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NEWSLETTER 45

MAY 2001

## GROUP NEWS

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 12 April 2001

1. 21 members and two guests attended. Apologies were received from Jennifer Beazley, Douglas Bernhardt, Angus & Brenda Buchanan, Stuart Burroughs, David Crellin, Colin Johnston, Godfray Lawrence, Judith Samuel and Owen Ward.
2. The minutes of the AGM held on 5 April 2000 were confirmed.
3. In her chairman's report, Philippa Bishop referred to the wide variety of meetings which had taken place during the year. She singled out Graham Davis', Jan Chivers' and Trevor Fawcett's talks, remarked how architecture had featured strongly in the year's programme and thanked all the speakers for the instruction and entertainment they had given the group. She reported that attendance at meetings had been maintained steadily and welcomed the addition of several new members. She regretted that no members were able to attend the December 2000 meeting of the Alkmaar Historical Research Meeting - thanks were sent to the president for the invitation. The chief activity of members has been on the Street Gazetteer of Bath, on which Trevor Fawcett would report. She ended by saying how much she had enjoyed her four-year stint as Chairman, not least because during that period the Group has seen the initiation and development of the Gazetteer, and she thanked members for their support.
4. In David Crellin's absence, Amanda Berry circulated copies of the Treasurer's Report and a statement of accounts from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001. There was a fall in net assets for the year despite an increase in income of nearly £40. This fall resulted from a substantial increase in the cost of room hire plus the unusual expenses of the visit to Beckford's Tower and payment of a speaker's fee. While the Group's financial position remains sound, the net assets of the group had declined to £419.60 at 31 March 2001. As a result, the Treasurer proposed an increase in the annual subscription rate, which has remained unchanged for over 5 years, to £5 for single and £8 for joint membership for those who renew prior to July 2001 and £6 single and £10 joint for those who renew later than July 2001. The meeting voted on the proposed increase and agreement to raise subscriptions was unanimously in favour of doing so.
5. Judith Samuel gave notice of her intention to give up the editorship of the Group's Newsletter at the last AGM. The Chairman thanked Judith Samuel for her sterling work and announced that Kirsten Elliot had agreed to take over as Editor. Her appointment was confirmed by the Group. Philippa Bishop retired as chairman and Michael Rowe proposed Dr Mary Ede be appointed chairman, which was seconded by Pauline Hanna. Amanda Berry nominated Bill Hanna as a committee member, which was confirmed by the members present. The remainder of the committee were re-elected en bloc. The 2001 committee is therefore Chairman - Mary Ede, Vice-Chairman - Michael Rowe, General Secretary and Treasurer - David Crellin, Meetings Secretary -

Amanda Berry, Newsletter Editor - Kirsten Elliott, Committee Members - Michael Chapman, Marek Lewcun and Bill Hanna.

6. Trevor Fawcett reported on progress on the Gazetteer. There had been a considerable amount of work done up to July 2000. Alan Keevil had given valuable help on one part. Entries have been put onto disc and Group members were urged to call into the Bath Record Office where Colin Johnston will load the disc to show interested parties the miscellany of entries. Trevor hopes that, by seeing what has been done so far, members might be inspired to offer help on the Gazetteer. He proposed that we try to set clear definable targets to be achieved over the next 12 months. These include listing and dating as many roads and streets as possible through working on directories and maps before moving on to working on buildings within streets. He proposed that work should be concentrated from September through to March/April, to avoid the summer period.

7. Suggestions were invited for future activities. John Ede said that Alan Dodge might be approached to give us a tour of Freshford and that Professor Robert Parfitt might talk on South Stoke. Michael Rowe suggested a tour of the Tunnels below the Roman Baths in place of a speaker meeting.

8. Kirsten Elliott asked members to contribute regularly to the Newsletter with comments and snippets of news. She invited members' views on layout, querying whether to continue with the A4 format, to change to A5 format using desk top publishing or to A3 with a fold. Trevor Fawcett agreed to contribute excerpts from the Gazetteer for every issue of the Newsletter. He pointed out that illustrations were better on A4 size paper. Peter Carpenter suggested that the Newsletter could be distributed by e-mail to members but only 8 members currently have e-mail addresses. Kirsten will consider these suggestions.

9. Trevor Fawcett proposed a vote of thanks to Philippa Bishop for her 4-year tenure as Chairman. The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m. and wine and juice were served before Bruce Croft's talk on Street Entertainers of Bath.

## MEETINGS HELD FEBRUARY- APRIL 2001

**BATH ARCHITECTS:** panel presentation by Michael Bishop, Kirsten Elliott, and David Crellin, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2001, chaired by Dr Mary Ede.

Michael Bishop, speaking on James Wilson (18816 - 1900), summarised his importance to Victorian Bath with examples of his and his partners' work still (with the exception of the Grand Pump Room Hotel) to be seen in Bath itself, instancing first the three buildings whose towers dominate the Lansdown skyline: Kingswood School, the Royal high School, St Stephen's Church. He might almost be dubbed "Wilson of Lansdown": his office was at 1, Belmont, and he died in his son's house on Lansdown. He was versatile both in the buildings he designed - churches and chapels, hotels and private houses, schools and colleges - and (as a true Victorian) in the styles he could command, from Classical Greek to Scottish Baronial. Wilson was first connected with Kingswood school (founded by John Wesley in the 1740s) when it was still in its original location at Kingswood, Bristol. In 1846, together with W.W. Pocock of London, he was commissioned to advise on whether its increasingly inadequate buildings could be enlarges and improved or whether a new building elsewhere was more desirable. Wilson produced two sets of drawings (still extant) showing both the school in it existing state and how it might be expanded and updated. Ultimately it was resolved, with Wilson's practical assistance, to purchase a site on Lansdown, Bath, part of the land which William Beckford had acquired to connect his town house in Lansdown Crescent with his Goodridge-built Tower at the top of the hill. Commissioned to design "New Kingswood", Wilson was active also in collecting subscriptions towards the costs ( a severe drain on Wesleyan finances).

The new school, built in symmetrical late Tudor style, was officially opened in 1852, though still without the chapel he had designed (in order to save £875. A chapel was not built until 1922!) Wilson's last commission for the school was -after his retirement - in 1883, when Kingswood was obliged to double its accommodation and amalgamate with Woodhouse Grove School (its northern counterpart near Leeds.) With Elijah Hoole he produced a number of imaginative schemes, all sadly rejected in favour of an ugly block behind the central tower.

Kirsten Elliott next brought us up to date with her ongoing researches regarding both James Wilson himself and the person she amusingly identified as the "vanishing architect", one Ralph Wilson, identified by her as James's elder brother and at an early stage working with James from No. 1 Belmont, but thereafter disappearing from the scene. She had traced a Ralph Wilson subsequently working in London (possibly, she surmised as James's London partner, James being sometimes referred to as both of "Bath and London"; but the mystery remains.)

What shed interesting new light on James Wilson was the title deeds from "Crosslands" (originally Nos. 1 and 2 Alma Villas) on the northern corner of Sion Road and Lansdown Road. These, complete with drawings of the semi-detached houses (the right-hand of which remained in Wilson's possession) furnished interesting evidence of the architect's meticulous attention to detail of all kinds (our attention was particularly drawn to the importance he attached to chimneys), but also to details relating to the legal entailment of the property. A further intriguing of not directly related matter, as yet unresolved, concerned the "avenue" of lime trees bordering the "Promenade" on the west side of Lansdown Road between Sion Road and Hamilton Road. There is now some evidence to suggest that the trees were planted not - as tradition has till now held - by Beckford, but by members of the influential Gunning family, owners of much land in that part of Lansdown. One further question the speaker raised with her audience (one suggested by the use of "Alma" and other battle names for houses, roads, etc.): when did the practice of using great battles in this way cease? She suggested it stopped during World War I, when battlefields were synonymous with horror rather than glory.

The third speaker, David Crellin, shared thoughts on three aspects of Bath's humbler buildings which particularly intrigued him.

1. The device adopted by different architects to link, visually and tellingly, the individual elements of terraces built on slopes (a feature met with so often in Bath, a city of hills). Various solutions were found, ranging from the aesthetically admirable device observable in such early 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings as St Mary's buildings, where houses are linked by a continuous downward-sweeping cornice and string-course, each house joined to its neighbour by a hooked curve; by way of the horizontal, stepped elements employed by earlier architects; to cases in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century where all subtlety is abandoned and architects juxtapose elements of different height with no attempt to link them imaginatively.
2. The desire (inspired surely by such "palace façades" as the northern side of Queen Square, with its unified façade, central pediment and corner accents) shared by builders on Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bath to furnish even the humblest pairs of semi-detached houses with unifying features to suggest that what are in fact two dwellings are a single, grander one.
3. The importance attached to detailed decorative work (albeit often mass-produced) of even the humblest terraces in Bath. Few houses however modest, lack decorated, often fanciful details on doors, windows or balconies or beneath guttering. Its importance is strikingly illustrated in the case of a meticulously reconstructed terrace in Oldfield Park, where all the original features are reproduced with the exception of the conspicuously absent guttering-supports that lent character to the original building.

**Philippa and Michael Bishop**

**Naturalists in Georgian and Victorian Bath: Talk given by Trevor Fawcett on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2001.**

Trevor stepped in at the last minute to replace Samatha Baber with a fascinating account of the 'Naturalists in Georgian and Victorian Bath'.

It is a sad reflection on our environmental management that a miniature Cheddar gorge in the shape of Wick rocks has been lost in the name of progress; that is quarrying. All that remains are some beautiful illustrations of the area and descriptions of the fauna and flora of the area dating from the late eighteenth century. Trevor outlined the background to two collectors of the period who gave us such an insight into a lost part of our local habitat. They were Edmund Rack and John Walcott whose principal interest in nature was led by a belief that the book of Nature revealed divine wisdom and simply confirmed biblical truth.

In the late eighteenth century however attitudes were different and it is important to appreciate that the motivations of early naturalists were often very different to our conservation led approach today. Gilbert White of Selbourne was unusual in his more scientific approach which led to his work being best appreciated a generation after he carried out his studies.

Most British naturalists of this time had adopted the Linnaean arrangement and naming of plants. One diehard clinging to earlier classification schemes was William Sole. Despite this he was one of the most expert practical botanists of the area, and maintained his own botanic garden on the edge of Bath.

Clearly there was also some debate going on about the use of new technology with some naturalists despising those who resorted to the use of the new fangled magnifying glasses and microscopes.

By 1791 the first attempt at a local flora (by John Collinson) had been printed which together with works by others enabled Charles Babington to produce the *Flora Bathoniensis* (1833) which with the updated version of 1839 identified 750 local species. Other important projects were carried out by John Stackhouse on British Seaweeds and by Frederick Hanham who planted the Royal Victoria Park on the lines of an arboretum.

Whereas there was a strong focus on botany up to the 1840's local research on the fauna had lagged behind. Attitudes to wildlife in the period were just beginning to change from an extermination approach to a realisation that this could be counter productive. By 1856 a new guide to Bath was able to offer a section on the zoology of the area. In this guide book the report on Botany was written by Leonard Jenyns who was later to be invited to join the voyage of the *Beagle* which he turned down and his place was taken by Darwin.

In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jenyns and Broome started the Bath Field club which finally was to resemble the present day Bath Natural History Society.

Microscopes became increasingly useful and available leading to the creation of the Bath Microscopical Society which put on public soirées in 1864 and 1888. the second of which attracted over 300 who were mostly women. In 1887 the Selbourne Society was formed initially as a pressure group for the protection of nature. It flourished for some time with a peak of over 300 members. By 1910 the focus of the group had changed to antiquarianism.

Trevor gave us a remarkable insight into the development of interest in Nature in and around Bath during the Georgian and Victorian periods. It is particularly interesting to note how early the issue of conservation was raised and supported.

**David Crellin**

**Street Sellers and Entertainers in Bath. Talk given by Bruce Crofts at AGM of HBRG Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2001**

After the business of the AGM was concluded, Bruce Crofts (kindly substituting for the advertised talk by Jennifer Beazley) spoke on the subject of **Street Sellers and Entertainers in Bath**. Using as his chief source of material the notebook kept by a policeman, Edward Smith, from 1919 to the 1950s, he described a variety of colourful characters who - usually because they were drunk and disorderly - had cause to be brought up before the law. These were chiefly itinerant street pedlars selling anything from ice cream, fish and chips, cats' meat, and skim milk, to flypapers, logs, coke and coal dust. Although their real names might be known and recorded in the notebook, they were more likely to be recognised throughout the city by their appropriate nicknames: 'Hokey Pokey', for instance, identifying Mario Mancini who sold ice cream; or 'Catchem Alive-O' for the flypaper man who wore a top hat with the papers attached like streamers; or 'Milky Gallows' who sold skim milk and would entertain crowds on the recreation ground before the game. For the most part they were providing cheap goods to the poor. Rufus Cook, 'Cookie', during the meat auctions he held on Friday and Saturday nights, was notoriously rude to the well-off who came looking for a bargain, and equally generous to those unable to afford much. Following his release from a spell in prison for drunkenness, he was given a hero's welcome at the station on his return; and after his death mourners queued to view his body lying in state.

Other well-known figures on the streets included the musicians, such as the Rhine String band and the German Band ('Huffum Puffum'). There were also the entertainers who used animals in their acts: bears on chains, caged love birds, and even a guinea pig that climbed out of its box and performed on top. Finally there was a miscellaneous group of people living on their wits who would by one means or another trick the public into giving charity, or else - like the 'Terrible Turk', the crossing sweeper - frighten them into doing so. Sometimes the tricksters, accused of merely pretending a disability, would be brought to court. One such (nicknamed the 'Shammer') was examined by the doctor and pronounced "Weak generally but fit to do hard labour"!

The speaker was warmly thanked, both for agreeing to talk at such short notice, and for shedding light on a fairly obscure but fascinating area of the history of the city. He said that he was putting the material he had gathered at the disposal of the Museum of Bath at Work, for them to incorporate into their records.

### MEMBERS' NEWS

Welcome to four new members who are:

Dawn Hodgson  
Ellen Webster  
Ken & Phyllis Bourne

**Trevor Fawcett** has come upon some rather intriguing facts in the course of his researches and wonders if anyone can shed further light on these curious facts.

### Mysterious Visitors

The Chamberlain's Accounts reveal a rather odd group of payments:

1725-26	Governor of Lebanon	£1-1-0
1729-30	A Grecian from Mount Lebanon	£2-2-0
1731-32	ffathi Ishtamma	£1-1-0
ditto	A foreign prince	£1-1-0
1732-33	Father Anastasius Paulus	£2-2-0
1734-35	A Grecian	£1-1-0
1737-38	A Man from Caelo Syria	£1-1-0

No similar payments are recorded until:

1765-66	Prince de Balestina	£5-5-0
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The Corporation dispensed occasional charity to paupers passing through Bath, including discharged soldiers and sailors, but rarely gave each one more than a shilling. It also rewarded the odd entertainers, e.g. Morris dancers (£1-1-6 in 1702) or Powell the Fire-eater (10s.6d. in 1752-3). But straightforward presents of guineas to visitors, foreign or not, were distinctly unusual. The exotic recipients seem mostly to be Levantines, but who exactly were they, why were they in Bath, and what moved the Mayor to give them money? Any answers - or even clues - would be gratefully received. So too would be the identification of the anonymous 'German artist' who received a guinea in 1728-9, bearing in mind that 'German' might also mean 'Dutch' at this time. It can hardly be Van Diest who had just painted a set of civic portraits.

Trevor Fawcett

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*The Newsletter is compiled and typed by Kirsten Elliott*