be of **considerable significance**.

Surviving original features

Whilst the exterior shell and volume remain intact as described above, (despite some physical deterioration), the interiors display a number of features that taken together contribute to retaining the earlier story of the complex when originally in use as the Baths. These include:

- large slate floor panels that denote the slipper bath are in the North range. Whilst far from complete, it is possible to trace earlier partitions and some bath locations.
- sections of winding mechanism for the substantial ventilation requirement when the spaces would have been at the highest possible humidity, and the lack of solar treatment to the substantial areas of glass potentially leading to excessive interior temperatures.
- the remaining pipework in the Pump Room; whilst it is fragmentary and non-functioning it is significant as an evocative reminder of the room's heavily industrial purpose and past.
- the metal arched trusses still remain visible below an later inserted ceiling in the Main Studio. Through this ceiling it is possible to glimpse the original two stage lantern still in position (as is evident from outside), which is at the time of writing becoming visible as the 1960s cladding is removed.
- The original water supply tanks still exist above the boiler room,. There is some rusting and deterioration evident, and signs of long term leakage and water penetration, but the scale of the tanks remains impressive and a visual reminder of the volumes of water that the Baths as predicated upon and needed to remain in use
- Surviving pipework in both the North Wing and the Pump Room has been exposed and decontaminated as part of the Phase 1 works allowing closer inspection and a better opportunity to understand how the original system worked. This process will be supported by the examination and interpretation of the schematics and plans that are held by Bristol Archives.

- The chimney, whilst severely truncated in 2006 as a result of concerns regarding its structural integrity, is a prominent and important feature of the design and use of the Baths as envisaged from the start.

The surviving original features are assessed as being of **considerable** significance.

3.3 Aesthetic Value

A landmark presence in its area now surrounded by high rise flats

As an urban design element the building is significant for its unique, exuberant appearance, and would have been a landmark from the time it was built. Apart from the nearby churches, it was the largest single structure in the road, but far more eye-catching in its flamboyant polychrome appearance. One can but imagine how it might have looked before the severe cost cutting exercise was undertaken on the initial designs. Currently the building has an even more prominent role, being dwarfed by post war residential blocks of flats. The chimney is a notable feature of its overall external appearance; largely hidden from Jacobs Wells Road it is nonetheless a quietly Its external aesthetic value is assessed as being **considerable significance**.

Interiors

The Pump Room was hidden from public view for much of its existence. As the mechanical 'nerve centre' of the Baths, it was critical to their intended use but was visible to only a few operational members of staff. When filled with boilers and other equipment, it would have been a congested and dirty space. Even after the removal of the boilers and associated plant after 1977, it remained inaccessible – presumably surplus to BCDC's requirements in terms of space, and without necessary funding in place in order to convert it for any other public use. More recently, the room was isolated as a result of asbestos contamination. The removal of the boilers released extensive airborne contamination, presumably as a result of breaking up the gaskets and insulation. This has only recently (May – October 2025) been addressed as part of the Phase 1 works. The impact of the space, now accessible and empty for the first time in its history, is considerable; it is possibly one of the great industrial 'secret spaces' of the city as a whole. Accordingly, its aesthetic value is assessed as of **considerable significance.**

The light-filled interiors of the Main Studio, North Wing and South Studio are as remarkable now, as the later accretions such as the roof cladding and subdivisions are removed, as they must have been to the first users of the facilities in 1889. The light and space of these areas must be retained as far as is possible. Their aesthetic value, revealed after so many years of later compromises that served their purpose in retaining the building in use, is assessed as **considerable**.

3.4 Communal Value

Public building still in public ownership and with community use

The public baths were purpose built for the community and were sited in a particular location that could take advantage of one of Bristol's historic water features, the Jacob's Well spring. The fact that the baths have survived in (all be it reduced) use until 1977 is testimony to a continuity of requirement over the century since their conception, (although 88 years since they first opened).

However, where many similar buildings are faced with radical change when they reach redundancy, the foresight of the early Dance Centre trustees could see the potential of the structure and its appropriate continuing use by and for the public. It has allowed the building still to be enjoyed by the public all be it for a complimentary function, and give intense satisfaction to many Bristolians and others. The value attached to this space by generations of Bristolians and from beyond, whether in the context of its dance, community, or baths heritage, has proved be a strong emotional connection, as demonstrated regularly both informally and through oral history workshops. The communal value of the Baths is assessed as being of **exceptional significance**.

3 Risks and opportunities

4.1 Risks

Historic neglect leading to deterioration of fabric

When the popularity of swimming in large echoing, un-heatable spaces faded in the mid-20th century, the writing was on the wall for the long-term viability of the complex for its original use. Attendances fell and re-vitalising schemes such as a new Jacuzzi ('Aerotone') bath, providing a new roof, etc were introduced to prop up its flagging fortunes. Gradually, more significant failures occurred, the main pool sprung a leak and it was decided to shut it down but retain the shower and bathing facilities until its eventual closure in 1977. Then, even these shower facilities, deemed to be original to the building were condemned as 'showing signs of wear' and had to be abandoned. In 1979, the majority of fittings were stripped out from the building for safety and for scrap value as the building had been closed up awaiting a decision on its future. It was not then until 1984 that work began by the new tenants by which time some further decay and deterioration had well established. This deterioration has been better understood and addressed through the implementation of the Phase 1 works, so to a considerable degree the risk associated with historic lack of maintenance have been mitigated. Most significantly, this applies to the Main Studio roof lantern, whose poor condition means that it will be substantially if not totally be replaced owing to its structural failure.

Awkward entrances, access and internal circulation

One of the negative experiences for any visitor is the cramped and very compromised primary entrance and circulation. This is intrinsic to the original planned layout of the building with Ladies and Gentlemen being provided with separate but adjacent entrance doors, and turning in opposing directions once inside. In order to maximize the pool size no doubt this left very little space for any reception space and the desire to separate the sexes at the earliest opportunity resulted in this mean corridor approach. The experience is exacerbated by the whole primary façade aligned across the slope so the internal corridors requiring steps as well to re-establish the appropriate ground levels for the North and South ranges. In addition, as the main studio space takes up the whole of the central zone except this corridor, access from one secondary space to another (North to South or vice versa) is effectively blocked by the mass of the old pool. The scheme for which permission is in place has sought to address this in the proposals, which have been predicated on the basis of equal access for all.

Considerable space under-utilisation

As discussed above, part of the beneficial effect of the Dance Centre occupation was the fact that they have managed to accommodate themselves within the primary areas with a minimum

of alteration to those spaces. Nevertheless, there were unused spaces within the North range and Pump Room. Such spaces will tend to deteriorate without some form of beneficial occupation.

Original structure likely to be hard to heat and insulate without detriment to the appearance

When the baths were originally constructed, expected levels of comfort were distinctly different to those of today. Indeed the issue of energy efficiency had not become the global survival issue it is today. Whilst there might have been a concept that levels of exercise should keep you warm anyway, the primary task of the building envelope as an environmental moderator was to provide light into a deep space and ventilation to areas of high humidity. The levels of integral insulation were incidental.

Due to the lantern light design there was be considerable stratification of heat in the spaces below, not only cold in winter but potentially too hot in summer. The walls of the main pool are considerably thick for high levels of thermal storage, and the floors are generally suspended, so of lesser significance, to any heating design strategy. The removal of the suspended ceiling has necessitated taking into account both the loss of a significant insulation layer and the incorporation of the double tier glazed rooflight.

The need to sustainably (both financially and environmentally) manage the internal climate has been and will continue to be critical in developing the detailed Phase 2 fit-out plans.

Appropriate use for a redundant building, exemplary adaptation of purpose designed space for different function

The listing of buildings is no guarantee of their survival. It merely provides protection against unauthorised damage or loss. When a property becomes redundant and its original occupants can no longer benefit from it, for whatever reason, and particularly for properties designed and built for a specific purpose, staving off decay and dereliction can be problematic, particularly when alterations are constrained. The most successful way to breathe new life into such a situation is to find a new use and new occupants who can identify with the problems and have an interest to see them maintained. Various elements of the original conception have harmoniously adopted in more recent post-swimming pool use; including the hierarchy of spaces, and the ability to make the most of the primary large volume.

The current occupancy is not sustained and alternative appropriate uses are not found, so the building is abandoned.

As discussed above, the biggest threat to the fabric of a building (after inconsiderate alteration) is the loss of viable use leading to abandonment and neglect. Natural processes of decay and vandalism then mean much of the original and valuable fabric is relentlessly lost, making restoration an ever more daunting task. The eventual outcome of abandonment is a period on the heritage at risk register, as or when the purpose built baths complex is found to be too uneconomic or un-viable to restore or re-use. To this end, TCA's plans are predicated on a robust and well-tested business plan which is based on extensive stakeholder consultation to ensure that the provision offered by the Baths matches the needs and demands of the community.

The intrinsic design of the building makes management and maintenance difficult

One of the greatest challenges presented by the building, and the likely source of much of the failure of its fabric, is that of maintenance. The extensive roofs are difficult to access them safely

for clearance and maintenance, but simultaneously, owing to their size, they perform a huge task in terms of keeping the building watertight. The constriction of the site overall as well as the design of the roofs means that there are many internal downpipes built into the walls, which in turn have proved difficult to maintain but equally to have catastrophic results if this maintenance is not carried out. The ongoing supply of spring water is not fully understood, and there are currently temporary diversions in place to prevent the tanks over the Pump Room refiling. The management of water across the site is a major challenge which has left a legacy of damage which must be resolved as part of the designs for the proposed scheme.

Incorporating new design and modern requirements without harm to heritage significance

Certain adaptations need to be made in order to bring the site up to present-day requirements, most notably in terms of mechanical & electrical services, management of water, ease of maintenance, and accessibility. Design decisions to date have been taken with reference to the heritage significance of the site, and have struck a balance between the need to retain and enhance significance whilst creating a sustainable and accessible site where the risks of future obsolescence, compounded by lack of access and beneficial reuse, are mitigated against.

Managing the effects of climate change

As alluded to above, the management of water is a major challenge at the site. The rainwater goods have failed both due to lack of historic maintenance (e.g. gutter clearing), but also because they are undersized for a climate-changed future in which heavier and more prolonged periods of wet weather are anticipated. The presence of historic features such as internal downpipes (which having failed, have led to extensive damp penetration into walls) and more successful ones such as the underfloor gullies in the North Wing which continue to discharge water effectively into the street) need to be understood fully through surveys and opening-up in order to incorporate or adapt as necessary.

4.2 Opportunity

Considerable opportunity for additional and improved space utilisation

Whilst much of the building reflects its original physical requirements (particularly light and ventilation) the interior usable volume of the building is well adapted to its current use with a minimum of detrimental intervention. This is partially assisted by the surplus of space over current use requirement, thus leaving the interventions to a minimum. As the TCA business plan demonstrates, the whole of the site is required in order to create a sustainable operation. The previously under-utilised spaces, including some of the North range and particularly the boiler room, offer yet again a big range of differing spaces and volumes that can be capitalised on.

Revitalise the building and reclaim some of its original spatial excitement

The condition of the building overall is far from being unviable for maintenance nor repair and restoration. Indeed so much of the original structure is in place that some careful reversal of the more obscuring intrusions is allowing the original spatial forms to be revealed.

Improve the working environment for the users, staff and visitors

The interior of the complex has certain inherent limitations as described above. Taken with the condition of various elements, fittings, decorations, finishes generally there is the opportunity to

substantially up-lift the facilities which will attract more users and so improve the viability overall.

Increase the occupancy of the building and therefore its financial viability

As discussed above, beneficial occupancy of a building is the best guarantee of its survival. The current occupancy level has plenty of scope for improvement providing the facilities and environment on offer can match or exceed expectation. The zones of underutilisation (North range shower facilities and old boiler room space alone) offer ready space for additional facilities, and their incorporation should be accompanied by a general review of the extant provision, with options for improvement and diversification considered. This has been carried out to date through community and stakeholder consultation, reflected in the comprehensive business plan.

Improve public access to the building and perceptions of its role and qualities

The site is of outstanding communal significance to a diverse variety of stakeholders, with a community dimension that stretches right back to the ritual significance of the spring waters to the Jewish community of Bristol. The site's somewhat secretive history includes a Victorian 'coyness' around mixed bathing and nudity, the inaccessible space of the Pump Room (first due to its operational role and secondly owing to asbestos contamination), the inaccessible space of the tanks, the personal nature of oral history testimonies before they are captured, and the relatively unexplored nature of the documentary sources in the archive. When these aspects are considered in relation to the tremendous public affection for and connection to the site as a ritual space (the location of rites of passage such as learning to dance or learning to swim, or the daily ritual of cleansing), the opportunity for showcasing, sharing, and enhancing the communal significance of the space through interpretation and digital resources is perhaps the single most exciting opportunity of all.

Reduce its carbon footprint.

Running costs are always a major part of any institutional operation. For this reason, as well as the statutory and moral requirement, it is essential that the completed building is as energy-efficient as possible. This is currently designed into the project by the inclusion of photovoltaic panels (PVP) to the Main Studio, where is has been accepted as part of the scheme as consented. Additional avenues that have been explored have include ground source heat pumps (GSHP) and air source heat pumps (ASHP); the latter has the potential to offer benefits to the scheme subject to further development.

4 Policies

5.1. Maintain beneficial occupation

The greatest period of risk is when a building ceases to be occupied. The lack of regular oversight increases the risk of maintenance backlog and small issues compounding over time as they are not noticed and tackled in line with the regular programme of maintenance required of an occupied building in safe beneficial use. A beneficial occupation will ensure that it remains loved and well-used, and in turn financially viable under the management of a sympathetic organisation.

5.2 Retain the integrity of the building.

Management of the building, including any capital works, will be carried out with reference to its heritage significance. Any proposals with could harm the heritage significance should be avoided or the impacts mitigated e.g. where historic fabric has been impacted through the present works, such as the replacement of the Main Studio lantern roof, this is done on the basis of a thorough understanding of the condition of the historic fabric. Features impacted by proposals should be fully understood prior to making decisions, including an assessment of archival as well as physical evidence. The benefits of any interventions will be considered in the context of this potential for harm, and the ability to mitigate this. In the case of the Baths, where it is of exceptional communal significance, this intangible value will be suitably weighted in considering the extent to which communal uses can be promoted and enhanced at the site without detriment to the physical fabric. Design processes will be transparent and will involve all affected stakeholders including the Local Planning Authority Conservation Officer, Historic England, and specialist industrial heritage advisors where appropriate.

5.3 Increase awareness and appreciation of the building, its role and qualities.

The site will be promoted widely for its utility as a community asset, with appropriate interpretation and activity programmes undertaken in conjunction with this. Interpretation and activities will be designed to sit alongside the regular operational use of the site such that users are able to access and understand the heritage significance without the site becoming a conventional heritage attraction in a way that would ultimately harm its communal significance. Digital as well as fixed interpretation and activities such as tours and talks will be used to ensure that the heritage is accessible without imposing on the flexibility and operational potential of the site which is critical to its financial viability. Relationships with stakeholders should be nurtured and maintained for the long-term rather than activated only during project lifecycles. This should be done on an ongoing basis through regular engagement with local community groups and users.

5.4 Improve access to the building (for all users and visitors).

All capital interventions are based on the principle of maximum physical accessibility. Equal dignified access for will be a fundamental consideration for works. These will be tested against statutory requirements in place at the time but also developed with reference to user access groups to ensure that as wide an audience as possible can use the building equitably. In the unlikely instance that physical access cannot be provided, and also to increase the potential reach of the impact and outcomes of work, digital resources should be created recording works to the building and activities undertaken where possible and these resources made widely available.

5.5 Preserve or enhance the primary architectural forms.

Proposals are based on an understanding of the heritage significance of the building as outlined in this Conservation Plan. Use is made when considering changes of the extensive resources in Bristo Archives, as well as the physical evidence presented by the building. There will be limited intervention to the exterior of the building other than where this is necessitated in order to resolve access issues; where this intervention is necessary, it will be designed with reference to existing features such as window openings and arcading such that the florid and bold architectural language of the original building maintains its primacy and the new interventions are clear and subsidiary rather than competing.

5.6 Improve the legibility and signage respectfully.

Signage will be the minimum necessary to ensure that users are able to easily and safely enter and navigate the building. It will be clear and accessible without reference to obscure language or acronyms, considering the use of symbols where these can be more effective. Fonts will be consistent and chosen for legibility. Where prominent signage is required (e.g. externally) this will be designed to be attractive as well as functional, and will not compromise or conflict with the distinctive architectural langue of the exterior.

5.7 Initiate routine maintenance (quinquennial) inspections and records.

The building will be maintained according to a programme of regular maintenance as laid out in a comprehensive Management & Maintenance Plan. This plan will include all aspects of the building and the installations within it. It will range from daily inspections, such as floors, doors, janitorial supplies, and routine health & safety inspections to ensure user safety, through to longer-term cyclical works including replacement of fittings. The appointment of a dedicated manager and caretaker will ensure that any issues arising in between or as a result of planned inspections will be addressed in a timely way.

5.8 Aim to reduce energy footprint and consider alternative green strategies.

Works to the building should incorporate within them appropriate energy-saving measures and environmental sustainability; this will however be done without creating an over-reliance on untried or overly-complex installations which are unproven in use or have the potential to be costly to maintain. The introduction of secondary glazing and the ability to control climate by mechanical means will be incorporated, as well as where possible 'future-proofing' for the provision of means such as photovoltaic (PV) panels.

5.9 Collect and collate all existing drawings and records and commit to fully referenced archive.

There are numerous sources of documentary and archival information relating to the Baths, and these are a key component in their history and the understanding of their significance. Whilst it is not envisaged that a further archive will be created, it is desirable that any material currently not held by Bristol Archives should be better understood and documented (for example, records held by the former Centre Manager of the Bristol Dance Centre). The process of documenting archives and supporting their transfer as appropriate to Bristol Archives in due course is vital to achieving a full record of the site's history is germane to the conservation of its heritage.

5.10 Initiate oral history projects

It is recognised that, despite works to date, there remains untapped material in respect of oral histories from users of both the baths and the dance centre. Work has been undertaken by the Jacobs Wells Community Hub and more recently TCA has been important in creating an oral history archive, but this work should continue – in particular as, by recording these histories which are at risk of inevitable loss, the communal significance is enhanced. Where it has not already taken place, transcriptions of oral history recordings should be undertaken and deposited in a central appropriate location for example Bristol Archives.

5.11 Building environmental sustainability into the operation of the building

In addition to measures taken through capital works, every effort should go into embedding sustainability in everyday operation. This includes, but is not restricted to, choice of suppliers

for consumables such as refreshments and janitorial supplies, clear processes in respect of recycling, provision of cycle rack to encourage sustainable transport, and the inclusion of transport directions which eliminate the need for car travel.

5.12 Manage and maximise the presence of water on the site

Water is a defining feature of the site, and in a climate-changed present and future, the management of water must be considered. This includes for example the management of rainwater and its disposal taking into account the extensive valleys, gutters, and downpipes across the building. Critically to the heritage of the site, the opportunity offered by the still-live spring water should be managed and maxmised, with the provision of an outlet where the water can be taken from as necessary for use off-site. The opportunity to see and potentially to touch and taste the water would be valuable in allowing the spiritual as well as the practical significance of the water to be experienced.

5.13 Share and develop this conservation plan via regular reviews

This conservation plan and these policies will be available via hard copy and digitally. The plan will be reviewed at least annually and more regularly as needed e.g. subject to any significant discoveries during works.

6 Bibliography

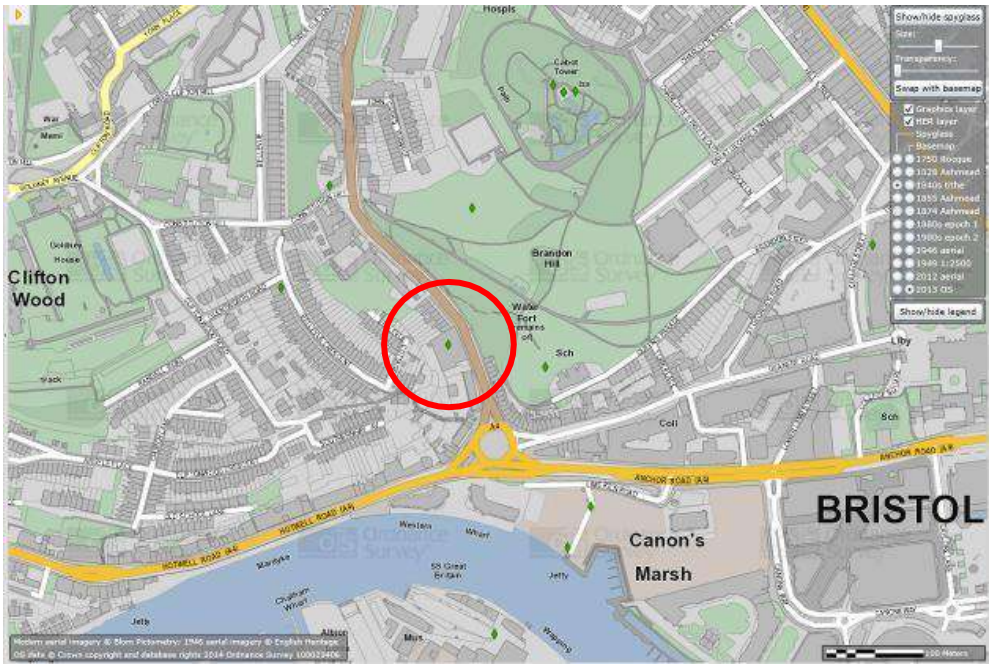
Appendix 1 - Timeline

Date	Event	Archive source
11.5.1875	Council Baths Committee begins search for site of new Baths in Hotwells or St Augustine's parish	BRO:M/BCC/BAT/1/1, (Baths and Wash Houses Committee Minute Book 1847-89), p. 194 onward.
2.8.1877	Site in Woodwell Lane (now Jacob's Wells Road) identified by City Surveyor, Josiah Thomas	
17.10.1878	Thomas working on drawings and elevations, plans and estimates	
24.4.1879	Plans submitted to Baths Committee by Josiah Thomas and approved unanimously	
10.9.1880	Testing of bed-rock complete and found to be suitable for the building proposed	
24.9.1880	William Veals tender of £415 accepted for building retaining wall at rear of site	
8.4.1881	Josiah Thomas estimates cost of building at £20,000	
10.7.1881	Cosmetic cost reductions "without impairing its desirability or efficiency" are agreed; eg removal of stone dressings on sides and rear of building	
10.7.1881	August Krauss tender for building accepted; £15,170. W.J Fraser's tender engineering accepted; £3535.	
16.9.1881	Ratepayers protest at extravagance and costliness of the design. Committee defers decision	
27.9.1881	Main council meeting hears protests from ratepayers	
10.3.1882	Main council refers proposed plans back to Baths Committee	
4.3.1885	Tenders for a significantly reduced scheme submitted; lowest A. Krauss, builder, £7,140 reduced from £8140: Frasers, engineer, £1,483 reduced from £1,783.	
12.5.1886	Tenders accepted (builder, A. Krauss £7140; engineer Sampsons, £1,090). Clerk of works to be engaged at maximum £3 per week.	
11.12.1886	Dean & Chapter offer Jacobs Well spring water for use of baths	
16.6.1887	Council completes mortgage arranged to fund building - £10,117	
12.7.1887	Dean & Chapter's offer of 11.12.86 accepted.	
27.9.1887	Tenders invited for tank to store spring water	
15.2.1888	Sampson's tender of £840 for water tank accepted	
13.6.1888	Advert to be placed for Superintendent at maximum £2 per week	
11.9.1888	Thomas explains delays to Baths Committee; (rain, frost, material supply and the addition of tank)	
25.4.1889	Jacob's Wells Baths opened	
1906	Bristol Corporation ran 6 swimming pools/public baths. They were at Broad Weir, the Mayor's Paddock (Clarence Road), Jacob's Wells, Rennison's Baths (Montpelier), Barton Hill and Victoria Pool (Leigh Road South, Clifton). There were open-air swimming baths in public parks at Ashton, Victoria Park (Windmill Hill) and Eastville.	
14 June 1920	Herbert Victor Taylor of 95 Bishop Road Horfield drowned at Jacob's Wells Bath during a water polo match.	Western Daily Press, June 10, 1920; coroner's report
1929	Original boilers replaced	38059/5, report of 16.12.1976
July 1929	25,000 bathers patronise Bristol baths and swimming pools in 1 week; the figure for Jacob's Wells was 3,788.	Western Daily Press, 16.7.1929

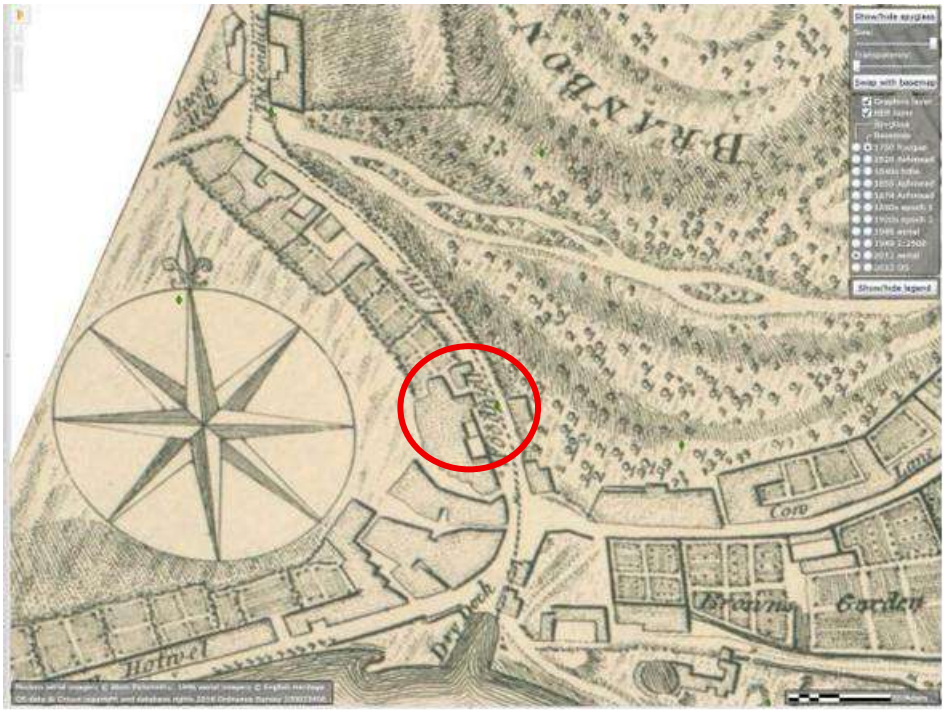
1932	Original filter plant replaced	38059/5, report of 11.8.1977
Early 1930s	Bray & Slaughter contracted to replace original swimming pool roof lantern	
1951	Proposed extension of baths premises on vacant land to the south. This was not executed and the land was used to extend St Peter's House, multi-storey council flats of c. 1952.	BRO: 40148/I/1; plans of 28.8.1951, City Architects Dept
1959	The men's 1st class hot baths area was adapted to accommodate an Aerotone bath and later two steam cabinets with shower unit. The space was very cramped.	Baths Mgr Report, 38059/5, 11.8.1977
1963	Review of Service reports that Jacob's Wells provides a pool of 78 x 35 ft, 27 hot baths and 1 Aerotone Bath. There were 6 full time staff including a Superintendent working 42 hours a week, and 2 part time working 16 hours a week. A minimum of 2 staff were on duty at any one time.	
23.6.1963	Possible contamination of Jacob's Well spring water supply (from a sewage leak under the road at the foot of Constitution Hill, adjacent to the settling tank) was avoided by bypassing the spring for 4 weeks for repairs. Repairs and tank cleaning cost £430	38059/4, Baths Mgr Reports, 23.6. and 5.11.1963.
26.1.1965	Major refurbishment of Jacob's Wells Baths proposed. This probably corresponds with the evidently mid-1960s fabric extant at the Baths (eg laminated wall cladding, new floor tiles and changing cubicles around the swimming bath location).	BRO 38059/5; undated plans, 40148/I/2, produced by HH Moore, City Estates Valuer & Surveyor
1968	The Baths Committee (which managed all Bristol's public baths and swimming pools since 1847) was disbanded and responsibility handed to the City Council's Public Works Committee.	BRO: M/BCC/PUW
15.11.1973	Jacob's Wells Baths remained popular with "certain users, mainly for family swims, 'learn to swim' and lunchtime recreational swimming". Regular schools bookings were split 50/50 between State and private school use.	38059/5, 15.11.1973
18.12.1973	Proposal to spend £10,000 on a new roof and improvements to the Remedial (Turkish Bath) section (not done?)	38059/5, Baths Mgr Report
1.10.1975	Short term closure of Jacob's Wells Bath as a cost saving measure. Unclear how long the closure was and whether it affected the whole premises or just the swimming pool.	38059/5
22.5.1975	Proposed closure for 4 months to repair roof of hot baths and improve Remedial section	38059/5
April-May 1976	Baths closed 9 weeks for redecoration. Proposed to reopened c. end of May	38059/5, 14.5.1976

16.12.1976	Baths Manager reports a serious fault: a leak had developed in the deep end wall of the swimming pool. Manager proposes permanent closure of Jacob's Wells swimming baths for cost saving	38059/5, 16.12.1976
1.4.1977	Swimming Baths closed permanently	38059/5, 27.6.1977, 23.2.1978
27.6.1977	Report that the baths and hot showers section is still in use and must remain open, partly for truck drivers parked overnight at Canon's Marsh.	38059/5
28.6.1977	Reduced cost "Award Pass" for hot baths and showers at 7p (usual cost 28p) was granted by request of Bristol Gully Operatives and sewer men "in view of the nature of their work". A condition was stipulated that they avoid peak periods on Friday evenings and Saturdays.	38059/5
1977	Bristol Dance Centre project founded. Karole Johnstone was seemingly the director at first. Fundraising and identification of permanent premises continued while classes were held in temporary venues across the city.	BCDC archive: K. Johnstone, Bristol Dance Centre Project, undated. (Internal evidence, 1981)
11.8.1977	Report on reasons for closure. It was stated that the hot baths and shower fittings were original to the building (1889) and "showing signs of wear"; there was a leak in the deep end wall of the swimming pool, and the whole premises were the least used of Bristol's public baths.	38059/5
28.2.1979	Baths premises being stripped out and boilers etc sent for scrap	38059/5, 28.2.1979
Late Nov 1980	Premises at St Mary on the Quay identified. Lease negotiations and conversion work completed in c.6 weeks.	BCDC archive: K. Johnstone, Bristol Dance Centre Project.
Jan 12 1981	Bristol Dance Centre opened at the church hall of St Mary on the Quay RC church.	BCDC archive: K. Johnstone, Bristol Dance Centre Project.
c. summer 1981	St Mary on the Quay served notice; the hall was needed for redevelopment BCDC occupies a local Sports Centre for c. 6-9 months while Jacob's Wells Baths was leased and upgraded.	Sarah Rubidge, pers.comm, Jan 2015
Autumn? 1981	Dance Studio leases the Jacob's Wells Baths "after months of negotiation" and begins conversion work	Venue, Aug 3-16, 1984.
February 1982	BCDC opened for classes at Jacob's Wells Bath	BCDC archive: Programme, Gala Evening of Dance, Bristol Hippodrome, Feb 19 1984.
1984-6	Major refurbishment of the building to provide dance studio facilities. Architect Peter Ware. By c. May 1984 the foyer had been refurbished, a hot water supply, changing rooms and showers installed for the first time.	BCDC archive: undated plan, and pers.comm, Alan Roberts.

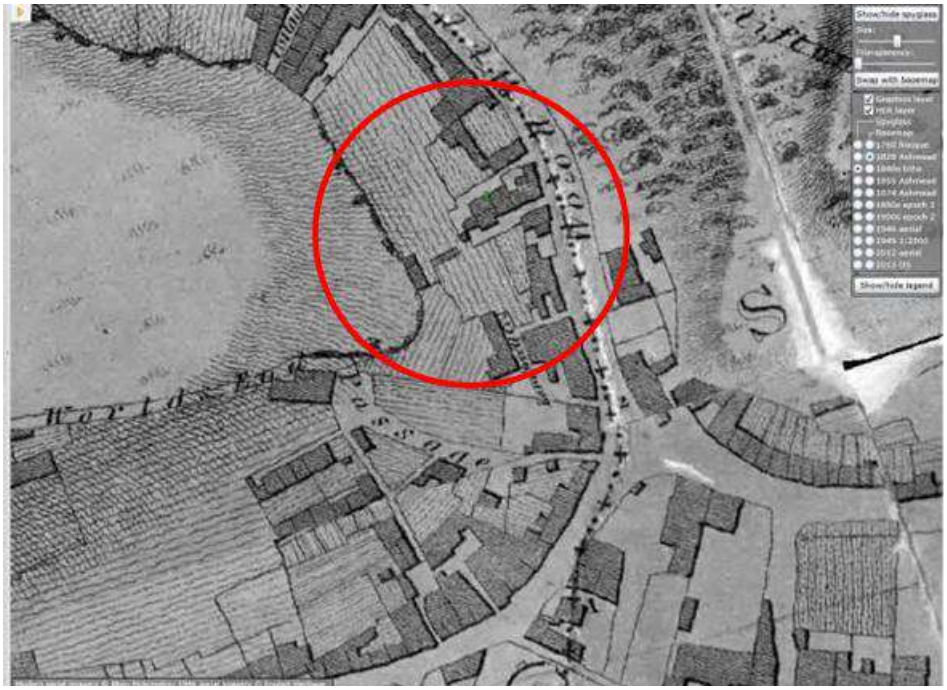
Appendix 2 – Map Regression



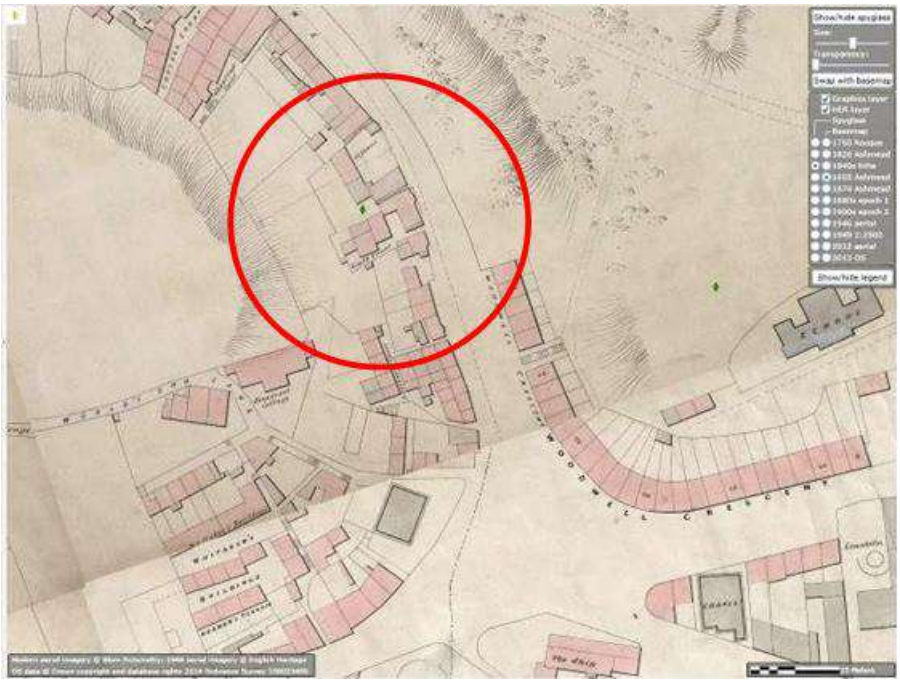
Site Location



1750



1855



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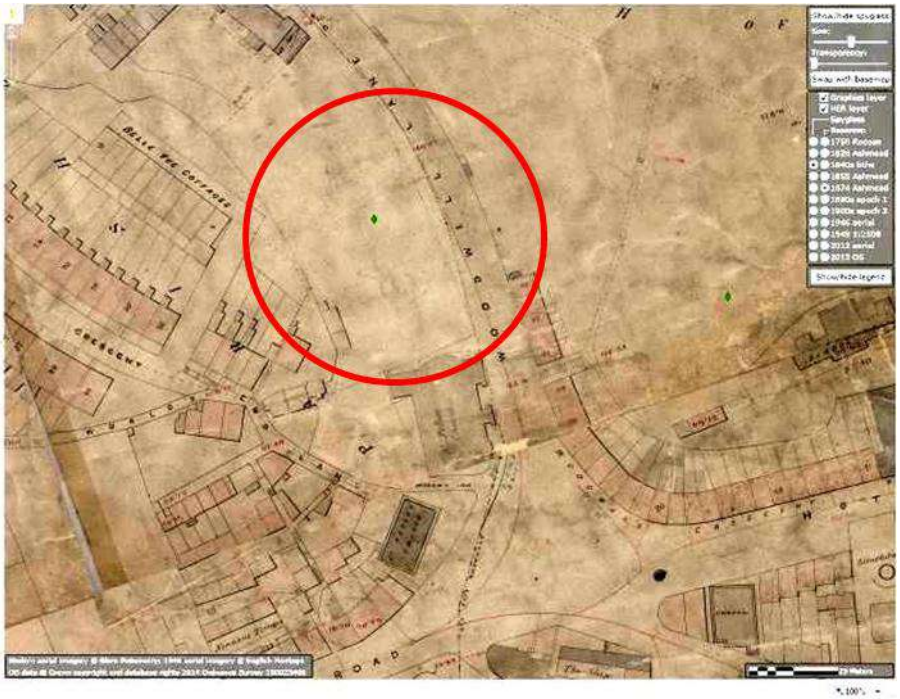

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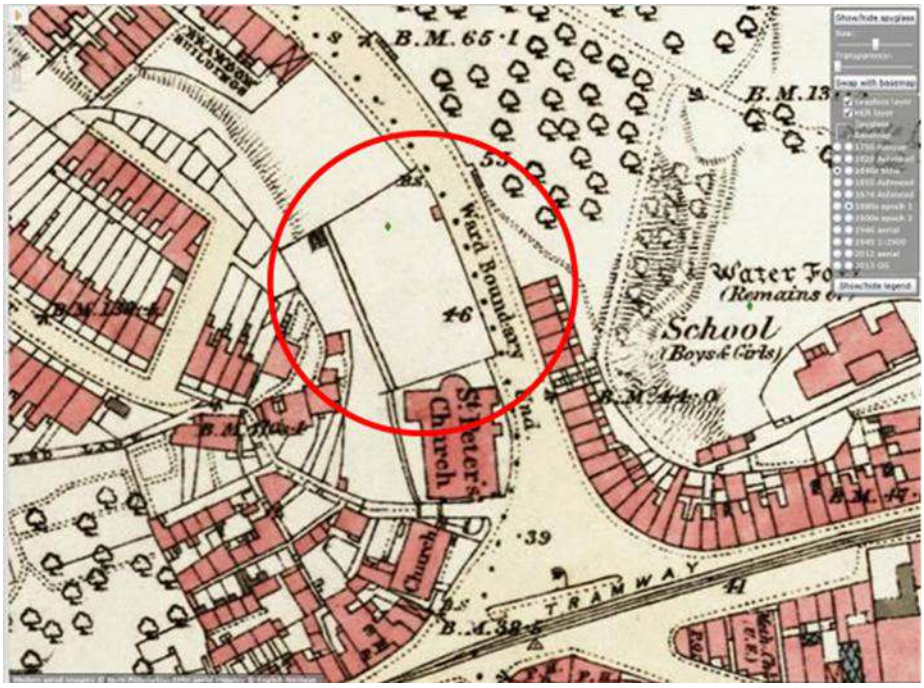
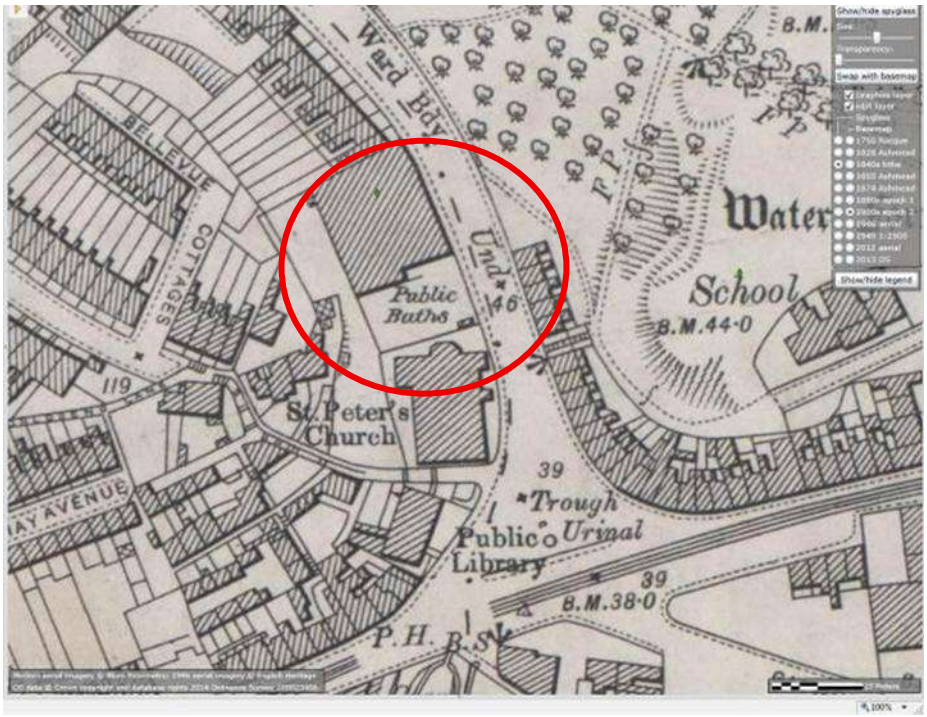

B.M. 65·1
Ward Boundary
St. Peter's Church
School
(Boys & Girls)
TRAMWAY

1880


Ward Bdy
B.M.
Water
School
B.M.44·0
Public Baths
46
St. Peter's Church
119
BELLEVUE COTTAGES
39
Trough
Public Urinal
Library
39
B.M.38·0
P.H.

1900

Public Baths
46
B.M 44 0
St. Peter's Church
Urinal
Dispensary

1949

2012