The Baths and Mineral Waters of Bath

Falconer Randle Wilbraham
THE BATHS
AND
MINERAL WATERS
OF BATH.

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MDCCLXXX.
a seething bath, which yet men prove  
Against strange maladies a sovereign cure.

Shakesp. Son. cliii.

"For if they be able to help men's diseases:  
What shall men need to go into farre countree to  
seek that remedy there whyche they may have at  
home?"

"Of the bathe of Baeth in England."

Dr. Turner, fol. 1, MDLVIII.
The following pages contain a description of the admirable and extensive arrangements provided by the Corporation of Bath for the employment of the Mineral Waters of Bath; together with brief notices of their impregnations and medicinal uses, and of the Bath General and Mineral Water Hospital; the whole being prefaced with a general account of the early history of the Mineral Waters and Baths of Bath.

The original plans which illustrate this work were presented to me by the late Messrs. Manners and Gill, Architects, which have since been kindly corrected by Mr. C. E. Davis, the City Architect, so as to show the improvements which have been made from time to time in the Corporation Bathing Establishments.

To Messrs. Wilson and Wilcox my thanks are also due for the plans of the New Royal Private Baths, erected by them, at the cost of the Corporation, and are connected with the Grand Pump Room Hotel.

R. W. F.

22, Bennett Street, Bath;
June, 1880.
A list of some Authors of Works on the Bath Waters from 1557 to 1857:

From 1557 to 1607.—W. Turner, M.D.; John Jones, M.D.
From 1607 to 1657.—Tobias Venner, M.D.; E. Jordan, M.D.; T. Johnson, M.D.
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PLANS, &c., AT THE END.

PLAN I.—Grand Pump Room, King's and Queen's Private Baths
  " II.—King's and Queen's Public Baths.
  " III.—The Royal Private Baths and Hot Bath.
  " V.—New Royal Private Baths.
INTRODUCTION.

No statement deserving of credit has been preserved regarding the discovery of the Hot Mineral Waters of Bath. The account given by Jones, in his Book of Bathes Ayle, which attributes their creation to "Bladudus Magus, that wyse Magician;" and also Wood's statement in his Description of Bath, which declares their detection to have been effected by Bladud and his swine — are examples of those legendary histories, with which it is attempted to supply the want of authentic records. If any truth exists in such legends, it is generally extremely difficult to disentangle it from what is fictitious.

It is thought by some, whose opinions are entitled to respect, that a British settlement once occupied the site of the present town of Bath, and that through the obscurity which envelopes its history, the outlines of an extensive city are traceable, which was distinguished above all those of the West; and hence, it is inferred as probable that its inhabitants did not neglect the mineral waters of the locality.

It is, however, more likely that the British occupied the elevated positions in the neighbourhood, where remains of their habitations are yet traceable; and that the hot waters of the valley formed a moras, the overflows of which were poured into the river Avon; still, it must be conceded that if they did inhabit the valley, all indications of their dwellings would be eradicated by subsequent occupants.

The period at which the history of Bath and the Bath Waters can be truly said to commence, is with the Roman occupation of the locality of the present city, which, according to Warner, was A.D. 54, or subsequent to A.D. 50 in the opinion of Whitaker; and lasted until A.D. 410. The presence of the Romans is indicated by many remarkable remains of their workmanship, which have been found and preserved, and among these are the ruins of buildings of magnitude and great beauty, erected in various parts of the neighbourhood, as well as in the immediate vicinity of the springs.
portions of which contribute to form one of the richest and most interesting collections of Roman Antiquities in England," among which attention may be specially directed to the remains of a temple found beneath the site of the present Pump-Room.† These, however, are but the remains of a still larger collection which was in existence more than two centuries ago.

One of the most important discoveries of a Roman building, connected with the use of the hot waters, was the finding in 1755 of the ruins of a Bath, of considerable size, in the position at present occupied by Kingston Buildings and Baths, near the Abbey. These remains were described by Dr. Lucas, † † and subsequently by Dr. Sutherland, ‡ in 1763; and an account of them, which is too extended to admit of quotation, may also be found in Collinson's History of Somersetshire, vol. 1., p. 9, or in Warner's History of Bath, p. 22. Some idea of the size of the building in which the baths were contained may be formed from the statement that "they occupied an area, 340 ft. from east to west, and 130 ft. at the broadest part, from north to south, that they were highly decorated with tessellated pavements, columns, pilasters, and every ornament of classical architecture." § These baths, it is probable, were destroyed by the Saxons, who succeeded the Romans in their occupation of Bath, and their ruins must subsequently have escaped notice, inasmuch as eight feet below the surface, but still considerably above them, several stone coffins, containing remains of persons of both sexes, and coins from the mints of several Saxon kings, † † were simultaneously discovered. Additional remains of these baths were discovered in 1799 and in 1803. To this subject it will be necessary again to refer.

The Roman city of Bath is generally believed to have been named Aquae Sulis, "Waters of the Sun"; but there is some

† These remains, the property of the Corporation of Bath, are placed under the care of the members of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution.

† † For an account of the ruins of the temple Vide Scharf Archaeol. xxxv, p. 199, and Board Soc., p. 19, et seq.


§ "Attempts to revive ancient Medical Doctrines relative to Waters, &c.," Lond., 1763.

† † Warner's "New Guide through Bath," p. 28; 1811.

† † There was a Mint at Bath. Vide "On Coins issued from Somersetshire Mints," by the Rev. T. F. Dymock—Somersetshire Arch. and Nat. Hist Soc.; Proceed. for 1848-50, p. 12.
foundation for considering that the name may have been Aquae Sulis; the first word in both cases being probably the same as the Celtic Ac or Acg, and Sulis, from the goddess Sul—Sul Minerva, the presiding deity of the Mineral Waters—which name appears upon several of the altars discovered in Bath.* The names which the Saxons gave to the city founded by the Romans of Hot Batham and Alemannasenequaeter, sufficiently indicate both the nature and efficacy of the waters. It has, however, been recently suggested that in Acg, the British pronunciation and orthography of Aquae is found, and that was being the British word for place. Alemannasenequaeter signifies the place known by the name of Aquae,† and it may be added that in “ceaster” we have the British form of “caestrum,” which would point out that the place known by the name of “Aqua” was fortified. What we know of Saxon habits, tends to confirm the belief that they paid considerable attention to the employment of the thermal springs.

“Oswin built a monastery at Bath (A.D. 676), and visited its hot waters; and Offa, a century afterwards, made it the residence of his court for some time. Athelstan and Edgar also delighted in the use of its medicinal springs; and indeed almost all the Saxon kings honoured Bath, either with their presence, or enriched it by their munificence.”++ A bath seems to have been provided from very ancient times for the use of royal visitors, since the name King’s Bath occurs as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century.

John de Villula, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who died in 1122, richly endowed the church of St. Peter (the Abbey) in 1106; and for the convenience of the monastery, built two new baths within its precincts, one of which, called the Abbot’s Bath, he gave to the public use, and the other for the prior. “He did not,” says Lucas, “rebuild those of the Romans, the foundation and ruins of which were buried under his palace; but he enclosed the heads of the chief springs then known, with strong though rude cisterns, which remain, with very little improvement, to this day.”† Wood states that both the above baths were given to the public; this took place perhaps at a later period. The baths went by the name of the Abbey Baths for some time, and were supplied

† Earl’s Bath, Ancient and Modern, p. 42. 1864. We have also Ac in the Pyrenees, from Aqua.
‡ Warner’s History of Bath. p. 316, and note.