

A Celebration of *Bath History*: A Personal View

It may not seem entirely fitting that the editor of the last five volumes of *Bath History* should write a note of celebration for this journal, with which she has been closely concerned for many years. But I do so precisely because I know something of the history of this series since its inception in the mid-1980s, and have had the responsibility of editing the journal and bringing it to publication since the mid-1990s. Credit for the concept of *Bath History* must go to Simon Hunt, then of the Bath Museums Service. He secured the initial funding, and the support of the major archaeological and conservationist societies in Bath: the Bath Archaeological Trust, the Bath Preservation Trust, and the Bath Society, who all nominated the members of an editorial committee. But it was Sam (as Simon was more familiarly known) Hunt whose initial editing of the fledgling publication set the standard for form, design, and quality.

The early volumes were published by Alan Sutton of Gloucester, and a neat scheme for dividing the distribution between commercial outlets in the form of bookshops, and voluntary outlets in the form of supporting societies was devised. The latter, including for example the very-recently established History of Bath Research Group, were encouraged to make advance orders in bulk, to sell at a discount to members. Also participating in the scheme were the privately-funded museums such as the Holburne, and before Sam Hunt's career took him away from Bath, an arrangement had been made for substantial sales to an organization catering for the education of American students in the city.

By the time volume III was published in 1990, *Bath History* had a new editor, Trevor Fawcett, and a new officer from the Bath Museums Service on the editorial committee, Stephen Bird. Trevor's work on the history of Bath is well-known, and is attested by the many acknowledgements from later writers who have consulted him on matters about which he is almost uniquely able to give advice. He was the editor of volumes III (1990), IV (1992), and V (1994). The steady but unobtrusive support given by Stephen Bird is less well-known, and also deserves recognition. Not only does Stephen have a good eye for design and an instinct for an attractive cover, he is also an excellent negotiator, as we were to find when he persuaded the Bath Archaeological Trust, then in its heyday, to step in to underwrite the somewhat precarious finances of *Bath History*. This move rescued the journal from the threatening situation caused by the loss of support from societies, who no longer felt able to guarantee the purchase of a certain

number of copies at a favourable price. From the mid-1990s these new financial arrangements, backed by a change of publisher to the Bath-based Millstream Books, together with the introduction of a new editor as I took over from Trevor Fawcett after his successful stint, have given a decade of stability to *Bath History*, during which a second set of five volumes has been published.

I must also mention particularly the publisher with whom I have worked on the last five volumes. Tim Graham is already well-known in the literary community for the many volumes of local interest that he has produced. In the publication of *Bath History* his work has been outstanding, not only for the strong commitment that has led him to combine the role of copy editor and illustration-advisor with that of publisher, but also for the sense of design that has contributed so much to the elegance of the finished volumes.

This accomplishment has I hope been matched by the high quality and broad range of the articles published – 40 of them on my watch in volumes VI to X. The cumulative index indicates the breadth of subjects presented, and the *Notes on Contributors* tell something about the authors. Some have been well-known to me already, whilst others have made contact to suggest a possible article. With regard to all the articles submitted, the advice of ‘expert readers’ has been a great help. The range of authors from within and beyond Bath shows that like the city that is its home, *Bath History* has the capacity to combine the unique quality of being both intensely local, yet at the same time of considerable international significance.

Now, after two decades, ten volumes, and some 80 contributors, we have reached the point where the financial underpinning by the Bath Archaeological Trust, which has been so much appreciated, has been lost. In an increasingly competitive archaeological world the Trust has been forced to step back from all its activities, including its exceptionally public-spirited support of *Bath History*. With no supporting organization and subscription list, but with plans for *Bath History X* well-advanced, it has seemed that the only way to keep faith with our contributors who had already worked hard on their articles, and with our readers keen for a tenth volume in the series, was for us to dig deep in our pockets and provide the funding ourselves, helped in large part by the sympathetic role played by our publisher. I can now only thank all who have played any part in the happy collaborations that have produced the ten attractive volumes at the high and interesting standard that has been the hallmark of *Bath History*.

Brenda Buchanan, 29 September 2005