

## Placemaking Areas

### CHARLOTTE STREET CAR PARK

#### HISTORICAL OUTLINE

##### **Barton Fields and The Royal Crescent**

At the beginning of 18th century the area of Charlotte Street Car Park lay within a large pasture ground adjoining the Upper Bristol Road called Barton Lower Field or Kingsmead Furlong, property of the demesne farm or 'Barton' of Walcot which then stood in what is now John Street. Above this, reaching the road to Weston, lay two similar grounds, Barton Middle Field and Barton Upper Field (known also as Hayes Furlong) which provided the site for the Royal Crescent and its front lawn. On the west side of these grounds was a stream, 'Mud Brook', boundary with the town Commons, later marked by the line of Marlborough Lane. On the east side, a smaller watercourse, arising in the dell below what later became the Gravel Walk, formed the boundary with two more fields near the Farm House; Barton Bestall Ground (or Longcroft, on which Queen Square was built) and Barton Home Field (or The Hayes, site of the King's Circus). Various other minor springs leaked out into these fields, one at the western end of the car park area forming a small watercourse which flowed out to the Avon a little way downstream of the later Norfolk Crescent.

An important component in the siting of the Royal Crescent was its view over these fields, in the manner of a country mansion overlooking the grounds of an estate, and when the lease for the building land was finally drawn up in 1766 between John Wood the Younger and the then manorial owner, Sir Benet Garrard, this amenity was safeguarded by a covenant which precluded any buildings being erected, or the planting of any tree or shrub over eight feet high on the grounds below. The only exception was a plot adjoining the Bristol Road, next to the eastern boundary stream below the dell, set aside for a 'Farm House and Offices' (presumably to replace the original Barton Farm). For this purpose also, all the existing fields were thrown together into a single expanse of pasture for cows and sheep, henceforth known as Crescent Fields, separated from the Crescent by the Ha-Ha in front of the building. Included in this expanse were the remnants of Longcroft and the Hayes on the east side of the dell, lying between the Gravel Walk (laid out in 1771 to link Queen Square with the Crescent), Queen's Parade (built in 1768 in place of an intended Assembly Rooms) and a large area which fronted the Bristol Road (now Monmouth Place) between Queen's Parade and the intended Farmhouse, then occupied by Messrs. Jelly and Sainsbury, builders, for a timber yard. The northern part of this yard, behind Palace Yard Mews (then called Stable Lane) later became the site of Charlotte Street.

Even while the Crescent was being built, in 1767 the ownership of the estate passed to the Rev. Sir Peter Rivers Gay, bart., who in 1773, after it was completed, sought to capitalise on the value of Crescent Fields, without infringing the covenant, with a scheme for laying out 'kitchen gardens' - such gardens being then at a high premium. This policy was already being adopted by principal landowners elsewhere in the city who lacked the immediate opportunity to develop their land for fashionable building [as noted in other Placemaking Areas such as the Recreation Ground and Villa Fields in the Pulteney Estate, and the Ham Gardens in the Manvers Estate]. To dissuade the reverend baronet from 'desecrating' the Crescent landscape, the satirical poet Christopher Anstey, one of the early occupants of the Crescent, produced a mock heroic *Ode on an Evening View of the Crescent in Bath* (Appendix I below) which hints that the fields were already becoming the fashionable venue for walkers familiar to later writers such as Jane Austen.

Nevertheless, Sir Peter was not deterred from laying out a strip of gardens along the Bristol Road (site of the present Crescent Gardens) between Marlborough Lane and the proposed 'Farm House and Offices'. In the event, these would have had little impact on the view between the Crescent and the river - certainly less than the irregular rear elevations presented by the development of New King Street, Stanhope Street and Norfolk Crescent which soon began to appear on the south side of the Bristol Road, blocking off the view of the river. Indeed, by the end of the century the Bristol Road was becoming increasingly commercialised, the site of the proposed Farm House and Offices being used for a coal yard, and a large complex of storehouses and auction rooms erected on Jelly & Sainsbury's timber yard.

After the death of Sir Peter Rivers Gay in 1790, when the estate passed to his widow, Lady Martha Rivers, a proposal was made in 1810 to replace the kitchen gardens with a 'handsome' terrace of houses to mask the 'ugly and irregular' buildings on the south side of the road. These houses were to face towards the Crescent, with a new road in front leading from Marlborough Lane to Queen Square. However, it appears that the design did not meet with the approval of Lady Rivers, whose permission would have been needed to release the land from the covenant, and in the following year an alternative plan to extend the kitchen gardens northward was adopted instead. To advise 'on Drainage and Sunk Fence &c', William Smith ('Father of English Geology') was brought in by Lady Rivers, having recently been employed by the City to locate and restore a loss of hot water to the baths from leakage around the springs. Smith's diary and papers show that the ground works were already under way in 1812, and almost certainly finished by 1814 when he discusses the discovery of several Roman coffins when 'digging Gravel for the Walks lately made' (Appendix II).

In this scheme a second row of gardens was added to the back of those by the road, with another row above that fanning out behind a serpentine hedge, the latter reflecting the outlines of the Crescent and possibly masking the gardens from view. To provide access to the upper garden plots, a gravelled walk was laid out along this hedge, running from the lower end of Marlborough Buildings to the Brock Street entrance of the Gravel Walk, together with another pathway at the centre leading down through the middle of the gardens to the Bristol Road. Smith's note implies that the various springs mentioned above were diverted at this time into stone sewers, particularly the one in the Dell, which was replaced by the eastern boundary hedge of the new gardens, leaving the remaining ground on the east side of the dell as an isolated open field. Even before this, the outfalls of these streams had already disappeared on the south side of the Bristol Road, where they were diverted into sewers serving the new developments there.

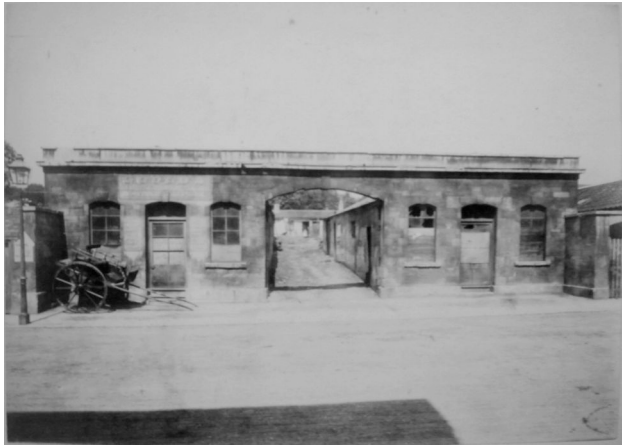
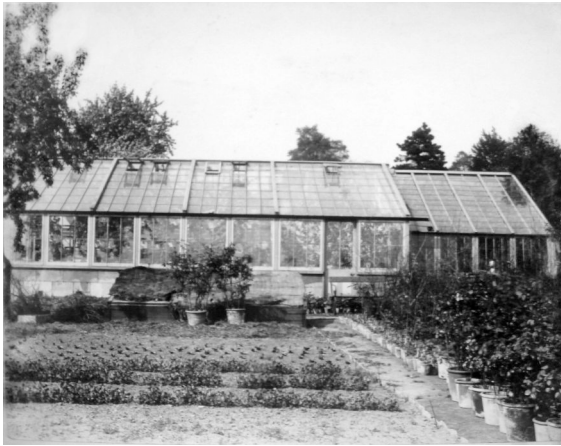
### **Victoria Park**

In 1829 a plan proposed for a public park on the Crescent fields above the gardens - extended with the agreement of the Freeman of Bath to include the town commons on the west side, was approved by Lady Rivers who granted a lease of the necessary land for an approach road (the Royal Avenue), and in October 1830 the Park was opened by Princess Victoria. Since the new road cut across the gardens at their northern end, several plots along its border were included in the park ground, together with the field on the east side of the dell and (for pedestrian access) the serpentine walk and central pathway between the gardens. The parish rate books show that one of the garden plots given up to the park, on the corner of Marlborough Lane, was adopted for a small botanical garden, created in 1837, but removed to its present site in 1886. Another plot, at the Brock Street entrance to the Gravel Walk, became the site of 'Richard Beard's Photographic Institution' (Bath's first photographic studio) between 1841 to 1850, later converted back to a flower garden following the donation of the flower vase by Signor Pieroni in 1861. Since the park was initially financed by subscription, access was controlled by a perimeter fence and gates (closed at night), one of which stood at the Bristol Road entrance of the central walk between the gardens. As a result this route became known as the Subscription Walk, and the gardens themselves sometimes called the Subscription Walk Gardens. It was about this time also that a gated entrance was made at the southern end of Queen's Parade into the field on the east side of the dell.

### **Charlotte Street and Crescent Gardens**

When Lady Martha Rivers Gay died in 1835, the estate passed to her surviving son, Sir Henry Rivers, and it was Henry's wife, Charlotte, whose name was adopted for Charlotte Street when laid out by George Manners, City Architect, in 1839-40. Sir Henry died in 1851, and although Lady Charlotte Rivers continued as lady of the manor until her death in 1870, her son Sir Henry Chandos Rivers, the last of the Rivers baronets, died in the same year. However, when part of the Crescent Gardens was considered for building development in the 1890s, the covenant on building was still an issue - as illustrated by a set of photographs in the Bath Record Office entitled 'Photographs showing buildings in Crescent Gardens prior to the erection of houses between 1893-1897 despite the restrictive covenants in the Deed relating to the land.'(BRO PX805). These views (some included below) show that from an early stage the gardens adjoining the Bristol Road (and evidently those in Marlborough Lane also) had already become fronted by a variety of single-storey buildings (carriage houses, stables, lodge cottages, &c), similar to the mews

that existed elsewhere in the city. It can also be seen that the open gardens at the rear contained many summerhouses, greenhouses and other structures, often of an ornamental nature.



Nevertheless, the new houses (the present Crescent Gardens) were built on the lower strip of gardens fronting the Bristol Road, taking in the former Coal Yard (by this time a Stone Yard) which abutted the houses in Charlotte Street, and separated from the remaining gardens by a back lane connecting with Marlborough Lane and the main Road. It was about this time also that another row of houses were built along the east side of Marlborough Lane. Although the Subscription Walk was retained between these houses, the piers of the entrance gate were moved up to the new boundary of the back lane, on the west side of which was built the present Park Superintendent's Lodge. The back lane also provided access to a nursery which had taken over all the garden plots on the south-west side by the early 1900s.

### **The British Restaurant**

Although the ownership of the Common had already passed from the Freemen to the Corporation in 1879, it was not until 1921 that the management and financial control of Victoria Park itself was handed over by the Park Committee and a variety of public works brought into effect. Besides several new public toilets, one in Marlborough Lane on the site of the former Botanical Garden, another at the Charlotte Street entrance, a sports facility including a pavilion, tennis courts, bowling green and putting green was laid out in terraces on the upper part of the ground on the east side of the dell.

However, the lower part, inside the Charlotte Street entrance, remained open until the second World War, when the Council received a directive from the Ministry of Food in July 1941 requesting the erection of one or more British Restaurants, to provide 'day-to-day feeding of the population and to act as a first line of defence in an emergency'. The first to be built was inside the Charlotte Street entrance (named Parkside as a result of a newspaper competition) which opened in August 1942, followed by two others; Hillside (Oldfield Park), and Riverside (Walcot). Parkside was the most used, serving 900 lunches a day, 30 teas and 70 suppers (open between 10 a.m. and 8.30 p.m., the cost of an average three-course lunch

being set at 9d), and a dance was held there each month. It was at this stage that the entrance was widened for vehicular access by the acquisition of part of the garden of the adjoining Registry Office, although it was not until later that a connection was made with the back lane of Crescent Gardens. After the Ministry withdrew support for the scheme in April 1947, the Council purchased the buildings which they continued to run under the name of Civic Restaurants. Parkside was the last to close, at the end of 1950, by which time the spare ground on the north side of the building was already in use as a car park. The building subsequently became Parkside Junior School (closed 2006), and is now a Children's Centre.

When the Charlotte Street Car Park was laid out in the 1980s on the site of the gardens (which had no vehicular access), new openings were provided at each end; from the Charlotte Street entrance through the fence at the back of the School, and from Marlborough Lane through the site of the toilets, demolished to connect with the end section of the serpentine path which was converted to a roadway. For pedestrians, the pathway of the Subscription Walk was retained, and an opening was made at the eastern corner of the car park which connected with the other end of the serpentine path in Victoria Park. The rest of the old path was left to become overgrown with shrubbery to provide a dense screen between the car park and the lawns surrounding the bandstand.

## Appendix I

Inscribed to the Rev. Sir Peter Rivers Gay, bart, with allegorical watercolour frontispiece, 'written on the occasion of a scheme to convert the beautiful fields in front of the Crescent at Bath into kitchen gardens'.

### **'Ode On An Evening View Of The Crescent At Bath**

Lo! where beside yon verdant plain Sweet Avon winds his way,  
And smiling laves thy rich demain, Sir Peter Rivers Gay,  
Joyful I view the flocks that graze, Or o'er his margin stray;  
Here let us rest, and silent gaze, Sir Peter Rivers Gay.  
Mark with what glee that playful crew In life's delightful May,  
Eager their childish sports pursue, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
Nor glads it less, now sol's withdrawn, Yon nymphs in fair array  
To trace the velvet of thy lawn, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
O! may no rude remorseless swains, No churlish clown essay  
To force them from these blissful plains Sir Peter Rivers Gay!  
E'en o'er my brows tho' time should steal, And spread his mantle grey,  
Still to bright beauty's shrine I'd kneel, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
May health, blith active health be theirs, No care their charms decay,  
And, right I deem, you'll join my prayers, Sir Peter Rivers Gay.  
Now on yon Crescent's form so fair My ravish'd eyes shall stay,  
View all Palladio's beauties there, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
May it to thee full many a year, It's joyful tribute pay—  
But hark - what sounds salute mine ear Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
Sure o'er my sense some waking dream, Or airy visions play?—  
No - 'tis the genius of the stream, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
See! where he rests upon his urn, With looks of sore dismay!  
Turn there! - thy frightened visage turn, Sir Peter Rivers Gay,  
To thee he calls with stern command, Slow gales his voice convey—  
Hold! hold! thy sacrilegious hand, Sir Peter Rivers Gay!  
Hush'd be ye winds, ye murm'ring streams, And hear old Avon pray:  
And thou attentive to my themes, Sir Peter Rivers Gay.  
Should'st thou by filthy Mammon stung, Thine own fair spot bewray,  
With scare-crows, cabbages, and dung Sir Peter Rivers Gay,  
Wo! to that architect superb, Who holds o'er Bath his sway,  
Yet still forgot thy pow'r to curb, Sir Peter Rivers Gay!  
His rueful corps some god transmute To mournful box or bay,  
(Or better should the yew-tree suit) Sir Peter Rivers Gay

Cut him, his compass in his hand, Meet emblems round him lay;  
 And like Vitruvius let him stand Sir Peter Rivers Gay  
 Full in his Crescent's front: thine heir For ever and for aye  
 Be doom'd to keep him in repair, Sir Peter Rivers Gay.  
 But for that tribe so skill'd in quirk And quibble to betray,  
 Who urg'd thee to this fatal work, Sir Peter Rivers Gay,  
 May they to cursed hemlock sped Ne'er view sol's genial ray -  
 Guard thou their poison from thine head Sir Peter Rivers Gay,  
 For Oh! - I tremble to relate Thine ills in future day -  
 A Collyflow'r must be thy fate, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
 Thou in this fair, this fragrant spot Shalt od'rous plants survey,  
 Thyself be destin'd to the pot, Sir Peter Rivers Gay;  
 In vain your cabbag'd head you'll rear, And branching leaves display,  
 Five farthings is the price you'll bear, Sir Peter Rivers Gay:  
 And when of stalk and root beguil'd, For cooks you're deem'd a prey,  
 And thou in thine own Crescent boil'd, Sir Peter Rivers Gay,  
 E'en Jeffery Pounce, that griping elf, That hungry dunce, shall say -  
 "Troth, - thou'rt as tasteless as myself Friend Peter Rivers Gay."

**Christopher Anstey, 1773.**

'Crescentem sequitur Cura pecuniam' (As riches grow, Care follows), Horace

**Appendix II** - From the Smith MS, Oxford University.

Wednesday 28 August 1811

'Morning - saw several Persons - Mr.Hosey informed me Lady Rivers was expected.'

Monday 23 March 1812

'Morning - about <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> past 10 arrived in Bath per White Hart Coach - Waited on Lady Rivers respecting the Drainage and Sunk Fence &c now going on in the Crescent Fields ...'.

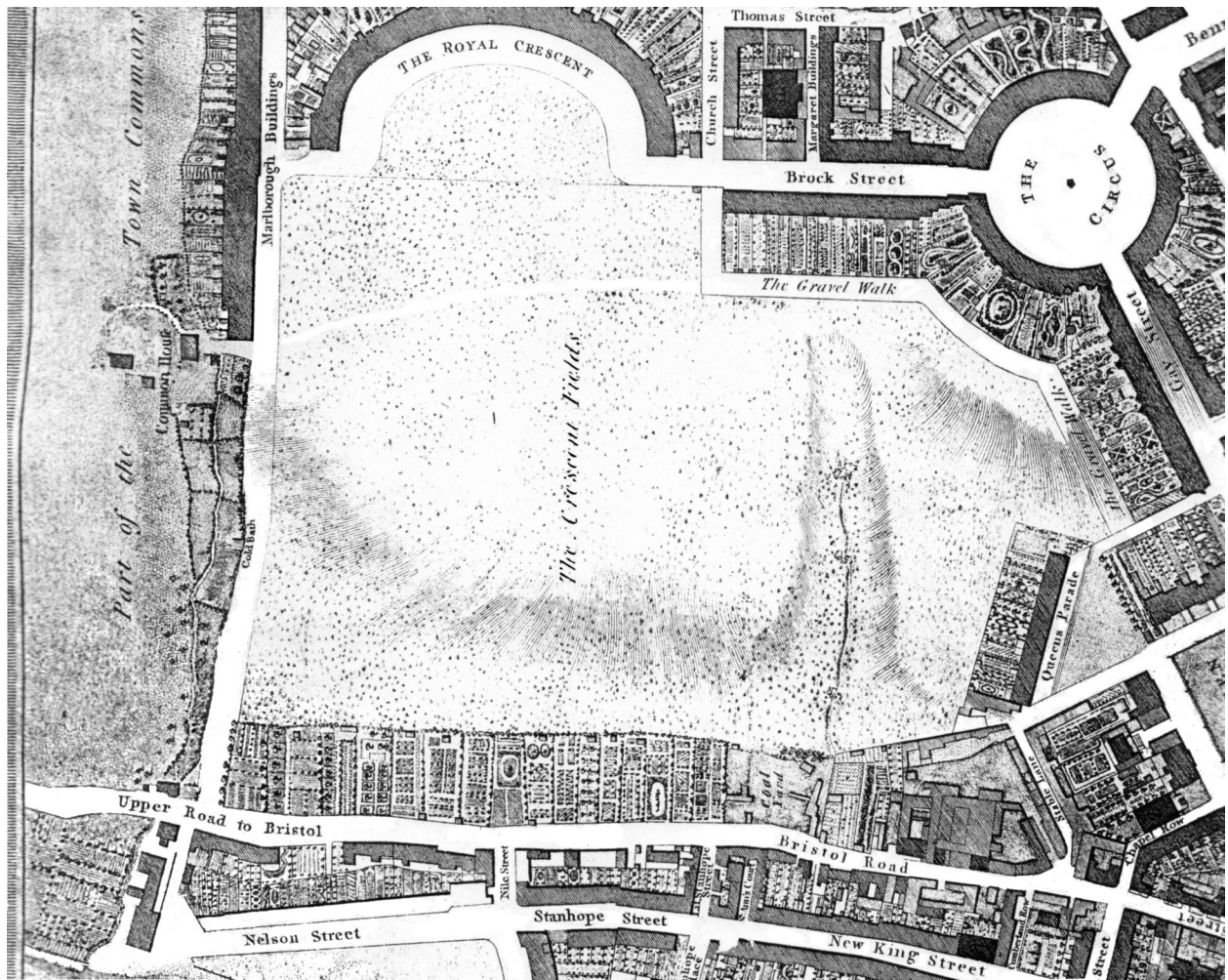
7 July 1814, London. Stone Coffins found in Crescent Fields Bath &c.

'Two Stone Coffins were found in digging Gravel for the Walks lately made in the Crescent Fields, of the rudest workmanship. These also were made from beds of Stone from Combe Down which could be easily recognized by persons accustomed to making correct observations on Stone. The lids of these lay so near to the surface as to have been frequently and deeply scratched by the plough although the Field was in pasture & never either known or supposed to have been ploughed. Both of the Coffins contained Bones & in or near them were also dug up Rings & other Ornaments which Lady Rivers the owner of the Soil could not obtain although a handsome reward was offered. It is hoped these things may yet fall into the hands of persons of intelligence and that some light may thence be thrown on the origin or date of this mysterious interment.

It appeared by the size of the Coffins & of the Bones to have been a Male & Female probably of some consequence in early ages. The coffins were of the rudest workmanship and the top fitted on them each in two or three pieces. They lay near enough the surface to have been affected by the Weather if Frost could have had any effect on such Stone.'

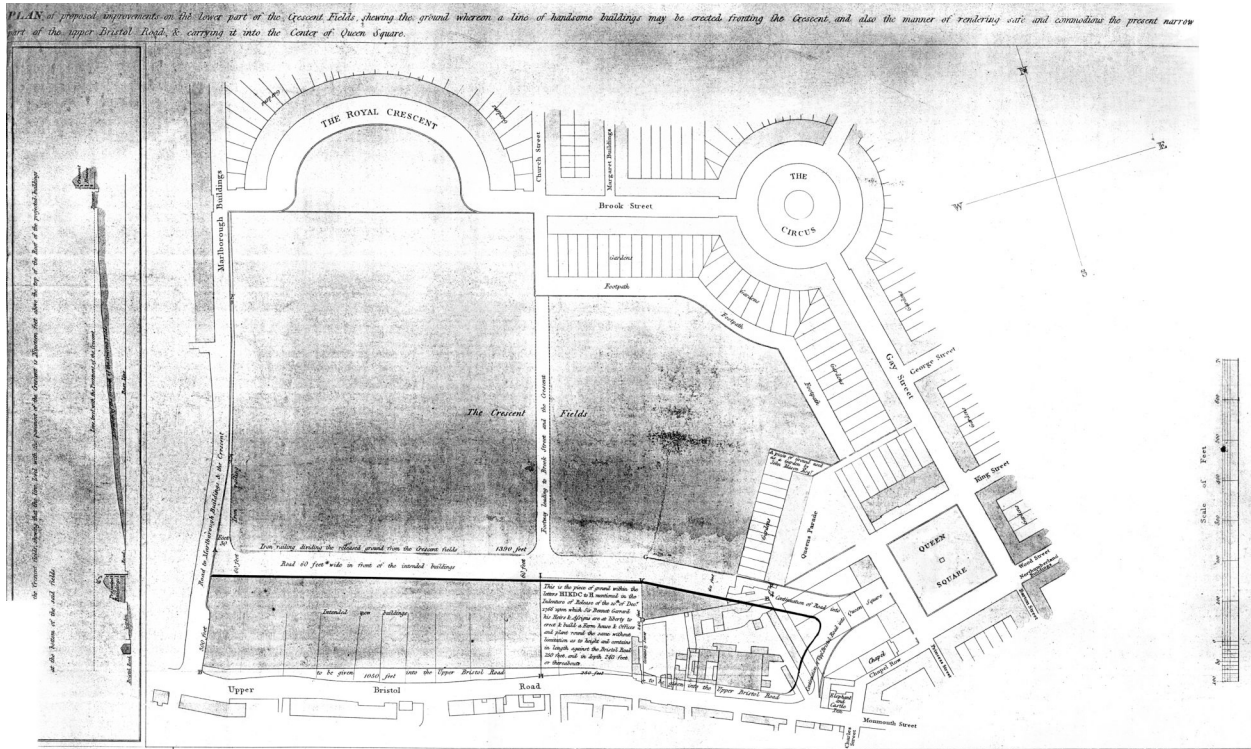


2. From Harcourt Masters' *Plan of the City of Bath, 1795*.

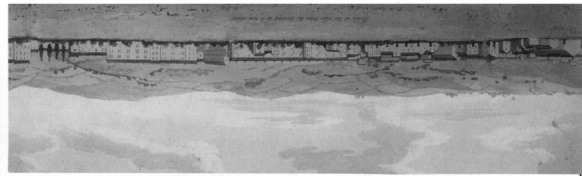


Here the Barton Fields have been thrown together into one expanse called The Crescent Fields, as far as Queen's Parade, including the stream in the dell below the Gravel Walk. Ranging along the north side of the Bristol Road, from left to right, are Sir Peter Rivers Gay's Kitchen Gardens, a Coal Yard (intended site of a Farm House and Offices), and a large block of storage buildings and auction rooms (formerly Jelly & Sainsbury's Timber Yard) behind Queen Square in Stable Lane (now Palace Yard Mews).

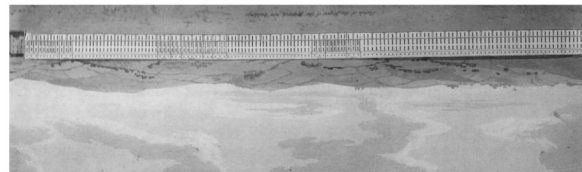
### 3. From 'Plan of proposed improvements on the lower part of the Crescent Fields ...', 1810.



In consideration of Lady Rivers agreeing that the Crescent Fields not be let for Gardens, but pro-  
 vide as pasture for Sheep & Cows only, & to be given up to the public for  
 use, no property on ground and  
 any necessary to widen the upper  
 & road and contain the same.  
 An order of Queen Square it is  
 not that a portion of the lower  
 of the Fields & garden as shown  
 in this plan, shall be retained  
 the Chain, which probably has  
 on the same.



This view is taken from the Crescent, and shows the present state of the land, with the buildings which are now erected, and the road which is now proposed to be carried through the middle of the Fields, and to be widened at the end of the same, so as to be carried into the Center of Queen Square.



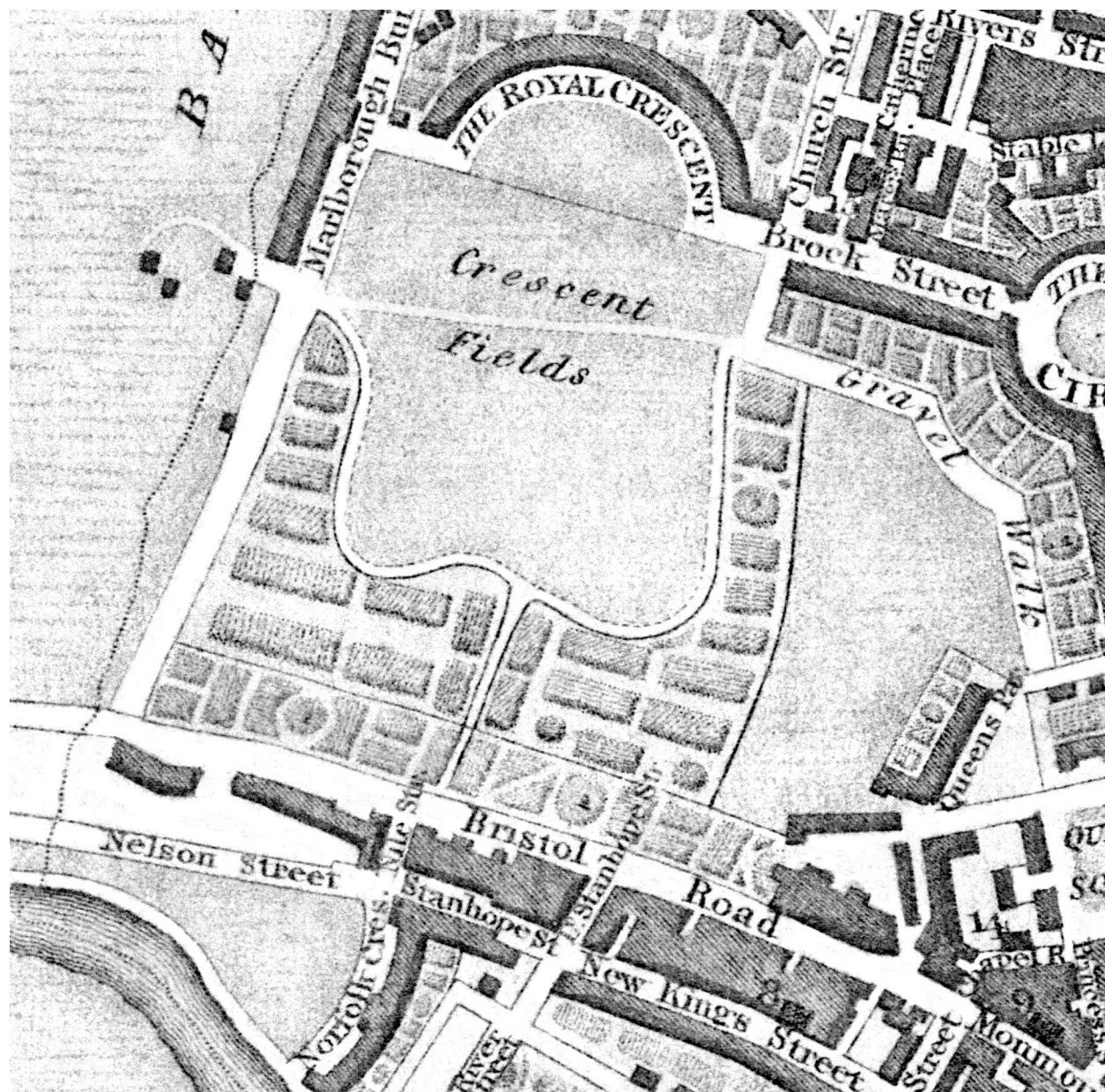
This view is taken from the Crescent, and shows the proposed improvements on the lower part of the Crescent Fields, and the manner of rendering safe and commodious the present narrow part of the Upper Bristol Road, & carrying it into the Center of Queen Square.

The Land proposed to be Released is comprised within the Letters ABCDEFG back to A  
 and is distinguished by the general Pink colour.  
 The deep Pink colour denotes the part on which a line of handsome buildings are proposed  
 to be erected to extend from the Road to Marlborough buildings to the new intended Entrance  
 into Queen Square.  
 The faint part of the Pink colour shows the intended Road, 60 feet wide in front  
 of the forementioned line of new buildings, the East end of this Road leads into  
 Queen Square.  
 The rest of the faint Pink colour between the Letters B & C shows that part of the Released  
 Premises which is to be given into the Upper Bristol Road.

Included at the bottom of this plan (inverted) are before-and-after views from the Crescent of the site of the new houses intended to replace the gardens along the Bristol Road. To the left is a diagram of the calculated line of sight from the Crescent across Crescent fields.



4. From *A New and Correct Plan of the City of Bath* (published by J.Barratt, 1818).



Here the new layout of the gardens is shown (schematically) reaching as far as Marlborough Buildings on the left, and joining up with the Gravel Walk on the right. The pathway following the serpentine hedge and passing through the middle of the gardens provided access to the upper rows. The eastern boundary of the gardens follows the stream in the dell below Gravel Walk, leaving an open ground behind Queen's Parade.

**5. From Cotterell & Spackman's MS plan of water supply in Bath (sheets 20/21/26/27), 1852-1853.**

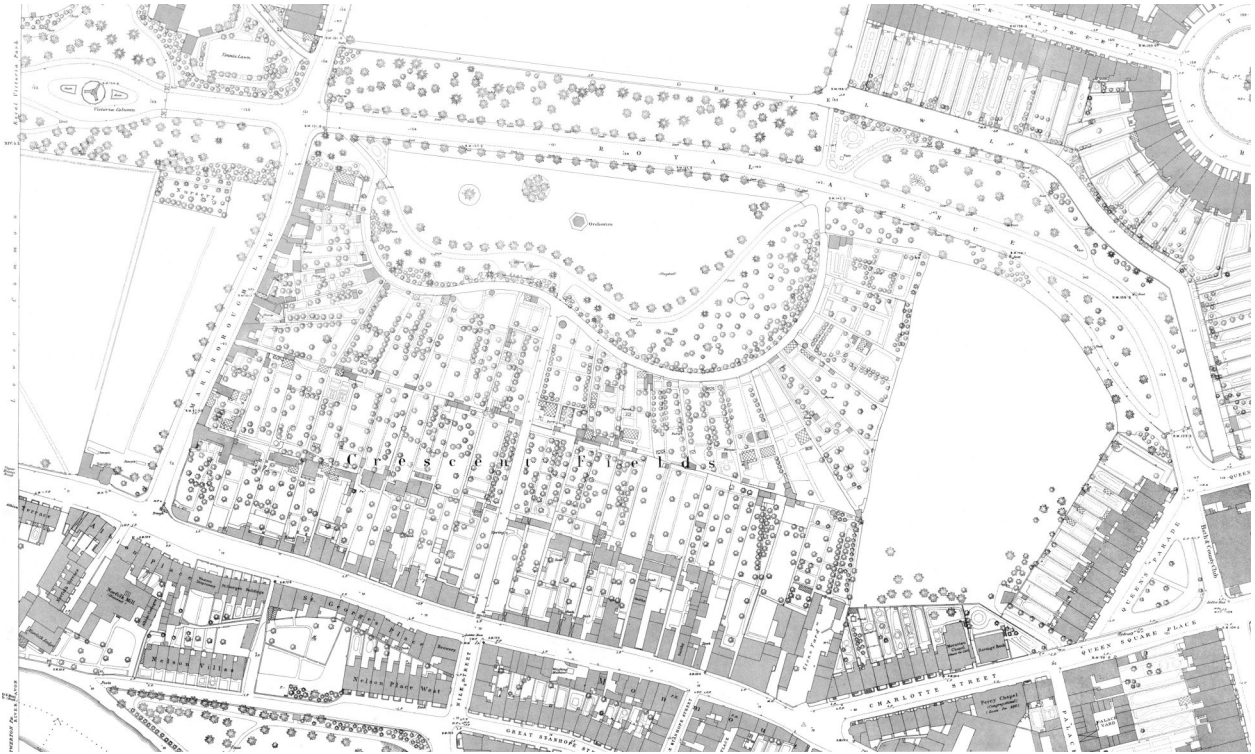


**By this time Victoria Park has been laid out, the Royal Avenue cutting off some of the northern garden plots. One of the remaining plots (top left with the octagonal structure) was included in the Park for a botanical garden. The serpentine walk is shown hedged, with the present serpentine pathway added above it, but no bandstand has yet been built.**

**A faint pecked line inside the eastern boundary of the gardens marks the line of the culverted stream or sewer in the dell. An entrance into the ground on the east side of this boundary, behind Queen's Parade, is shown leading from the newly built Charlotte Street.**

**On the Bristol Road are variously named cottages, one of which appears to be a dairy. This is identified later as a stable block with farrier/smithy.**

6. From the OS 1:500 maps of Bath (sheets XIV.5.3/4/8/9), 1885.



These two editions of the OS large-scale maps show the area just before and after the building of Crescent Gardens on the Bristol Road, with other houses appearing in Marlborough Lane.

7. From the OS 1:2,500 map of Bath (1904 edition), sheet XIV.5.





8. From the OS 1:2,500 map of Bath (1932 edition), sheet XIV.5.



The main changes in the area shown on these maps are (above) the building of the sports amenity behind Queen's Parade in 1921 (with toilets in Charlotte Street and Marlborough Lane), and (below) the appearance of the British Restaurant building at the Charlotte Street entrance in 1942.

9. From the OS 1:1250 maps of Bath, 1952 (sheets ST 7465 SE/SW).

