

# THE FIRST 75 YEARS OF THE HOLBURNE MUSEUM

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The building which closes the vista along Great Pulteney Street to the east is a familiar landmark for Bathonians. It is the home of the Holburne of Menstrie Museum which celebrated the centenary of its opening in 1993. The Scottish name in a West Country setting is unusual; so is the origin and diversity of the collection. But my essay is not so much concerned with the contents of the museum as with its place in the life of the City.

The Holburnes were of Lowland Scots ancestry, acquired a Scottish baronetcy early in the eighteenth century and lived an unremarkable life in Bath at the beginning of the nineteenth. Sir Francis Holburne, the 4th Baronet (1750–1820) and his wife Alice had seven children: two died in infancy, the eldest son, Francis Ralph, died of wounds in 1814, and four survived into old age, among them the 5th Baronet, Sir Thomas William (1793–1874). He and his sisters were only moderately well off, at any rate until the death of their wealthy aunt, Mrs Catherine Cussans (1753–1834). Under her will the Holburne siblings received the income from several trusts for life. *Their* children were the ultimate beneficiaries, but if there was no issue, the principal would revert to the estate of the last surviving Holburne. This provision was the origin of the 'Cussans Reversion', which was to play an important role many years later in the history of the Holburne Museum.

Sir William (he did not use the first Christian name) was the chief beneficiary, receiving £1,600 a year for life. The money enabled him to pursue his lifelong interest of collecting – paintings, silver, plate, miniatures, fine china and books. He showed taste and was proud of the collection: selected items were sent to loan exhibitions.<sup>1</sup> When he died he bequeathed the entire collection to his youngest sister, Mary Anne Barbara (1802–1882), the Miss Holburne of this story. She had for many years kept house for him at 10 Cavendish Crescent, Bath, but unlike him was no collector, let alone a connoisseur. Miss Holburne was now, with the exception of two childless descendants of another branch of the Holburne family, the only surviving beneficiary of the Cussans will. Having no-one to care for she devoted herself to the perpetuation of the

family name. She paid for an obelisk in Lansdown Cemetery and provided for a new church at Menstrie near Stirling. At the time Dr John Coates, her physician, was also her confidant. He was a collector and may have directed her interest towards the project of establishing a museum in Bath for her brother's collection. Miss Holburne had learnt that Sydney House or Sydney College at the end of Great Pulteney Street was for sale, and she wanted to buy it. But in 1882 she fell ill, fussed over details and changed her mind. That delayed the drafting of the codicil to her will, but finally she called for her London solicitor. He came on Sunday 18 June to draw up the document which she signed and had witnessed. She had left it too late, however, and the Trust documents had not been completed when she died on 21 June.<sup>2</sup>

Probate was granted to the Executors and the lawyers got down to work. The codicil was straightforward: first, various legacies to friends, staff, hospitals and the Royal Victoria Park; next, 'in priority' £8,000 for the church at Menstrie; finally, £10,000 'absolute' to the 'joint tenants' (including Coates and others who later became the first Trustees), who also received the entire 'Residuary Personal Estate' including no.10 Cavendish Crescent and its contents, notably Sir William's collection, and the reversion of the Cussans Trust. Several important matters were left unsettled and Counsel advised obtaining a direction from the Court of Chancery whether the legacy was valid for charitable purposes and whether the Trustees could own property. So two of the Trustees attended Court for three days in May 1885, accompanied by Counsel for all the parties involved. In *Coates v. Mackillop*, Mr Justice Chitty ruled that the gift was 'for charitable purposes', that is, it was '...to be kept in Bath as a public institution for the benefit of the inhabitants of that city'. But the judge did not rule on the acquisition of property although he allowed the Trustees to place the collection in hired rooms and added '...possibly the Corporation of Bath or some public spirited citizen may be induced by...the gift to provide a permanent home for the collection'.<sup>3</sup>

The costs were considerable and more were to follow. A formal 'Scheme' had to be drawn up for the 'Interim Regulation and Management of the Holburne of Menstrie Museum Charity' – 'interim' because the Scheme would be revised when the Cussans Trust Fund (then represented by £39,000 in Consols) reverted to Miss Holburne's residuary personal estate. The Scheme listed the funds in the Charity, valued at almost £23,000 before payment of legal costs and legacy duty. The Scheme also named the men who were henceforth to be the Trustees: it gave them the minimum of discretion in the execution of their tasks and



**Fig. 1**  
Sir William  
Holburne  
(‘The Collector’)  
in old age.  
(Courtesy  
Holburne  
Museum and  
Crafts Study  
Centre)

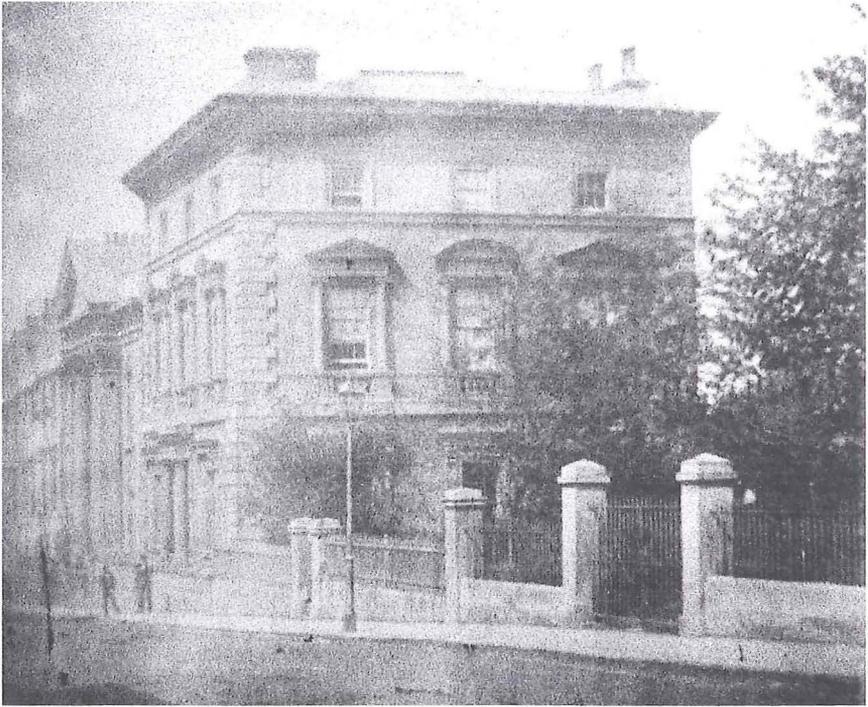
entailed the maximum of trouble, expense and delay in obtaining the Court’s approval for all actions not expressly authorised.<sup>4</sup>

The judge approved the Scheme by Order dated 24 July 1886, more than four years after the death of Miss Holburne. The Trustees were now in business: they paid legacy duty and bills, sold Miss Holburne’s goods and chattels and found that, while they had more than she had anticipated, it was barely enough to run a museum. Their funds amounted to roughly £18,000 and yielded about £500 a year.<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 2 Miss Holburne in old age. (Courtesy Holburne Museum and Crafts Study Centre)



The four Trustees and Dr Coates, their chairman, faced many difficulties. Although all were men of substance and public figures in Bath, particularly in the local Conservative party, they had no experience of running a museum. Their first priority was to find a home for the collection. That took about three years and entailed inspecting sixteen buildings, some of them more than once, and several surveys. Two properties caused much trouble and expense. The first was Sydney College which the tenants were willing to sell with ten acres of land, but



**Fig. 3** The Bath Savings Bank, Charlotte Street, in the 1880s: the home of the Holburne of Menstrie Museum from 1893 to 1915. (Courtesy Bath Central Library)

the owner, the Duke of Cleveland's estate, was unco-operative and there were insurmountable legal obstacles. So for the second time Miss Holburne's intentions were frustrated. The other property was no.8 Upper Church Street, which was for sale in October 1888 but without vacant possession until spring 1890. The Trustees were now becoming frantic and proposed to turn 10 Cavendish Crescent into a museum. The furniture and carpets had been sold, but the collection still adorned the empty rooms. The idea was absurd and when the other residents heard of it they objected strongly. So the Trustees scrapped the plan, and in March 1890 contracted to buy 8 Upper Church Street. Three months later they learnt that the Bath Savings Bank in Charlotte Street was to be auctioned in the autumn. But would the vendors of Upper Church Street release the Trustees from the contract? They would not, and sued for completion.

The Trustees lost the case and paid, with costs, £1,783. They lost again when they eventually resold the house for £1,050. Meanwhile someone was ramping the price of the Bank building, and Coates was relieved when he had to pay only £2,400 at auction in October. As the Chancery Court would not allow the Trustees to take the money out of the endowment, they had to borrow in a hurry.

At last the Holburne Charity had a building, but very little cash to pay the builders and decorators. Cavendish Crescent was sold for £1,210 in January 1891 and provided some relief. A caretaker couple were engaged, but within weeks the man was sacked for misconduct. Next, the Trustees advertised for a curator and appointed Percy Bate at a salary of £150 a year and free accommodation with effect from 1 July 1891. He seemed a promising choice, single, in his late twenties, with seven years' work experience as deputy curator of the Maidstone Museum. He turned out to be indispensable. There were also problems with the Chief Clerk to the Chancery Court, which delayed the release of funds for fitting out the museum. Thus it was not until February 1893 that the last display cases were delivered and the plate chests arrived from secure storage. Finally everything was ready and the Holburne Museum opened on 1 June 1893. Bate counted 127 visitors. The *Bath Chronicle* gave the collection a good write-up, and the numbers gradually increased in the following weeks. The opening times were restricted, 11–4 on six days a week, and a shilling admission charge was levied on two days. Nevertheless 5,085 people came in 1893. Then the novelty and the curiosity wore off and numbers fell to 2,600 in 1896. The following year the Trustees waived the admission charge and there was an increase to 3,900 in 1898. Thereafter the annual number of visitors fluctuated around 4,000. The Trustees blamed the inconvenient location, but Bathonians were not sufficiently interested to flock in larger numbers to the Museum.

A few years later a legacy from Mrs Roxburgh provided the means to build an art gallery on a site in Bridge Street which the City was donating for that purpose. The Trustees were invited on very favourable terms to add the Holburne collection. Coates, on their behalf, brusquely refused without even submitting the proposal to the Court of Chancery. The City went ahead with the project and a public subscription was opened to build the Victoria Art Gallery. The curmudgeonly attitude of the Trustees was noted and they felt sufficiently embarrassed to subscribe to the appeal.<sup>6</sup>

The opening years of the twentieth century were the most eventful in the history of the Museum until the establishment of the link with the

University in the 1960s. Coates resigned abruptly in 1903, and it was fortunate for the Holburne Charity that somewhat younger and very able men became Trustees. In particular the Rev. Sydney Adolphus Boyd (1857–1947) joined in that year and soon took over the chairmanship, a position he held until 1925. Having read law at Cambridge (though he never practised in court) he became an Anglican priest. His ecclesiastical advance from curate in Hampstead to Rector of Bath (1901–1938) and Archdeacon (1925–1938) was impressive. Unlike Coates, Boyd was a public personality and he attracted much attention as one of the conservationists of the Bath Street buildings and as first President of the Old Bath Preservation Society. He and his fellow Trustees played a major role in smoothing relations with the City, badly ruffled in Coates' days. They also had a clear vision of the Museum's future.

They were able to carry it out because Mrs Isabel Calnady, the last life beneficiary of the Cussans trusts, died in November or December 1906 and the principal reverted to the Holburne Charity. The results were startling: in 1903 the Charity endowment was valued at £18,700. In April 1909 after estate duty had been paid on the Cussans money and £2,000 refunded to Coates' estate and others for their loan to buy the Savings Bank building, the total value of the endowment was £47,700 (the equivalent in 1993 purchasing power of £1.1–1.4 million). In the former year the Museum income was about £550, in the latter £1,400. The Trustees had more than they needed and were able to save.<sup>7</sup> Mrs Cussans' trusts had made it possible for her nephew to collect; three-quarters of a century later they secured the future of his collection.

The Trustees wanted to buy the dilapidated Sydney College building but underrated the obstacles. The estate of the Duke of Cleveland (represented by Capt. Forester) was not prepared to sell the Bathwick property piecemeal. The principal tenant – a property developer trading as the Gordon Hotels Ltd – wanted to make a profit on the transaction and the Treasury Solicitor would not authorise a deal which gave the Holburne Charity an annual income of £157 from the tenants of Sydney Gardens. The officials at the Guildhall knew of the Trustees' plans which happened to coincide with the City's intentions to improve the gardens and parks of Bathwick. The Town Clerk spoke to Boyd about a joint purchase of the entire site of about ten acres, and on 29 September 1908 the Mayor made a non-binding proposal: the City would take over the land, the income from rents, and satisfy the Gordon Hotels, while the Trustees would pay the City for the Sydney College building and two acres of garden. He and the Trustees met in November and a deal began

to emerge. The following February the Trustees agreed to a 'provisional contract' with the City subject to sanction from the Court of Chancery, and from Forester to the change of use from school to museum. The complicated and time-consuming details need not detain us. Suffice it to say that at the end of 1912 the Trustees were able to buy the house and garden for £2,650. The Gordon Hotels received £2,500 from the City and departed. Without the help of the City and the 'willing co-operation' of the Attorney General's solicitors the difficult negotiations would have stalled. One of the new Trustees, a local solicitor, handled the Bath end and, as on previous occasions, the Holburne solicitors dealt with the Chancery lawyers in London. The episode shows what could be done when the parties were agreed on a solution.

Meanwhile Boyd, with the agreement of the other Trustees, had invited Reginald Blomfield to Bath. They knew each other and, as Blomfield was a well-known architectural historian and Boyd a conservationist, they hit it off. In October 1910 Blomfield submitted his plans costed at £14,300. It was his first commission for a museum, and when the Trustees protested he reduced the estimate to £9,650. During 1911 and 1912 various alterations were proposed and considered, and the estimate rose again to £13,600. There was some confusion and in the end an Order of the Chancery Court set a limit of £12,000.<sup>8</sup> It was exceeded, but at first all was harmony. Work began in autumn 1913 and was completed in March 1915.

Blomfield's alterations to the building were extensive. The front elevation was changed and the wings on either side replaced by short colonnades. He gutted the interior, eliminated an entire storey and installed new fire-resistant first and second floors. He intended to have a dome, visible above the parapet as a counterfoil to the Victoria Art Gallery, but at the last moment this was changed to three roof lights on a flat roof. Blomfield arranged accommodation for the curator, the caretaker couple and the Trustees' meeting room on the ground floor. The basement was to be used for the boiler and storage. The projecting loggia at the back was removed, but otherwise no change was made to that elevation. The garden was left untouched and during the war potatoes were grown. Blomfield's opinion of his reconstruction was entirely favourable, but his design had some serious drawbacks. The basement tended to dampness and was unsuited for the storage of works of art. Neither the basement nor the ground floor could be used for display purposes. The staircase was inconvenient for the elderly and the handicapped, the hoist was an unsafe alternative, the sanitary facilities

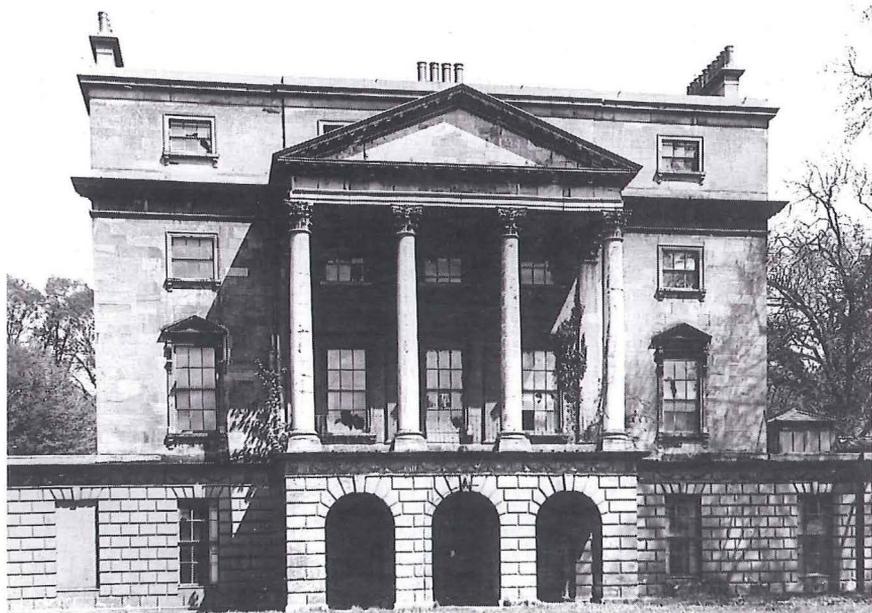


Fig. 4 The old Sydney College, a photograph taken by Mowbray A. Green in 1904. (Courtesy Holburne Museum and Crafts Study Centre)

were inadequate for a large number of visitors, the roof was apt to leak. On the other hand the refurbished building offered far more space: if we take the available surface area of 10 Cavendish Crescent as 1, Charlotte Street was 1.3, and Sydney Gardens 2.34 times as large.<sup>9</sup>

The 'new' Holburne Museum represented a considerable achievement of the Trustees and the move to Sydney Place was a turning point in its history. Yet the relations between Trustees and curators remained unsatisfactory ever since Bates' departure in 1900. The Museum was not best served by his successors. Perhaps the most gifted among them was Hugh Blaker, who curated from 1905 to 1913. He was a trained painter and endowed with remarkable flair, but he was often away at sales or advising the Davies sisters on their purchases of French masters, which now grace the National Museum of Wales. If he made a contribution to the running of the Holburne, it is not recorded in the minutes of the Trustees' meetings. He was followed by a young man who tended to be idle, but nevertheless was useful with the fitting out of the new building, the move from Charlotte Street and the preparation for the reopening in



**Fig. 5** The Holburne of Menstrie Museum, altered by Reginald Blomfield c.1913–15, as it is now. (Courtesy Holburne Museum and Crafts Study Centre)

June 1916. He left a year later upon joining the army. The Trustees were eventually led by their unsatisfactory experiences to seek the advice of other museums, and then to set out principles for the management of their staff which established rules for the curator and the attendants. Such regulations were overdue, but incomplete in that they failed to establish criteria for judging performance and granted the curators only the minimum of discretion. Thus, despite their obvious importance to the running of the Museum, they did not formally attend Trustee meetings until the late 1920s. Nevertheless relations between Trustees and curators did improve, possibly because rather older men, temperamentally better suited to the Trustees, were appointed to the post.

After the worries and irritations of the 1910s the next thirty years were tranquil. The preparation of a new Scheme for the management of the Holburne caused some apprehension because the Trustees had overspent the money authorised by the Chancery Court in 1913. However, the judge overlooked the omissions and commissions and approved a new Scheme which, in many respects, was not noticeably different from the Interim

Scheme of 1886. It nevertheless allowed the Trustees to build up reserves (or 'Accumulations') and a contingency fund out of unspent income, and made access to such assets straightforward. The Trustees were enjoined to maintain the garden and arrange for educational visits by students and public. They could charge for admission, except on one day a week. The Scheme had two clauses which were to be of great significance in future. First, the Board (later Ministry and now Department) of Education took over regulation from the Chancery Court. The measure saved money and time, and greatly simplified the procedure for obtaining formal sanction to carry out plans. Second, the Scheme provided for the appointment of 'representative' Trustees – two from Somerset and two from Bath. The Charity Trustees were unhappy about the clause, but had to put up with what they perceived was a restriction on their independence. The Court's intention was to link the Holburne with the County and the City. On paper the benefits of such a community of interests are obvious, but the 'representative' Trustees were given no objectives and their status remained undefined. Did they attend to safeguard their County's or City's interests? And how were they to do it? Were they responsible individually or collectively for the Trustees' actions? As often happens under such circumstances, all parties opted for acceptable, safe and unimaginative policies. In practice therefore little changed and the cultural and educational links were neglected. Similarly the connection between fine art and tourism at local or county level was underrated. In all these respects the Holburne and the City of Bath were no different from museums elsewhere in the country.

The new Scheme came into operation at the end of July 1921 and remained in force for the next forty years. It ushered in many years of sound administration, characterised by financial prudence and stability. The British economy of the inter-war years provided a non-inflationary background and an assured income even during the slump of the 1930s. The endowment produced £1,500 in 1920 and £1,700–1,800 a year in the 1930s. Expenditure ranged between £1,300 and £1,800 p.a. (exceptionally £2,200 in 1937) depending on the incidence of maintenance work. Accordingly some money was regularly transferred to the 'Accumulations' and the contingency fund. Henry Wace (1853–1947), a Trustee from 1917, was the chief negotiator during the preparation of the Scheme and afterwards the executor of its financial directives. Although Boyd remained chairman until 1925, he had less time for Holburne business and left the management of the Museum increasingly to Wace, who followed as chairman and served in that capacity for over twenty years,

only resigning a few months before death in extreme old age. He was another Cambridge-educated lawyer who was called to the Bar in 1879, where he specialised in bankruptcy and wrote several books on the subject. He had retired to Bath in 1909 and lived at St Winifred's (next door to Cavendish Crescent), where he collected English literature of the eighteenth century and gardened. All this came to an end in 1942 when a bomb destroyed the collection and the house. Orderly administration and financial prudence were the hallmarks of his trusteeship and his parsimony created reserves which sustained the Holburne for many years after his death. But Wace's skill at handling money was not matched by initiative and imagination in dealing with the Holburne collection. The curators of the inter-war years were not innovators, and opportunities for attracting critical attention and also more visitors were missed. In short the Holburne remained old-fashioned, when others began moving with the times. The collection, moreover, while conscientiously maintained, had continued little changed since Sir William's death, though at Sydney Place, which had more space than the Bank building, retiring Trustees and well-intentioned friends by their gifts sought to round off what 'The Collector' in his idiosyncratic manner had begun in his lifetime.

In 1937–1938 the Trustees, after some discussion, resolved that the prime purpose of the Holburne was '...the education in the fine arts...' of Bathonians,<sup>10</sup> but the implementation of that purpose cannot be detected from the attendance statistics or the Museum regulations. The former fluctuated around 4,000–5,000 a year in the 1920s and 1930s, which does not indicate that the educational aspects and visits by students (mentioned in the 1921 Scheme) were rated highly. Visiting times were only four hours daily, and the Museum was closed on Wednesdays and Sundays. One small sign of change should be noted; the Holburne remained open during August from 1932 onwards. In general, however, the Trustees' policies were not likely to change the under-use of an interesting museum. Indeed Wace himself had written about his fellow Trustees: '...their attitude... was rather that of governors of a private benevolent institution acting on their own views of beneficial administration'.<sup>11</sup>

In retrospect it is surprising that he did so little to change that attitude and it may explain why he, his colleagues and curators neglected or delayed collaboration with bodies promoting the cause of fine arts and museums. The first contact with the National Art Collections Fund (NACF) was in 1920, but nine years passed before Charles Knight (Trustee 1928–1943), the local NACF representative, was able to persuade

Wace to authorise the payment of the small annual subscription. Soon afterwards the first donations arrived from the NACF, and in 1939 it presented Thomas Barker's portrait of his future wife to the Holburne. One might have thought that professional help would be especially useful to the amateur museum trustees at the Holburne. The Museums Association, founded in 1889, could have been of value, but in 1929 the curator (instructed by Wace) replied to Sir Henry Miers' inquiry that the Museum did not intend to join, though the annual subscription was a mere two guineas. The reason was not financial stringency but indifference towards the objectives of a professional association. Wace changed his mind in 1936, and the benefits of membership emerged twenty years later.

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The slow, but unstoppable deterioration in the Museum's financial situation was the dominant element in the history of the Holburne after the Second World War. Expenses, especially wages and salaries, maintenance and insurance, rose while income from the endowment hardly changed. (See summary of income and expenditure in Appendix.) The Trustees vainly attempted to remedy this state of affairs, but their growing preoccupation with money caused the postponement of many desirable and indeed necessary reforms. The progressive impoverishment of the Holburne naturally attracted much attention in Bath. As early as 1948, R.M. Wright in his report 'A Cultural Centre for Bath' suggested combining the Reference Library with the collections of the Victoria Art Gallery, the Royal Literary & Scientific Institution and the Holburne in a single, purpose-designed municipal building in Walcot Street. Among his chief aims was the effective co-ordination of cultural activities with the work of the Local Education Authority.<sup>12</sup> Similar though more modest projects appeared at intervals in the next twenty years, but none addressed the specific problems of the Holburne.

Neither Wace nor his immediate successors (Major G. St. J. Strutt and Robert Henshaw) came to grips with the situation, and so younger and more energetic men took charge. Sir Orme Sargent (1884-1962) became Trustee in 1950 and was chairman between 1955 and 1960. This former Foreign Office mandarin, unusually for a Trustee, was no collector, but known and respected as a hard worker who could motivate people to do his bidding in the interests of the Museum. His tactics, however, were counter-productive at the Guildhall.<sup>13</sup> It was therefore fortunate for the

Holburne that his colleagues possessed many of the skills which he lacked. Humphrey Goldsmith (Trustee 1949–1977) was a practising architect who rendered valuable service giving advice, designing display cabinets and, all too often, warning about the deteriorating condition of the building fabric. Ernest H. Cox (Trustee 1946–1965), who started off as one of the two ‘City Representatives’, turned out to be a faithful friend and a vigorous lobbyist for the Museum in the Council Chamber. Charles James Robertson (Trustee 1955, Chairman 1960–1983) had many and varied concerns, of which the Holburne was one of the most troublesome.<sup>14</sup> He was also until 1969 managing director of James Robertson & Sons Ltd, the well-known jam manufacturer, and was thus able to contribute business knowledge and negotiating experience when they were sorely needed.

The Trustees relied increasingly on the physical and mental energy of the curators who dealt with the daily routine, as well as the organisation and arrangement of the loan exhibitions, and generally coped when the live-in attendants were off duty or on leave. Caring for the collection and taking round parties of children or adults were necessarily neglected. The work also involved considerable physical exertion, but the salary offered, unlike that of the inter-war years, did not compare well with similar occupations elsewhere. So there was discontent and the curators looked for better prospects elsewhere and did not stay long. Then in 1961, upon the departure of G.R. Stanton, a retiree from the Bristol Museum Services, Philippa Downes, then Keeper of the Department of Art at Leicester Museum, was appointed. She had the attributes (not least among them stamina) to carry out much-needed changes. Perhaps even more significantly in the long run, she was the first woman to hold a responsible full-time job in the Museum.

The difficulties of recruiting, paying and retaining good curators were the most obvious consequences of running the Museum at a loss. The solution was to draw on reserves, cut expenses and raise income. As a first step the Trustees decided to ask the City for relief from the rates which had averaged £120 before the War, and had risen regularly since to £271 in 1955–56. The justification for the request was the presumed educational benefit obtained by young Bathonians from the existence of the Holburne. Cox made it his cause at the Guildhall from the beginning of 1948 onwards, but he did not convince his fellow councillors. In any case the City did not want to create a precedent, and as the legal powers under the Local Government Acts were uncertain, the Rates Department was able to stall. However, about the middle of 1950 the Education Committee relented and was prepared to grant £100 a year, sweetened by

the offer to maintain the garden. The former (representing less than half the rates) was henceforth paid – not always punctually! The latter amounted to one day's work a month. The Trustees accepted, then asked for more, but were turned down. Thereupon they joined the Special Committee on Rating Appeals of the Museums Association and the Carnegie UK Trust. Sargent became the Chairman of this small pressure group, commonly called 'The Joint Committee'.

As the agitation for rate relief had shown very small results, the Trustees tried a direct appeal to the public: the curator drafted it, the Trustees approved, and it was printed in the *Bath Weekly Chronicle & Herald* of 27 July 1950. It fell flat and the response was, according to the Treasurer, 'disappointing'. That set-back led directly to the 'reconstitution' of the Holburne Society, a group of well-wishers formed in the 1920s who met occasionally and presented *objets d'art* to the Holburne. It was renamed 'Friends of the Holburne' and the first meeting in January 1952 attracted eight people. Sargent was in the chair. At first all went badly and by May 1952 there were only 54 members, but a year later the numbers had trebled and in September 1954 275 were recorded, when the older sister organisation in Bristol had 350. How did the transformation of a sleepy club of male-dominated supporters into a vigorous group of energetic ladies come about? The personality of Sargent had something to do with it and so did a lively and enterprising new committee which set out to make the Friends practical and fashionable: houses and collections were opened to members and outings organised; the Trustees were badgered to allow a garden party in the grounds and, more ambitiously, a loan exhibition of the Friends' silver. They refused their consent to the exhibition because admission was to be charged – but how were the funds to be raised otherwise? Finally they gave way. Membership continued to grow, and ranged from 300 to 350 in the late 1950s. The Friends were able to make small but regular contributions to the Holburne, such as paying for advertising in the *Directory of Museums*, restoring damaged frames, helping with essential repairs and providing voluntary custodians when Sunday afternoon opening began in January 1959. Their help, in cash or services, soon exceeded the value of the City's discretionary grant and presently matched the expenditure on the rates. More importantly the commitment of such motivated people became a traditional support of the Museum and contributed to its survival.

The Friends built on the post-war fashion for loan exhibitions. These were not wholly novel because the National Loan Collection Trust (whose activities were coordinated by the NACF) had staged an

exhibition at the Holburne in 1932. In 1947 the Trustees agreed to exhibit the water-colours of J. Leslie Wright. It was a great success despite the restricted hours and the inconvenient location in the entrance hall. But a little later, when the Trustees asked the Ministry of Education if they might lend some surplus pictures to Bathavon R.D.C., they were refused. This uncooperative attitude was shortly superseded by a more liberal policy, because the Museum lent pictures to Plymouth in 1954. In particular Cox and Sargent were eager to draw attention to the Holburne by accepting pictures on loan: thus Sir Francis Cook's collection of thirty to forty old master paintings was displayed for several years after 1948. The results were encouraging inasmuch as the NACF, the Arts Council and the organisers of the Bath Festival approved of the Museum's open-door policy which added to the growing scope of the City's cultural attractions. The curators welcomed the loan exhibitions, but in the main restricted them to the entrance hall. Presumably they wanted to avoid the heavy physical work of moving the display cases and pictures to provide exhibition space on the second floor. (The Haskell Room, now used for that purpose, lay still many years away.)

Further evidence of change in the policy of the Trustees from the mid-1950s onwards was the welcome given to some very generous donations and more frequent loan exhibitions. On the part of the Ministry of Education permission was readily granted for lending items from the Holburne to other British galleries, and even abroad. Sir William's collection of paintings was significantly extended in 1955 by the arrival, via the NACF, of several fine eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works from the E.E. Cook collection,<sup>15</sup> and a year later by a legacy of furniture from the late Sir Hector Duff. (Most of Sir William's had been sold after his sister's death.) Finally, Sargent in his will bequeathed several Allan Ramsay portraits of his forebears to the Museum. Unquestionably it was enriched by these and other gifts, and even benefited, if only ephemerally, from the first commercial sponsorship financed by Allied Ironfounders in June 1964 whose 'A Pageant of Baths' was visited by almost 5,000 people.

But the higher profile and publicity failed to solve the financial problems. On behalf of the Joint Committee, Sargent appealed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but was told to apply to the local authority and to wait for the 1955 Rating and Valuation Act to come into operation. The Act gave local authorities discretionary power to remit rates; Bath, however, was not minded to do so. Thus all the toing and froing since 1948 had led nowhere and Sargent was becoming impatient. In August or

September 1957 he was in touch with the Ministry of Education and was advised that the Department will '...do its best to meet [the Trustees] reasonable wishes'.<sup>16</sup> Soon afterwards E. Philip Thursfield, the Somerset County Representative Trustee (1933–1961), announced that his County would not help the Holburne as it was already committed to the County Museum at Taunton, a statement which caused consternation among the Trustees at the meeting. Later in the discussion Sargent wondered if a threat to leave Bath might cause the City to act on rate relief. Henshaw warned against blackmailing the City, but the chairman had dealt with more obdurate opponents, and events were ultimately to justify his tactics. His first move was a long letter to the Town Clerk, setting out the position and proposing an annual grant of £1,800, without, however, giving any detailed justification.<sup>17</sup> In return, the Trustees would also contribute £1,800 p.a., agree to an increase in the number of City Representative Trustees and accept two from the Museums Association. Alternatively the Trustees were prepared to hand over the building to the City (which would look after it), but retain ownership of the collection, maintain it and pay the curator. Both offers could form a reasonable basis for negotiations and represented a fundamental change in the Holburne's status as an independent charitable endowment. The letter asked for a reply and a binding commitment from the City.

There was no answer and so the Trustees changed course: they invited Sir Philip Hendy and Sir Trenchard Cox (respectively Directors of the National Gallery and the V & A), who came in May 1958. Their visit attracted, as was intended, a good deal of attention. In due course they reported: they praised generously, were careful in their criticism and avoided practical suggestions. A copy of the report was sent to the Guildhall, but produced no reaction until, at last, a meeting was arranged for 14 November 1958. The Mayor, the Town Clerk, some Councillors and Trustees attended: the Holburne contingent was assured that Sargent's letter would form the starting point of formal negotiations with the Library & Art Gallery Committee when it had settled the proposed move of the Reference Library to the recently derequisitioned building in Queen Square.

As far as the Trustees were concerned 1958 had been wasted, but in 1959 the tempo quickened: Sunday opening with paid admission began in January, but there were disappointingly few visitors. Talks began with Bristol University about moving the collection to the Royal Fort and with the National Trust about Dyrham Park. Later that year the Joint Committee sent a delegation to Bath where it met the Mayor, the Town

Clerk, Lord Methuen and Alderman Hopkins.<sup>18</sup> The mission achieved nothing – the City would not vote a grant for the Holburne. The Trustees were neither surprised nor disappointed because they knew by then that the National Trust was offering them Dyrham Park and the Ministry of Education would provide a new Scheme. The news soon reached the Guildhall where it had the desired effect: in January 1960 the Trustees (now led by Robertson) met the Library & Art Gallery Committee which then drafted a resolution to help the Museum. More formal negotiations followed. What caused the City to take up the proposal made by Sargent in December 1957? Most likely it was the Trustees' threat of leaving Bath and moving to Dyrham Park, the more serious on account of the National Trust's generous offer and Goldsmith's favourable report on the suitability of the building for the collection. Despite some unnecessary delays progress was made, whereupon the Trustees allowed the National Trust offer to lapse. On 26 July 1960 the City Council resolved to make a grant to the Holburne, but the formal agreement, which required a new Scheme did not come into operation until the following April.<sup>19</sup>

The 1961 Scheme was a compromise, and only a temporary solution to the Museum's difficulties. The Holburne was granted £1,800, renewable annually at the discretion of the Council, but the management of the collection remained in the hands of the self-selected Trustees, henceforth called the Foundation Trustees. Attempts by the Town Clerk to bring about an amalgamation with the Victoria Art Gallery were rebuffed. On the other hand the City became entitled to nominate six Representative Trustees and there were also two from the Museums Association; those from Somerset withdrew. However, the financial problems soon reappeared because insurance and rates increased, and as the reserves were virtually liquidated the temporary but essential overdrafts were no longer secured. So in January 1963 the Trustees asked for an increase to £3,000 a year. The City refused, but once again suggested an amalgamation, a euphemism for takeover by the Victoria Art Gallery. This latest refusal and the threat to the Museum's independence precipitated a fresh crisis, which extended beyond finance to the museum policy of the City.

Neither the City nor the Trustees could agree on the next step and all they could think of was to invite the Joint Committee to send conciliators to Bath. They came in October, but the autumn of 1963 was not a replay of Sargent's tactics of 1957 or of 1959, because the Holburne's reserves had run out and because the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries had drawn attention to the plight of provincial museums.<sup>20</sup> Such was the background to the meeting in October at the Pump Room

where the present condition and future management of the City's cultural heritage was discussed. Given the conflicting interests, agreement on any future policy, let alone a single management structure for the City's museums and the Holburne, was remote. The Council officers were negative and only saw obstacles. Robertson said the Trustees '...wished to retain a measure of independence' and did not want to be subordinated to one of the two Committees (i.e. the Library & Art Gallery, and Spa) '...whose primary interests may lie elsewhere'. The Trustees would be happier '...about handing over control to a [single] Museums Committee'. The three 'experts' sent by the Joint Committee recommended that Bath should 'seriously consider' unifying their museums and have a 'Director of Museums'; the current situation was '...illogical and uneconomic'. Thereupon the meeting closed with nothing accomplished.<sup>21</sup>

The Trustees now had to take immediate action because the total funds had shrunk to £34,000, as against roughly £54,000 in 1954. At their meeting in December they agreed to transfer the Holburne to a single Museum Authority if the City created one.<sup>22</sup> They also applied to the Ministry of Education for permission to sell some 4% Funding Stock to pay for re-roofing the building. And at the beginning of 1964, after sixteen years of begging and prodding, the City agreed to waive half the rates and to contribute to the cost of re-roofing.

The longer term demanded more far-reaching steps. During 1965 the Trustees resumed their approaches to other institutions, and in October they informed the City and the Ministry of Education that the Holburne would leave Bath. The National Trust was sympathetic, but as Dyrham Park was no longer available it suggested Montacute House, spacious but remote. The new University of Bath, which was under construction on Claverton Down, responded favourably to informal enquiries and in March 1966 the Vice-Chancellor went so far as to write to the Trustees that the Development Committee was very interested in accepting responsibility for the Museum.<sup>23</sup>

As in 1959-60 the City responded quickly: it agreed to raise the annual grant to £3,000, provided the Trustees undertook to keep the collection in Bath, adopted measures to increase the Museum's income and accepted closer relations with the City's museums. In April Robertson and some colleagues met councillors and officers at the Guildhall and agreed to the first condition and to an admission charge of 2s.6d. (12.5p) in fulfilment of the second. The third condition, tantamount to a change in management procedure, was left in suspense because yet more changes

were impending. On 29 June 1966 at a formal meeting between the City, University and Trustees, the annual payment of £3,000 not subject to a time limit was confirmed. The City, though it had not resolved the question of administration of its museums, for the first time declared its acceptance as a principle of municipal policy of '...the preservation in existence of the Holburne...' collection. The University, for its part, declared that it wished to be associated with the future management of the Museum.<sup>24</sup>

These expressions of intent were not yet embodied in a formal agreement binding on all three parties. Nevertheless the meeting was a milestone in the history of the Holburne. A large measure of independence had been retained, but the Trustees could no longer operate, even if they had been financially able to do so, in their accustomed ways. The Guildhall meeting is also a convenient point to end the story of the first seventy-five years of the Museum.

The sequel is soon told. The University was not able, for various reasons, to implement at once its side of the bargain, but its Treasurer (who was also a Foundation Trustee) obtained a grant of £2,500 a year for three years from the Goldsmiths Company and that helped to tide over the finances in the immediate future. In the 1970s the rearrangement of the ground floor and the conversion of the caretaker's flat provided space for temporary exhibitions and the development of the Craft Study Centre. A new era was about to begin.

*Appendix: see overleaf*

	1937	1945/6	1955/6	1958/9	1961/2	1964/5	1965/6
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
INCOME FROM ENDOWMENT	1772	1871	1868	1669	1594	1822	1946
OTHER INCOME (i)	—	—	391	498	2057	1941	1925
TOTAL RECEIPTS	1772	1871	2259	2167	3651	3763	3871
SALARIES, WAGES, PENSIONS	810	913	1857	1678	2018	2269	2346
ALL OTHER PAYMENTS (ii)	904	638	1495	1466	1868	1638	1363
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	58	320	(1093)	(977)	(235)	(144)	162
TOTAL OF PAYMENTS	1772	1871	2259	2167	3651	3763	3871
As % of total receipts	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Salaries	46	49	82	77	55	60	61
Rates	7	(iii)	12	13	16	5	5
Insurance	9	5	7	13	15	10	10

(Abstracted from Museum Accounts)

- (i) Grants from City of Bath, donations, sales of catalogues, subscriptions under covenant and tax thereon recovered, rent from flat (1955/6), Sunday admission, insurance payments (1955/6, 1958/9).
- (ii) Includes all maintenance and repair expenses, heating, lighting, stationery and printing, typing, upkeep of garden, insurance, rates.
- (iii) Paid by Admiralty.

**Appendix.** Holburne Museum: Receipts and Payments. Selected years 1937–1965/66.

## Notes

The following abbreviations have been used **MM** – Museum Minutes; **LT** – Law Times; **TLR** – Times Law Reports.

- 1 Sir William, unlike many collectors, rarely listed the date and cost of his acquisitions.
- 2 I have relied on the typescript, dated 6 November 1906, entitled 'Short History of the Origin and Development of the Charity'. It was written by one of the partners of Carlisle, Unna & Rider and, as solicitors to Miss Holburne and later to the Trustees, they were well informed.
- 3 **LT**, Vol.53, N.S., 17 Oct 1885, pp.212–16. The parties represented, apart from the Trustees, were the next of kin of Miss Holburne (the Cussans beneficiaries) and the Attorney General.
- 4 The Scheme was printed and a copy is in the Bath Record Office.
- 5 The source is 'The Statement of Investments under the Control of the Court of Chancery', dated November 1888 in the Museum papers. A comparison with the Scheme figures shows that roughly £5,000 had been spent on legacy duty and legal charges.
- 6 **MM**. 8 Apr 1897 and 1 Jun 1897. The minutes give extracts of the Trustees' reply to the Mayor's letter in the *Bath Herald* 19 Jun 1897.
- 7 The Cussans Fund represented about two-thirds of the Charity's total endowment. Between 1909 and 1911 almost £2,000 was saved and used to buy more gilts.
- 8 The Trustees resolved to ask the Court to authorise expenditure 'not exceeding £13,600' (**MM**. 30 May 1913), but the Order, dated 2 July 1913, set a limit of £12,000. Any excess required separate approval by the Court (Counsel's opinion, n.d. [1918 or 1919], in Museum papers).
- 9 Cavendish Crescent – 1,369 sq. ft. (ground- and first-floor rooms); Savings Bank – 1,763 sq. ft.; Sydney Place – 3,209 sq. ft. (first and second floors).
- 10 **MM**. 18 Oct 1937, 4 Apr 1938, 15 Jul 1938, 20 Oct 1938. The occasion was the summary of a Chancery Court case, Spence's Estate, Barclay's Bank Ltd vs. Stockton-on-Tees Corporation (**TLR**, Vol.53, 961–963, 30 Sep 1937). The circumstances were similar to those in Coates vs. Mackillop.
- 11 Quoted by Ald. A.N. Dix (Vice Chairman of the Trustees) in a long, undated (probably 1965) minute. Dix had read Wace's notes, written about 1919, for use in a report to his fellow Trustees.
- 12 Wright's report is dated 1948 and a copy is in the Holburne papers. Wright's remarks on co-ordination and education echo the recommendations of the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries in its 'Final Report' (HMSO, Cmd 3401, 1929, passim).
- 13 Sargent resigned the chairmanship in 1960 owing to ill health.
- 14 His wide-ranging interests are listed in *The Times* of 2 Mar 1983. Robertson's services to the Holburne are not mentioned.
- 15 Under Cook's Will the NACF distributed altogether 150 paintings and many other art objects from the collection at no.1 Sion Hill Place, Bath, throughout the country.

- 16 A copy of the letter from E.B.H. Baker from the Ministry of Education, dated 6 Sep 1957, is in the Bath Record Office.
- 17 **MM.** 4 Oct and 8 Nov 1957. Sargent's letter to the Town Clerk of 20 Dec 1957 is in the Bath Record Office.
- 18 **MM.** 16 Jan 1960. The Joint Committee group was led by Sir George Dyson (Chairman of the Carnegie UK Trust), accompanied by Trenchard Cox and Dr Swinton of the Natural History Museum. Major Hopkins (an Alderman and former Mayor) and Lord Methuen (a past Trustee) represented the Holburne interests.
- 19 **MM.** 13 Jun and 22 Jul 1960, 17 Jul 1961. The new Scheme was dated 14 Apr 1961.
- 20 Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, 'Survey of Provincial Museums and Galleries' (HMSO 1963).
- 21 The summary report of the proceedings is in the Bath Record Office. Sixteen people were present on 16 October. The Holburne sent four (including Robertson) and the City was represented by eight (among them the chairman of the Spa Committee, who took the chair, and the chairman of the Library & Art Gallery Committee). Mrs Doris Langley Moore attended and spoke for the Museum of Costume. The Museums Association fielded three authorities, among them Trenchard Cox on his third visit to Bath.
- 22 **MM.** 2 Dec 1963. Thirty years later this condition had not been met.
- 23 **MM.** 21 Mar 1966. The Vice-Chancellor later wrote a full account of the events, and of the early years of the University (G.H. Moore, *The University of Bath: the Formative Years 1949-69* (Bath University Press, 1982).
- 24 **MM.** 4 Jul 1966.

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The interpretation of the legal, financial and administrative details is, of course, entirely my own.