



NEWSLETTER 8

JANUARY 1989

GROUP NEWS

1. The Sources Working Party has distributed a first batch of questionnaires to institutions in the region which are thought to hold archival material relating to Bath's history. Where appropriate, follow-up visits are being arranged to provide a clearer idea of relevant documents and their practical value for local historians. Gathering information is going to take some time, and members of the Working Party are now bracing themselves to tackle the county and city record offices.
2. On 25 November six members of the Group's committee, together with Mike Chapman (representing the Survey of Old Bath) and Angus Buchanan, travelled to the premises of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and Ordnance Survey in Southampton to view progress on the two historical maps of Bath due for publication in 1989. At that stage the maps had been largely plotted onto dozens of transparent overlays (different types of feature on each overlay); these would eventually be reduced to four printing plates (yellow, cyan blue, magenta and black) to achieve the final full-colour synthesis. Because of lack of definite archaeological or documentary evidence, certain details shown - especially on the Roman and Medieval map - are bound to be conjectural. Nevertheless these two maps are going to offer a fine cartographic conspectus of Bath's physical development up to the early nineteenth century and will prove a constant source of reference.

MEETINGS HELD OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1988

Because of the sudden indisposition of the scheduled speaker, John Styles, the Group's Secretary stepped in on 5 October with an illustrated talk on retailing in Bath in the 18th century. Local fairs, street vendors, and the provisions market were all significant, but Bath was most famous for its shops - which rivalled London's in range and splendour in the later decades, the "toyshops" being particularly noteworthy. Retailing took place in an atmosphere of intense competition, aggravated by seasonal tradesmen arriving from outside, and the heavy advertising that resulted supplies essential evidence that can be augmented by shop bills, Corporation records, visitors' references to shopping preserved in letters and diaries, and prints showing urban views that include shop facades.

Three of our members spoke on aspects of their current research at the meeting on 3 November. Ruth Fisher outlined the career of Colonel Edward Cooke of Highnam, an intriguing mid-17th century politician and country gentleman who served both the Cromwellian and Royalist causes in turn and whose hidden motives seem strangely ambivalent. Connie Smith gave a wide-ranging overview of Widcombe and Lyncombe parish, still quite rural (despite quarries and mills) until the growth associated with the coming of the canal, railway and new industries. Stella Pierce completed the evening with her investigation of corruption in local government, instancing embezzling of property, scandals and controversy over 19th century waterworks and the building of the Empire Hotel, as well as more recent parallels; but also mentioning efforts at self-reform in the early Victorian period documented in the Finance Committee Reports.

On 7 December Dr. Harry Nabb delivered a slide lecture on the establishment of the gas industry at Bath, based on his Ph.D. thesis and full of entertaining as well as instructive detail. Gas lighting arrived in 1819 in the teeth of opposition from the local Improvement Commissioners, and later extended to the outlying districts. The company soon became probably the largest ratepayer in Bath. Dr. Nabb discussed the attitudes of the promoters, pricing policies, attempts to introduce competition, technical innovations, and various other aspects of the industry, and stimulated a flurry of questions.

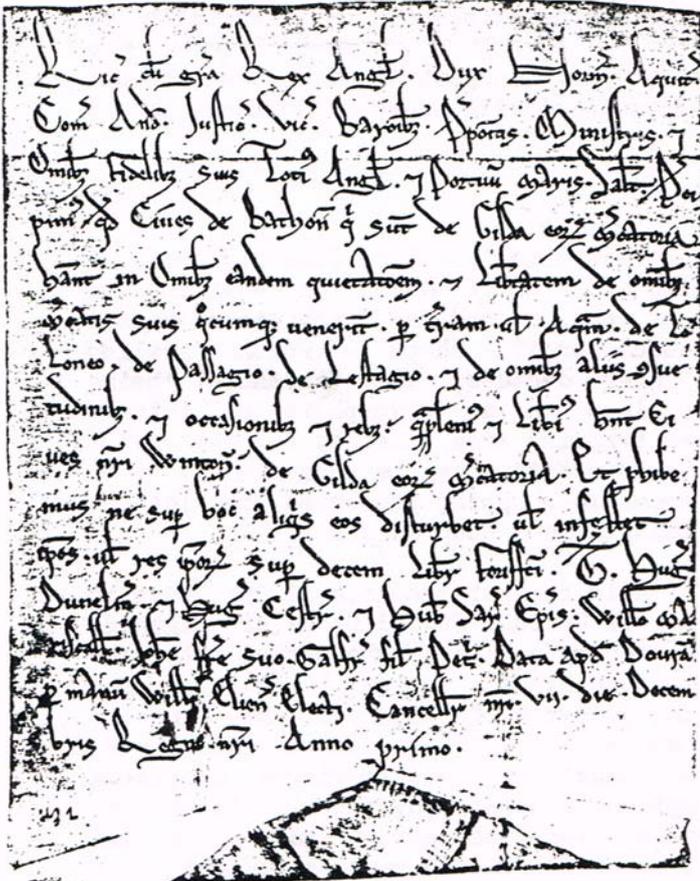
MEMBERS NEWS

1. Dom Philip Jebb, Downside Abbey, Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Bath, BA3 4RJ, has recently joined the Group. He is Headmaster and Archivist at Downside Abbey and has a particular interest in the history of Roman Catholicism in Bath.
2. Congratulations to Sheila Metcalf, awarded her M. Phil. degree for a thesis on the establishment of provincial public parks in Victorian England.
3. Stephen Bird, for eight years Keeper of Local History at the Roman Baths Museum, has now succeeded Sam Hunt as Assistant Director and Museum Curator in Bath's Department of Leisure and Tourism.

BATH'S FIRST CHARTER

In the coming year, while the French Revolution is commemorated on all sides, let us not forget that 1989 also marks the eight-hundredth anniversary of our first charter, granted to Bath by Richard I on the eve of his departure on the Third Crusade. Over the centuries other charters followed. The most significant being arguably that of Queen Elizabeth which comes up for celebration in 1990.

RICHARD, by the Grace of God, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, Count of Anjou, to the Justiciaries, Sheriffs, Barons, Governors, Ministers, and all the faithful of the whole of England and the seaports, greeting in the Lord. " We have ordained that the Citizens of Bath, who are of the merchant guild, shall have in all things the same acquittance and freedom for all their merchant goods, wherever they shall go by land or sea, from tolls, payments for bridges, and in markets, and all other customs burdens and things, as fully and freely as have our Citizens of Winchester and their merchant guild, and we forbid anyone to disturb or molest them or their property in this wise, under forfeit of _cto." Witnesses, Hugh, Bishop of Durham, Hugh, Bishop of Chester, and Hubert, Bishop of Salisbury, William Marshal, John, his brother, Geoffry Fitz Peter. Given at Dover under the hand of William Bishop of Ely, our Chancellor-elect, on the seventh day of December, in the first year of our reign.



EXETER CONFERENCE
(report by Brenda Buchanan)

The recently formed Centre for South-Western Historical Studies held its annual symposium at the University of Exeter on 19 November, 1988, in conjunction with the Southern History Society. As announced in our Newsletter 7 the subject was "Social change in southern England, 1600 - 1850" and there were four talks on different aspects of this theme. Three were reports on work in progress, in which speakers discussed some of the problems they faced. Dr. Jonathan Barry asked whether towns were the symptoms or agents of social change, especially in Devon and Cornwall, where developments in for example mining took place outside the urban centres. Dr. John Chartres raised the matter of regional variations within some rural occupations, for example the thatchers, slaters and carpenters of the building trade. Ena Cummings spoke of the problems encountered in a study of demography and social change in south Devon, where it was difficult within parishes to find adequate data on both aspects of this relationship. The only paper based on finished research, that by Dr. Stephen Jackson on migration and social and economic change in south-central England, had been completed sufficiently long ago for the author to raise questions about methods and materials in the light of more recent developments.

The symposium ended with a general discussion which followed upon comments from a panel led by Professor Eric Jones. His stress on the importance of placing regional and urban history in the context of the national economy found general agreement. From this I would only demur by observing that the determination of some demographers to achieve this relationship by presenting their results solely in terms of trends and rates of change frustrates the local historian by obscuring the evidence on which such conclusions are based

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES, LECTURE SERIES, etc.

1. "New Approaches to Towns, 100 - 1500", a conference to be held at the University of Birmingham, 14-16 April 1989, aims to bring together archaeological, historical and geographical approaches to late Roman and Medieval towns in considering three main themes - urban hierarchy, urban identity and civic pride, and the importance of churches, etc. For further details please contact the H B R G Secretary.
2. A short course at the Huntingdon Centre to be given by the H B R G Secretary, weekly from 7 February, will treat aspects of social life in 18th-century Bath. Programme from the Huntingdon Centre.
3. The University of the Third Age in Bath has embarked on an oral history project to record interviews with local people about their working lives. Cassettes of interviews will be held at the Bath Industrial Heritage Centre. If you are able to recommend suitable candidates (able to speak fluently and lucidly about their former occupations) please contact the Curator of the Centre, Jane Richardson, on 318348. In this connection, it should be noted that an Avon Oral History Network was formed in January 1987, with a brief wide enough to cover memories and life experiences on audio- and videotape, in print and in photographic form. Details can be obtained from Bob Pitt, 17 Midland Road, Bristol, BS2 0JT (TEL: Bristol 552968).

P U B L I C A T I O N S
(review by Francis Kelly)

JOHN WOOD, ARCHITECT OF OBSESSION,
Tim Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, (Bath, Millstream Books, 1988) £15.

This is an interpretation of John Wood's buildings and writings prompted by the suggestion in Colvin's Biographical Dictionary of British Architects that the "connection ... between Wood's antiquarian researches and his architectural projects is a subject that deserves investigation". In fact, what Wood wrote is frankly impenetrable by all but the most determined. The authors address their task in a provocative and highly readable manner combined with much scholarship. The book is about the buildings designed by, attributed to or claimed by Wood, about his writings and illusions and a mass of related source material. It is welcome to have the complete corpus dealt with in a single volume, including buildings outside the Bath area.

Wood's metropolitan background, youthful brilliance, the relevance of Stonehenge to The Circus and of Solomon's Temple to Llandaff Cathedral have been discussed by Summerson and others. All this and more is reviewed and developed. The highpoint of the book is about The Circus in Bath. This is convincingly presented as a Lilliputian organisation of social space in the guise of a Druidical Temple of Phoebus Apollo, which in turn echoes the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem. It is especially satisfying that the authors have found a key for the metopes of the Doric frieze.

John Wood I emerges as something of a caricature: as a rotten practical builder, but a compelling speculator; and as an untutored and crusty antiquary in the grip of quaint obsessions. These stem from a form of literalism: Jonesian Palladianism, Masonic Christianity, Druidism, and lively fantasy mixed - as Summerson puts it with curious originality. The authors dismiss some hoary old chestnuts, tilt at a few windmills and set up a few misconceptions of their own, for instance about the numbers of houses in The Circus and carved metopes in the frieze. One possible reservation about the book is that, whereas Wood is seen in the wider context of architectural history, there is no integrated reassessment of his status as an architect; nor is there a serious attempt to evaluate the contribution of his son.

This is a handsome, hardback volume. It is printed in a large enough format to accommodate numerous illustrations (the quality of which is variable) and the references are thankfully printed as footnotes. At £15 it is relatively cheap. If there are minor shortcomings, they hardly detract from the crucial point which is that, at last, we have an academic discussion of John Wood senior, and that it is in itself a stimulating contribution to the architectural history and belles lettres of Bath.

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A few cost-price copies of this special Bath issue remain on hand at £1.25 each. Telephone the HBRG Secretary on 312398 if you wish to reserve one.

BATH CITY RECORD OFFICE, GUILDHALL

Colin Johnston tells us that the records of Bath Municipal Charities, held at St. John's Hospital, have all been catalogued in recent years, and a copy of the full list is now in the Record Office. The greater part of the collection comprises title deeds and administrative papers of the extensive property holdings within the city of St. John's Hospital. The records of the Charities may be made available in the Record Office on written application to the Trustees.

THE NEWS LETTER IS COMPILED BY THE SECRETARY AND TYPED BY JUDITH SAMUEL.