

# Dorp

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## **between the object and the floor**

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Vaults are a common feature of 18th and 19th century buildings in Bath. They were usually built to support the highway above, and were a constructional response to the precipitous topography that surrounds Bath in order to provide a level site. They provided storage for coal and a service area for the principal building. Vaults are sometimes regarded as marginal and unimportant parts of the building. However, an informed understanding of the hierarchy of floors of most 18th and early 19th century buildings in Bath reveals that vaults are significant in both architectural and social historic terms. Frequently they possess evidential value relating to the firm social structures and hierarchies that existed in society during the 18th and 19th centuries.

### *Additional information:*

Vaults, in common with basements, were intended to provide a service function within buildings. Unlike basements, they usually fall outside the main footprint of the principal building, separated by a light-well and located beneath the highway to the front, and were never intended for habitation. However, there are some examples of vaults that are located within the basement arrangement, often to the rear and were likely to have been used as water storage tanks for harvested rainwater before the introduction of mains water supply in the mid to late 19th century. As well providing a structural function in supporting the highway, they provided a solution when developing inclined ground. They were used for the storage of coal and often for service areas, for instance the laundering of clothes. Surviving features such as coal holes and sinks and coppers provide evidence and testimony for this use and such features can often be found in vaults. Vaults are often subdivided by limestone ashlar partitions in order to segregate these two uses: storage and service. Their character reflects their humble functions including stone floors (of either rubble or flagstones that can be either local limestone or pennant sandstone), limestone rubble masonry walls and, in some rare cases, brick can be found in Bath. The internal face of the masonry would usually have been covered with a lime wash finish, which would usually have been white in order to maximise levels of light. Joinery would have been modest and functional. Ceiling heights are characteristically low.

*Text gratefully appropriated from a Planning Guidance Note published by Bath & North East Somerset Council.*

*\* This exhibition is only available to view online through our website or Contemporary Art Library*