

= Bath Assembly Rooms =

The Bath Assembly Rooms , designed by John Wood , the Younger in 1769 , are a set of elegant assembly rooms located in the heart of the World Heritage City of Bath in England which are now open to the public as a visitor attraction . They are designated as a Grade I listed building .

During the Georgian era Bath became fashionable . The architects John Wood , the Elder and his son John Wood , the Younger laid out new areas of housing for residents and visitors . Assembly rooms had been built early in the 18th century , but a new venue for balls , concerts and gambling was envisaged in the area between Queen Square , The Circus and the Royal Crescent . Robert Adam submitted a proposal that was rejected as too expensive . John Wood , the Younger raised funding through a Tontine and construction started in 1769 . The New or Upper Assembly Rooms opened with a grand ball in 1771 and became the hub of fashionable society , being frequented by Jane Austen and Charles Dickens , along with the nobility of the time .

The Bath stone building has rooms arranged in a U shape . There are four main function rooms in the complex : the 100 @-@ foot @-@ long (30 m) ballroom ? the largest Georgian interior in Bath ; the tea room ; the card room ; and the octagon . The rooms have Whitefriars crystal chandeliers and are decorated with fine art . In the 20th century they were used as a cinema and in 1931 were taken over by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and restored . They were bombed and burnt out during the Second World War , with restoration undertaken by Sir Albert Richardson before reopening in 1963 . They are now owned by the National Trust and operated by Bath and North East Somerset Council for public functions . The basement of the building provides a home to the Fashion Museum .

= = History = =

Several areas of Bath had undergone development during the Stuart period , and development increased during Georgian times in response to the increasing number of visitors to the spa and resort town who required accommodation . The architects John Wood , the Elder and his son John Wood , the Younger laid out the new quarters in streets and squares , the identical façades of which gave an impression of palatial scale and classical decorum . Much of the creamy gold Bath stone used for construction throughout the city was obtained from the limestone Combe Down and Bathampton Down Mines , which were owned by Ralph Allen (1694 ? 1764) .

Much of the development at this time consisted of new residential areas away from the old city centre . Queen Square was the first speculative development by John Wood , the Elder , who lived in one of the houses . The Circus consists of three long , curved terraces designed by the elder John Wood to form a circular space or theatre intended for civic functions and games . The games give a clue to the design , the inspiration behind which was the Colosseum in Rome . The most spectacular of Bath 's terraces is the Royal Crescent , built between 1767 and 1774 and designed by the younger John Wood . Gay Street links Queen Square to The Circus . All of which were designed by John Wood , the Elder in 1735 and completed by his son John Wood , the Younger .

The heart of the Georgian city was Wood 's Pump Room , which , together with its associated Lower Assembly Rooms , was designed by Thomas Baldwin , a local builder responsible for many other buildings in the city , including the terraces in Argyle Street and the Guildhall , The Lower Assembly Rooms consisted of two buildings . The first built in 1708 for Thomas Harrison overlooking Parade Gardens between North Parade and Bath Abbey . A large ballroom was added in 1720 , with further enlargement in 1749 and 1810 when it became known as The Kingston Assembly Rooms . In 1728 another building , known as Lindsey 's Assembly Rooms , was constructed , lasting until demolition around 1820 for the building of York Street . Harrison 's Lower Assembly Rooms were devastated by a fire in 1821 and rebuilt , lasting until demolition in 1933 for road improvements on the site now known as " Bog Island " .

In around 1770 the neoclassical architect Robert Adam designed Pulteney Bridge , a three @-@ arched bridge spanning the River Avon . He used as his prototype an original , but unused , design by Andrea Palladio for the Rialto Bridge in Venice . Adam also submitted plans for the new

Assembly Rooms but these were rejected as too costly . John Wood , the Younger raised funding for the construction of the Assembly Rooms by the use of a Tontine , an investment plan that is named after the Neapolitan banker Lorenzo de Tonti , who is credited with inventing it in France in 1653 . It combines features of a group annuity and a lottery . Each subscriber pays an agreed sum into the fund , and thereafter receives an annuity . As members die , their shares devolve to the other participants , and so the value of each annuity increases . On the death of the last member , the scheme is wound up . Construction started in 1769 and was completed in 1771 , when a grand opening was held .

The Assembly Rooms formed the hub of fashionable Georgian society in the city , the venue being described as " the most noble and elegant of any in the kingdom " . They were originally known as the Upper Rooms as there was also a lower assembly room in the city , which closed soon after the Upper Rooms opened . They served the newly built fashionable area which included The Circus , Queen Square and the Royal Crescent .

People would gather in the rooms in the evening for balls and other public functions , or simply to play cards . Mothers and chaperones bringing their daughters to Bath for the social season , hoping to marry them off to a suitable husband , would take their charge to such events where , very quickly , one might meet all the eligible men currently in the City . At one concert in 1779 , attended by around 800 ladies and gentlemen , 60 members of the nobility were present . During the season , which ran from October to June , at least two balls a week were held , in addition to a range of concerts and other events . Scenes such as this feature in the novels of Jane Austen , who lived in Bath with her parents and sister from 1801 to 1805 . Her two novels set in Bath , *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* , were published in 1818 and both mention the Assembly Rooms :

Mrs Allen was so long in dressing , that they did not enter the ball @-@ room till late . The season was full , the room crowded , and the two ladies squeezed in as well as they could . As for Mr Allen , he repaired directly to the card @-@ room , and left them to enjoy a mob by themselves .

Sir Walter , his two daughters , and Mrs Clay , were the earliest of all their party at the rooms in the evening ; and as Lady Dalrymple must be waited for , they took their station by one of the fires in the Octagon Room .

Charles Dickens also visited Bath on several occasions . He gave public readings in the Assembly Rooms and mentions them in *The Pickwick Papers* (published in 1837) :

In the ball @-@ room , the long card @-@ room , the octagonal card @-@ room , the staircases , and the passages , the hum of many voices , and the sound of many feet , were perfectly bewildering . Dresses rustled , feathers waved , lights shone , and jewels sparkled . There was the music ? not of the quadrille band , for it had not yet commenced ; but the music of soft tiny footsteps , with now and then a clear merry laugh ? low and gentle , but very pleasant to hear in a female voice , whether in Bath or elsewhere .

George Bridgetower , an Afro @-@ Polish @-@ born virtuoso violinist , made his debut at the Assembly Rooms in 1789 . Another young violinist , Thomas Linley the younger , played a series of concerts between 1771 and 1776 . Many of the concerts during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were organised by Venanzio Rauzzini .

In the 20th century several changes took place , with the Ballroom becoming a cinema , until the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings became the owners in 1931 . The building was restored by A Mowbray Green in 1938 , with Oliver Messel as the interior designer . During the Bath Blitz of 25 / 26 April 1942 , one of the retaliatory raids on England by the Baedeker Blitz following the RAF 's raid on Lübeck , the Assembly Rooms were bombed and burnt out inside . After the cessation of hostilities in Europe , they were restored by Sir Albert Richardson , with work being completed in 1963 . The ballroom ceiling had to be repaired after it collapsed in 1989 .

= = Architecture = =

The limestone building has a slate hipped roof . It is rectangular with a projecting doric portico entrance and an extension to the rear . The interior is laid out in a U shape , with the larger Ball Room and Tea Room along either side with the octagonal Card Room at the end . The rooms have

Whitefriars crystal chandeliers and are decorated with pictures by Thomas Gainsborough , Allan Ramsay (artist) , Edwin Long and William Hoare .

The Ballroom has five chandeliers and capacity for up to 500 people . It is over 100 feet (30 m) long and nearly 45 feet (14 m) wide . The ceiling is 42 feet (13 m) high . The Tea Room holds up to 250 people . It was the location for a banquet attended by The Prince of Wales for the BBC television series the Great British Menu . It is 60 feet (18 m) long and 42 feet (13 m) wide . The Octagon is named for the shape of the room has four fireplaces . It is 42 feet (13 m) across . It originally held an organ in the musicians gallery . In 1777 the Card Room was added . This is now used as a bar .

= = Current use = =

Today the rooms are owned by the National Trust and operated by Bath and North East Somerset Council . The main rooms are still available for hire for private functions . They are also used for concerts , including ones that are part of the Bath International Music Festival .

The basement of the building provides a home to the Fashion Museum , which was known before 2007 as the Museum of Costume . The collection was started by Doris Langley Moore , who gave her collection to the city of Bath in 1963 . It focuses on fashionable dress for men , women and children from the late 16th century to the present day and has more than 30 @, @ 000 objects . The earliest pieces are embroidered shirts and gloves from about 1600 .

The grandeur of the building make it a popular location for feature films and television series set in the Georgian period . The BBC have used it as a location for the filming of an adaptation of Northanger Abbey in 1986 and in 1995 Persuasion .