

## GROUP NEWS

### MEETINGS HELD OCTOBER — NOVEMBER 1996

Mike Chapman's skills as a historic landscape surveyor were much in evidence on 16 October when he brought cartographic, pictorial, textual and archaeological data to bear in a wonderfully fresh look at Ralph Allen's estates stretching from Claverton to 'Oldfield Park'. The fundamental document, the huge coloured estate map recently transferred from Bath Record Office to the Central Library, appears to be a composite in which the early 1740s survey has been updated by later detail — perhaps supplied by the landscape designer Capability Brown. This shows land purchased by Allen after the original survey as well as the subsequent conifer plantations which so transformed the old open landscape of fields. Using further information from Thorpe's 5-miles-round-Bath map, the invaluable topographical sketches of Thomas Robins, modern photographs, and other sources, Mike Chapman then concentrated on particular sites. The Dolemeads stoneyard area, complete with workmen's cottages, brewery and *WhiteHart* inn, stood at the foot of the tramway from the Combe Down mines and seems to have been an integral development built by Richard Jones. Further up the tramway, the site of Wicksteed's jewellery mill apparently extended into a pleasure garden beyond the carriage road, where the remains of the canal may still exist — as does a 'spiral mount' garden feature (once with Chinese pagoda and figure of Neptune) seen in a Robins view over Widcombe Manor grounds. There is similar physical evidence of the *former* Red Lion inn, the De Montalt paper-mill, and the operations at Midford Brook tucking mill where the geologist William Smith got into financial straits quarrying stone. Especially striking are the walls which bounded the mediaeval deer-park and divided the bishop's park (to the east) from that of the prior. In large part, somewhat renewed, these survive, though not the two entrances, the wooded 'compartments' of the bishop's park or the (Tudor?) Gothic Lodge. The latter was finally demolished by Allen's successors, the Warburtons — all except for the tower and front wall which lasted until 1953. The estate survey map is reproduced in Mike Chapman's pamphlet on the whole subject, a valuable addition to any collection of Bathoniana.

The history of Bath's parks *before* 1900 is more familiar than since, a situation that Stan Hitt's talk on 21 November greatly helped to rectify as he traced 20C developments with the help of many revealing slides. Comparisons of old-postcard views with present-day shots showed certain park features amazingly unaltered, yet others quite transformed. In 1909 when Pageant crowds

filled Victoria Park, and again in 1918 during the victory celebrations, it was still privately run but struggling financially and poorly maintained. Once acquired by the Corporation in 1921 it rapidly improved. The tennis courts, bowling green and pavilion were constructed using unemployed labour; the Temple from the 1926 Empire Exhibition was installed in the botanic garden overlooking a newly dug pool; the Park dairy became staff lodges; plant nurseries arose on the foundations of old cowsheds; and in 1927 the War Memorial near Queen's Parade was unveiled. But ornamental railings and the Victorian guns were brutally removed for the 1939-45 war effort, and the area below the Royal Crescent ha-ha turned into productive allotments — whose eventual closure in 1955 was criticised on social-class grounds. More recent improvements have included the hugely popular play area (created on a dump for gasworks ash), the opening of the Dell, the tennis dome, and a decently designed new pavilion. Meanwhile Sydney Gardens had obtained its own Temple (from the Crystal Palace) in 1909, a bandstand (1912), and the now-listed public loos (1913), but passed into city ownership in two stages, 1910 and 1913. Though improved by putting and tennis in 1924, it later suffered from neglect and the loss of the wings of its handsome upper loggia in 1938 and of its bandstand in 1948. A postwar attempt to revive entertainments also failed. Hedgemoor Park (opened 1892-3) has by contrast little changed, as if in a timewarp, and the sole great novelty at Henrietta Park has been the Memorial garden of 1936-7, subsequently re-designed. One of the City's most astute purchases was the land for Alexandra Park, notable for its vistas and also once equipped with bandstand (1905), etc. Alice Park at Lambridge, however, was laid out as a private citizen's memorial in 1936 and came to the city only in 1968. With his final slides Stan Hitt commented on conflicting park uses, vandalism, styles of planting and other topics to round off a rewarding survey.

## **MEMBERS' NEWS**

**RON FULLAGER:** Very belatedly we have to record the death of Ron Fullagar in a road accident on 30 October 1995. He was a valued and long-standing member of the HBRG with a fund of knowledge on the industrial archaeology of the region.

**NEW MEMBER:**

Dr. Paul Adelman, 14 The Linleys, Bath, BA1 2XE.

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:**

Marek Lewcun, 6 Burlington Street, Bath, BA1 2SA

## **RECENT PUBLICATIONS**

Mike Chapman, Peter Davenport and Elizabeth Holland, 'The precincts of the Bishops' Palace at Bath, Avon', Archaeological Journal, vol 152 (1995), pp.95-108. Reassesses the lay-out of the precincts and asks whether the design was on a modular plan.

Alan Hardiman, 'Servicing the houses of Bath, 1714-1830: water supply', BIAS Journal no. 27 (1994) pp.11-18.

Susan Sloman, 'Mrs. Margaret Gainsborough, "a prince's daughter"', Gainsborough House Review (1995-6), pp.47-55. Establishes the vital family connection between Thomas Gainsborough and the Beauforts of Badminton and points to other artistic/musical links between Badminton and Bath.

## A TALE OF TWO HOUSES

(report from Elizabeth Holland)

The Survey of Old Bath (Mike Chapman and Elizabeth Holland) have been carrying out a study of the manor of Lyncombe and Widcombe. They are now convinced that Lyncombe Hall, in Lyncombe Vale Road, lies at the old manorial centre. A sequence of leases has been established, with reference to fishponds, vineyards, curia and other mediaeval items, from the 1530s to the end of the 18th century, when Henry Howse bought the property. In 1727 the estate was bought by William Chapman the Distiller, and his son "Mr. William Chapman of Lyncombe and Widcombe" built the present house some time in the mid-18th century.

The story of Lyncombe Hall has been mistakenly transferred to Widcombe Manor — probably in the first instance by Peach. Elizabeth Holland's promised report on Widcombe Manor will now deal with both houses and the role the Chapman family played in each, with a full list of documentary sources. A programme has been planned for 1997, including a walk, articles and talks. For further information please contact Elizabeth Holland at 16 Prior Park Buildings, Bath.

Following the Survey's usual practice, the study has been a joint effort. One of the Friends of the Survey, John Hawkes has been closely involved and information has been sought from members of other groups, such as Trevor Fawcett of the HBRG and Brian Howard of the Widcombe and Lyncombe History Study Group. Valuable documentary assistance has been received from Connie Smith, a pioneer in the study of the ancient deeds of Lyncombe and Widcombe, Allan Keevil and Jean Manco.

The decision should prove a popular one. In the past, almost every major site in Lyncombe and Widcombe has been suggested as the site of the Prior's grange and the Elizabethan manor house, but Lyncombe Vale has been a favourite choice. If other members of the HBRG have relevant information on the manor it would be very gratefully received.

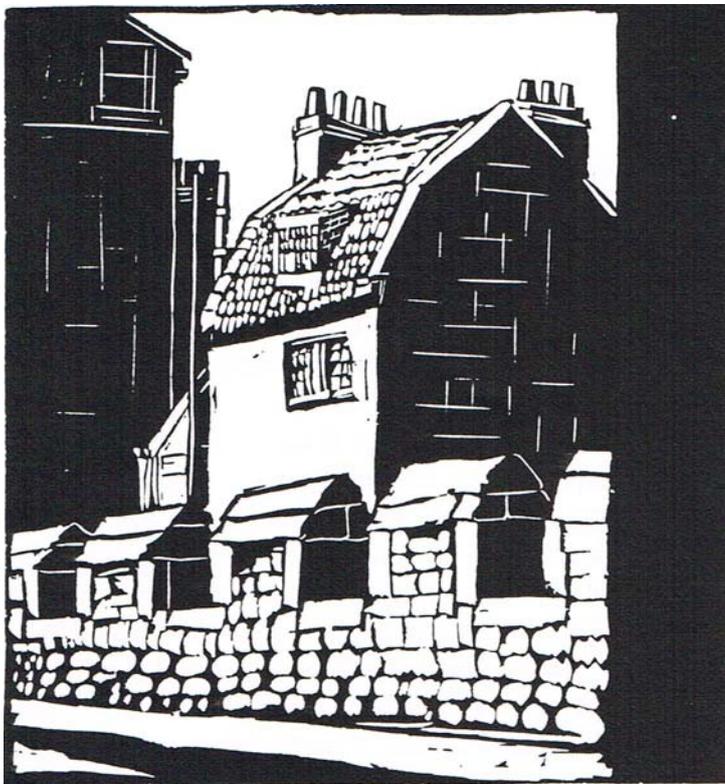
## MRS. PLUNKETT EDGCUMBE

Women medical practitioners in eighteenth-century Bath are fairly obscure figures. It is true that some of the nursing staff at the Hospital appear fleetingly in the records (e.g. at the time of the Cleland affair in the 1750s), and that the names of several female midwives (as distinct from male accoucheurs) are known, but otherwise only Mrs Plunkett - from 1784 styled Mrs Plunkett Edgcumbe - stands out. Even then, what little information we have derives mostly from her regular newspaper announcements which are not always quite reliable. The first dates from autumn 1766 when she is installed in Beaufort Square as a curer of cancers 'without incision'. This was her forte - the treatment of what she later called schirrous tumours' and cancerous growths without invasive surgery or the application of caustic substances. The remedy, she once claimed, had been passed down through her family for two centuries, until by 1784 she was, according to her own account, the last member of the line. Indeed her father, 'Dr Plunket', was already dead when she advertised in December 1769, and six months later the *Gentleman's Magazine* noted the decease in Ireland of presumably another relation, 'Mr Plunket, famous for curing cancers, aged 80'. She had, however, no apparent connection with other well-known contemporary bearers of the Plunket(t) surname, such as James Plunkett, friend of the politician John Wilkes, who lived in the Circus at this period.

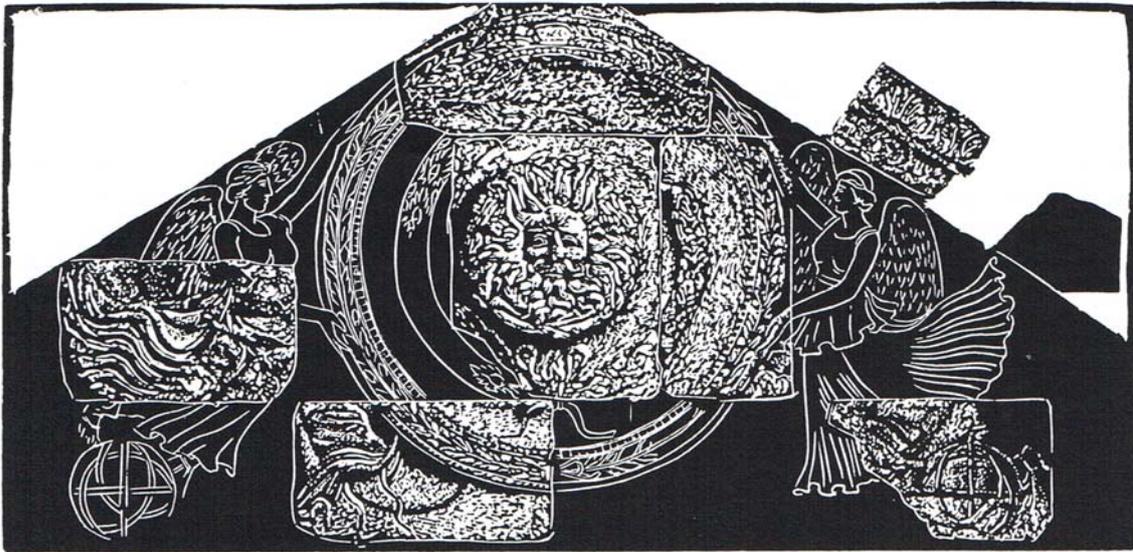
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Her statement in 1784 that she had practised for 19 years at her house opposite Cornwall Buildings, near Walcot Church, was misleading, for until August 1776 she advertised from other addresses (1766 Beaufort Square, 1773 corner of Chandos Buildings, early 1776 Wade's Passage). Moreover much of her time was spent touring a wide region from her Bath base, as is clear from the sample lists of successfully treated patients often appended to her announcements, which disclose a catchment area stretching from Devon to Berkshire and even Kent, and from Glamorgan and Shropshire to Dorset. Comparatively few of her listed cases lived in Bath itself, though some of those with other addresses may well have travelled to Bath for treatment, and local patients anyway may have been particularly reluctant to have their names publicised. As her fame spread Mrs Plunkett seems to have become a victim of imposture. There is no reason to dismiss as puffery her complaint in May 1787 that another woman was touring the country in her name and dispensing fraudulent remedies - 'a lusty, lame woman' travelling in a one-horse chaise. Impersonators were difficult to stop and in September 1788 she was still warning the public against being taken in. How expert she was herself professionally, and precisely what was involved in her cures, are difficult to judge. The majority of her publicised cases fell into two categories: (a) female breast cancers and (b) male and female facial or neck cancers (particularly of the lower lip, but also of the mouth, cheek, eye and forehead). Often these were tumorous growths of long-standing (2 to 15 years) and so not seriously malignant, even if Mrs Plunkett does call some of them 'dangerous' cancers.\* The lip cancers perhaps resulted from excessive smoking of clay tobacco pipes. Whatever her method of treatment without the 'tortures of extirpation', she was able to preserve extracted tumours in spirits in proof of her skills or give them to patients to keep. After her marriage (late 1783 or 1784) to Captain John Edgcumbe she continued her practice near Walcot Church until 1792 when Edgcumbe acquired the newly built 10 St James's Square. During the late 1790s her returns to this address, no doubt after further professional tours in the region, were signalled 'with pleasure' by the local press and in 1800, after 34 years, she was still in practice. Other women cancer doctors did exist at this time Gilbert White in *The Natural History of*

*Selborne* refers to one who used a toad cure but Mrs Plunkett, quack or not, enjoyed an unusually long career and respectable social status. She deserves to be placed in the context of similar itinerant specialists of the period, including eye, ear and dental practitioners, who toured the country and rendered services that resident physicians, surgeons and apothecaries failed to meet. Further information about her would be welcome.



\*Dr. Roger Rolls points out that some of the tumours, though non-malignant, may have become enlarged through secondary infection, and that others might in fact have been chronic infectious ulcers caused by various forms of malnutrition and hence fairly reversible through diet.

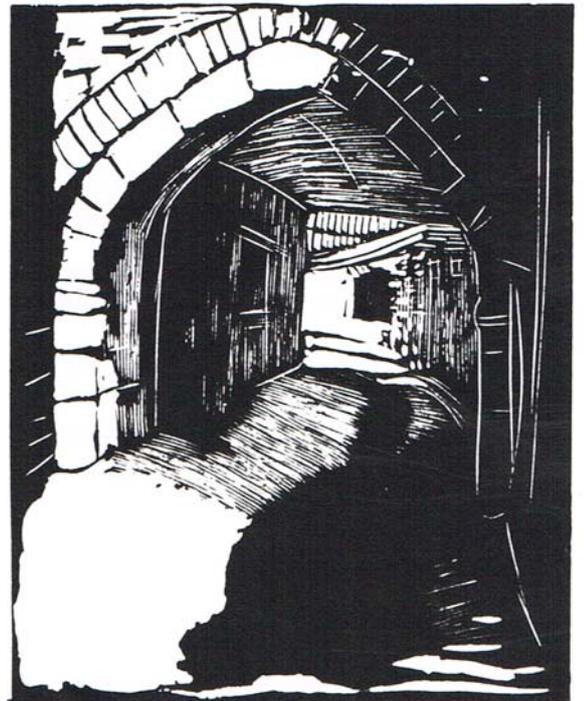


TYMPANUM OF THE PEDIMENT OF THE TEMPLE OF SUL-MINERVA



ROYAL UNITED HOSPITAL

The visual presentation of Bath over the years is a research topic in itself. These illustrations and the one opposite are taken from the *Book of Bath* prepared for the 93rd Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association held at Bath in 1925. The modern wood-engraving movement associated with Eric Gill, Robert Gibbings and Paul Nash was then in full swing and the BMA organisers chose A. Horace Gerrard to illustrate the special volume. With the 'East Gate' below the style becomes quite Expressionist.



THE EAST GATE, BATH

## SOCIETY NEWS, 1870

"It may be said that Bath and Cheltenham have both of them two seasons. At both places the earliest flower show is an important *terminus a quo* ... And a very pleasant thing is a flower show, unless the rain descends in torrents, penetrating the tents, dragging the dresses and keeping away an immense proportion of would-be visitors. A fine day is an important matter of finance. The railway companies now pour in the hundreds to a flower show ... At Bath and Cheltenham the flower show is such an established institution that to leave it off would provoke a kind of *prominciamento*. After the first Cheltenham show the visitors rapidly shade off; but in Bath they still linger on, and there is an additional influx. For in a week or two the races come off, and the Bath races, owing to the nearness of the Derby, have always a considerable importance. Horses kept dark now run, and some means are afforded for forming a judgement on the probabilities at Epsom ...

The other great social event in Bath beyond the spring and autumn flower show is the great fancy ball. This is so pre-eminent that it quite eclipses all the other balls of the season. It is a great subject, on which the wondrous female mind, in many instance for months before and after, is absorbed in an ecstatic contemplation. And let me say that the young ladies ... show well at archery and croquet, and one is glad to see that at Bath and Cheltenham the fine old practice of archery holds its own, even in the face of the attractions of croquet

... [At Bath they] have the peculiar fashion of having their drawing-room floors frothed [polished?] and of leaving abundant space in the centre of their rooms. The carpet dance [i.e. when the carpet is removed] might be a great institution, but it is the misfortune of Bath Society that at most parties there is a scarcity of gentlemen. So ... there is no place where gentlemen of really limited means can more fully enjoy the pleasures of social life ...".

(Quoted from 'Society in Bath and Cheltenham', *London Society* August 1870 pp.116-122)

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### **KONGRATULATIONZ IN SEMI-FONOTYPIK SPELLING TO A SITIZEN OV BATH**

To Isaac Pitman, Esq., Inventor ov Fonografy, and Scluetary ov the Fonetik Sosciety. We, the Fonografcz, Shorthand Writertz, and Fren dz ov the ancient sity ov Carlisle, gladly avail ourselvz ov the opportunity afforded by the Scicbration ov the Fonografik Jubilee and Tersentenaty ov Modem Shorthand at the International Kongres held in London on the 28th September, 1887, to expros our high appreciation ov the valuabel scrvisez which you hav renderd to mankind by the Invention ov Fonografy.

Viewing az we do your long laborz ov the past fifty yearz of self-sakrifize, our most hart-felt wishcz go with you in the future, that you may be long spared that vigor ov body and klcarnes of ov intellekt, to stil further develop the prinsipelz ov the Fonografik Art.

We hay also plesure in akording you our warmest sympathy for the nobel endeavors you hav made to reform the old romanik spelling, and dezire to publikly expres our gratitude to you for the konspikuous part you hay taken in many other great reforms.

And among the many bondz ov affektion uniting our distant Koloniz to the Mother Kuntry, it iz with pride we notis that Fonografy iz not one ov the least.

We ar. Sir, Your obedient servants.

The Kommitte on behalf ov the above Fonografcz,  
Shorthand Writertz, and Fren dz.

ROBERT WALES.

JOS. HEWITSON.

H. BEULL.

Carlisle, 19 September, 1887