



NEWSLETTER 59

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GROUP NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Our thanks go to Chris Noble for obtaining the contributions from speakers and others and collating and preparing the document for publication.

MEETING REPORTS

BATH FOUNTAINS

Tuesday 16th October, 2007 **St Stephen's Centre, Lansdown**

Speaker and Reporter **Mike Chapman**

Though the present day observer may see no interest in public fountains in Bath, in the mid 19th Century there seems to have been a 'fountain mania' in the city. The great days of the Spa were past and new innovations were sought to provide amenities in the city.

In 1850 an ambitious scheme was proposed for a series of fountains starting in St James Square down to the Royal Crescent, The Circus, Queen Square, Laura Place perhaps finally to Kingsmead Square. The scheme would be both decorative and also provide good quality water to benefit the health of the poor at the bottom of the series of fountains. The first plan was to pump river water by steam engine to St. James Square, it awaited a trial scheme to pump water from the Town Mills water wheels to Laura Place.

However, the pre-occupation of both the public and the city's men of influence with the Great Exhibition of 1851 led to the whole scheme being abandoned.

In 1855 a fountain using surplus hot mineral water was proposed in Abbey Church Yard: controversial but it was actually erected at the entrance to Bath Street.

It failed : red iron oxide, discolouration and rubbish dumping (- a problem which would continue into the next Millenium).

Re-designed with the help of Signor Pieroni, the vase only may still be seen by the Brock Street entrance to Victoria Park.

The last fountain to be erected was in Laura Place, 1880, an elaborate structure, cold water with provision for supplying water to street watering carts. Found to be unsafe it was dismantled in the 1940s.

BATH PRISONS

Tuesday 13th November 2007 Scouts HQ, 7 Grove Street

Speaker and Reporter Chris Noble

There are few Georgian gaol buildings left in the country but plenty of Victorian ones. Bath may be seen as occupying an unusual position : the whole of a purpose-built Georgian gaol building survives as well as important parts of its Victorian successor.

The New Gaol in Bathwick, built by Thomas Warr Atwood, opened in 1772.

The New Gaol survives as 16 Grove Street, its appearance altered only by the loss of an ornate flight of steps which led to the main entrance, now a window on the first floor. It is a handsome four storey building in the Palladian style adopted throughout the city and could be taken for the home of a prosperous city merchant. In the 1770s Bath had no idea how a gaol should or might be designed and Government gave no advice or instruction so although purpose built in that it was built to be a gaol it was not 'fit for purpose'. Not really a gaol, more a collection of shared rooms.

The first New Gaol lasted only until 1842. Overcrowding had become a serious problem, and without cells its inmates got up to mischief together. Most influentially, the two new competing philosophies of separate vs. silent imprisonment were being brought from the USA. After years in which the city dithered under heavy pressure from Government a second New Gaol was built and opened in Twerton. The separate scheme had won, first introduced at the Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia. Bath and Pentonville were both building in 1840-42, and Bath opened first, becoming our first example of separate confinement. Prisoners lived and worked in their cells, in isolation, with en-suite sanitation. Like the first New Gaol it housed both sexes and children as young as 9. The Governor's House, Palladian in style designed by the city architect George Manners, survives in Caledonian Road. Behind it a single cell block was designed and built exactly as Pentonville with three levels of separate cell 'landings'. However, by the Prison Act 1877, the Government took over or closed all non-state owned gaols, those run privately or by local authority. Bath gaol, to the councillors dismay, was closed. It was the end of a long story which included corruption by the Governor and problems caused by failing drains and a polluted water supply. The cell block lived on, first as a sweet factory and then an engineering works until after the Second World War. Finally demolished but several cell windows survive to be seen on the second floors of two houses in Stuart Place, the east end of the cell block used by an enterprising builder.

AIRFIELDS AROUND BATH

Tuesday 15th January 2008 Manvers Street Baptist Church, Coffee room

Speaker and Reporter John Penny

John Penny introduced the history of the 1939-45 air war as it affected the Bath area illustrated by a video film which showed places, maps and some of the aircraft. More widely, which of course it included the Bristol aircraft factory at Filton, immediately identified as a well known target for enemy aircraft. Three RAF stations were of crucial importance: Colerne and Charmy Down airfields, and Rudloe Manor operations room, North Stoke - Lansdown Race course was used as a training field. Preparation at Rudloe Manor took place rapidly between February and July 1940 and when the site at Rudloe Manor was completed it became part of Fighter Command, No. 10 Group, and from it the whole conduct of the defensive air war over South Wales, the South West and South Midlands was directed.

At Rudloe Manor the central operations room featured the design familiar from so many films and documentaries: a large central map table where WAFFs moved counters to represent the number and direction of enemy and RAF aircraft.

It was also the headquarters of the Western Area Observer Corps, civilian staffed, to become the Royal Observer Corps.

Filton was the target of the first enemy air attack on the West Country in June 1940, and it was realised that it would be difficult to protect Filton with its own fighter defence : Filton needed its airspace for test flying and it needed its own protective balloon barrage. The relatively successful enemy raid in June 1940 led to the decision to develop the airfields at Charmy Down (operational from November 1940) and Colerne. Both had been identified and development started before the war. Both were subsequently identified by enemy reconnaissance.

A range of protective, camouflaged hangars was illustrated, erected at Charmy Down and Colerne.

Those of us old enough to remember plane spotting were reminded of the Gloster Gladiator biplane, the Blenheim, Beaufighter and Spitfire, and the US Mustang, the American Air Force making a brief visit to Charmy Down in 1943-4.

LOST PUBS OF BATH

Wednesday 13th February Manvers Street Baptist Church, Coffee room

Speaker and Reporter Kirsten Elliott

Researching the pubs of Bath

Kirsten contributed: 'When giving a talk about the pubs of Bath, I usually show slides of pubs – some lost, some still in existence – and relate some interesting anecdotes. For most people, hearing the history of Bath's pubs fills an entertaining hour or so. However, behind the stories lies some serious social history, particularly relating to the life of poorer people in Bath. The research behind the Akeman Press Bath pub trilogy – Bath Pubs, Awash with Ale and The Lost Pubs of Bath - was the topic for the History of Bath Research Group.

At first, we intended only to research pubs, leaving out the coaching inns, many of which have vanished. But the coaching inns had taps for the servants of their clients – and the taps survive. Sometimes the inns themselves have survived as pubs. It proved impossible to draw a clear line. In the end, we covered everything from the grandest inn to the meanest alehouse.

We visited several record offices as well as making use of the reference library.

Postal Directories, especially early directories, were a valuable source of information, especially for pubs or beerhouses which only had a fleeting existence. Newspapers, held on microfilm, yielded items which contained pub names.

Bath Record Office has a fine collection of deeds, many relating to pubs. Perhaps the most difficult task was to disentangle the development of the White Hart in Stall Street from over 200 deeds, some of which related not to the inn itself, but to the White Hart Lodging across the road.

Bath Record Office also contains inventories of pubs made by Mortimer, a valuer in Bath in the late 19th century. The Ushers' Archive, held at Wiltshire Record Office was another rich mine of information.

Licenses before the 1770s rarely included the pub name, so before then it is sometimes a matter of guesswork. Somerset Record Office holds many old licences, but Buckinghamshire Record Office holds the Mompesson alehouse licences of 1618 – 1620. Giles Mompesson was a rogue, who extorted money from inn-keepers in granting their licences and he fled to France in 1621 to escape imprisonment. However, his list of inns proved extremely helpful to us.

Coroners' reports give a vivid picture of pub life in the past. Inquests are often held there, and frequently feature in the build-up to a violent death. From this, one can identify the less salubrious pubs.

As for pictures, we have our own archive, but both Bath Record Office and the Museum of Bath at Work provided many of the items.

Finally, one should not forget the reminiscences of local people. Descendants of pub landlords contacted us with information, photographs and other memorabilia, while other local people regaled us with stories of long gone pubs they remembered with affection – in particular The Retreat on Primrose Hill. But the most elusive pub remains the Folly – even though it disappeared comparatively recently. Its story still contains an unresolved mystery – but that is, perhaps, for another talk.'

SUNDIALS AROUND BATH

Tuesday 18th March St Stephen's Centre, Lansdown

Speaker and Reporter David Brown

We travelled with David Brown starting from the earliest known method of measuring time using the sun of which evidence exists in Egypt from about 1500 BC, and subsequently known in Iraq, Greece and Rome. A shadow is cast by the sun from an object set vertically in the ground: the object is known as a gnomon. A disc flat on the ground, and inscribed, the gnomon set in the centre allows periods of time to be measured.

Today sundials are popularly thought of as a horizontal clock-face like dial on which a vertical gnomon throws a shadow indicating the time. However, it is likely that our first sundials were fixed on a vertical plane with a horizontal gnomon made of wood or metal mounted in the centre. Such sundials may be seen on many early Anglo-Saxon church walls, sometimes with crosses marking the time of prayer. There are also scratch dials to be seen on church walls also marked with crosses to show the times of prayer. Many other types of devices for measuring time were introduced and the British Sundial Society is active in recording all fixed sundials and scratch dials as they are at risk disappearance through neglect or building "restoration".

In Bath's Parade Gardens is an armillary sphere sundial. Today, thanks to David Brown's skills, and following vandalism and lack of care, it is intact and supplying the correct time when the sun shines. Its gnomon is parallel to the earth's axis, tilted up to the latitude of Bath, lying in the meridian. Hours are marked on an equatorial band, spaced every fifteen degrees.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 16th April Museum of Bath at Work

GEORGIAN FOOD

Jean Seymour treated members to an amazing array of Georgian food. To suggest that they were only samples did not properly reflect reality in that in effect this was a Georgian banquet for members.

Many sample foods were on offer including savouries and deserts many of which are no longer regularly eaten despite them being very appetising.

WALK : WIDCOMBE AND LYNCOMBE

Tuesday 20th May 2008

Led by Mike Chapman

For a while during the 18th century Lyncombe Vale provided a special attraction for visitors to Bath, either as a quiet health resort or place of genteel entertainment, until eventually overtaken by competition from the Grosvenor and Sydney Gardens. One of the first sites to gain popularity stood next to Ralph Allen's tramway and carriage drive, where it crossed the junction of the Lyncombe Vale stream and Widcombe Brook - a little way beyond the present Garden Centre in Prior Park Road. It was here in about 1737 that a Mr. Wickstead set up a novel studio for engraving seals and cameos which was powered by a small water-wheel, and hence known as Wickstead's Machine. However, finding a mineral spring in his garden, in about 1770 he also established a spa and pleasure ground there called the 'Bagatelle' or 'Cupid's Garden'. This amenity not only featured the usual attractions such as refreshments, music, fireworks and illuminations, but also a 'boating lake', 'cascade' and 'bathing canal'. However, it did not last very long. Betsy Sheridan noted that it was already 'quite forsaken and overrun with weeds' when she visited Lyncombe Vale in 1786, and the garden subsequently became the site of several fine villas, now called Welton Lodge, Bagatelle House and Ashleigh Villa.

Although the road along Lyncombe Vale was opened up during these years, the attractive canal which now conducts Lyncombe Brook alongside it was probably not diverted from its original course below the road until later. Also built, further along the road on the south side, was Lyncombe Vale Farm, now converted to a private house. Behind the farm, just inside the present entrance to the Paragon School, can be seen a small side stream and a series of old watercress ponds. These appear to be the remains of the medieval fishponds which once belonged to the manorial farm centre of Lyncombe (now Lyncombe Hall) which overlooks them on the opposite slope. The farm, which then belonged to the monastery at Bath, also had a barn, oxhouse and granary which stood a few yards further on, at the bottom of Lyncombe Hill. Opposite the junction with Lyncombe Hill are the original gates and entrance to 'Lyncombe Spa' (now the Paragon School) built about 1740 after the discovery that a spring there contained minerals with curative properties. This establishment, visited by Rev. John Penrose and many others, was therefore less a pleasure ground than a quiet convalescent centre. Indeed, between 1767 and 1773 it was even used as an isolation centre for smallpox inoculants, but since then has mainly served as a private country residence.

A little further along the lane, opposite the Spa, is the entrance to a small group of modern houses occupying a large garden leading up the side of the valley. This ground was the site of the popular Lyncombe Pleasure Gardens known as 'King James's Palace' which opened in the early 1770s. Since hot-house plants were exhibited there, it also traded as a nursery, but as time went on, other attractions were included, such as refreshments, music, fireworks and illuminations. It eventually went down as a result of the financial slump of 1793, and never fully revived, although the house at the top of the garden, now 'Lyncombe Court', still remains. The strange title of these gardens refers to a plausible tradition that James II once visited Lyncombe Vale during his stay in Bath in 1687, when he and his consort were attended by the Chapman family who were then part-owners of the manorial farm.

The farm house itself, now called Lyncombe Hall, still stands halfway up Lyncombe Hill, although much enlarged with late 18th and 19th century alterations. Nevertheless, traces of the earlier 17th century building are still plainly visible in the side walls. Part of the garden, at the bottom beside Lyncombe Vale Road, was donated by a later owner, a Unitarian, for a Unitarian burial ground. This area is still kept clear, under the trees, although there is no other indication of its former purpose. The fields above Lyncombe Hall, on each side of the road, were once the vineyards belonging to the monastery, and at the summit of the hill, on the corner of Rosemount Lane was the site of the 17th century Parsonage House of Lyncombe and Widcombe. Again, although the present building is externally of 19th century origin, its irregular outline may suggest earlier remains. Descending Rosemount Lane to return to Prior Park Road, it is now difficult to visualise the earlier scene here, when the Lyncombe Vale stream crossed the road at the bottom (now culverted), with Mr. Wicksteed's 'bathing canal' nearby (now covered with houses).

WALK : BATHAMPTON DOWN

June 18th, 2008

Led by Bob Whitaker MBE, MA

The walk covered only a small part of the northern edge of the Bathampton, Claverton, Coombe Down and Odd Down plateau.

This remarkable landscape still retains remnant features from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano British periods as well as Medieval Georgian, Victorian and later remains.

Almost all of these features remain now on the Bathampton and Claverton parts of the plateau.

There are Bronze Age round barrows, Iron Age and Romano British field boundaries, building remains and evidence of quarrying. There also exists the outline of and some features of a 12th century Deer Park, an 18th century Horse Race Course, in addition there are stone mines, and tramways from Medieval to 19th century and the remnants of Georgian and Victorian public water supply sources and works.



Viewed from Bathampton Down, the course of the River Avon can be seen with the evidence of faulting and landslip which occurred during glacial periods.

There is still much research to be carried out on many of the features that exist, as well as the history of the plateau. Bob noted that Google Earth images show a number of interesting features as shown.

R.J. Whittaker, MBE, MA

BOOK REVIEW

Childhood Memories : Growing up in Kingsmead and Weston, Pauline Forrest, Akeman Press 2008

Pauline Forrest has written an account, often in daily detail, of a working class childhood in Bath. Born in 1921, so she travels through the 20's and 30's and her story illuminates much of the local social history of that period. Her life starts in Kingsmead Street in a house still standing (unless re-numbered) at the top of the steps now leading down to the car-park. Kingsmead Square was one of the hubs of Bath, the plane tree remembered and trams driven by her father and an older brother travelling through and passing her front door. Her home was in a house once grand but by then reduced to a shop and rooms, an example perhaps of the coming 'Sack of Bath' that was to follow elsewhere after the war.

Then a move to Avon Street where she gives a more positive description than many, of a lively district of lodging houses and small shops. What comes across so well is a strong and loving family, of adventures, trips to the seaside, school and starting work. Of poverty and royal visits and the beginnings of her ambition to nurse. The family couldn't afford the fees : did she make it ?

NOTES AND QUERIES

There have been a number of enquiries from members and others.

- An enquiry from Owen Ward: does anyone know whether Axminster made lace, or only thread for making lace? Please respond to Owen at hsxohw@bath.ac.uk. If you copy me in on any reply I can post the answers to the rest of the group too.
- An enquiry from John Eddows: I'm trying to establish whether Robert Cecil 1st Earl of Salisbury might have been treated for syphilis at Bath, where he was shortly before he died in 1612, and, more generally, the sort of treatment (e.g. hot tub, mercury vapour from a heated plate, etc.) that was given there between 1590 and 1620 approx., and whether records exist in Bath). Cecil is said to have died from an abdominal ulcer, and had a 'scorbutic rash' on his stomach at the time, but one wonders if the latter was not syphilitic. Please respond to John at john@eddows.co.uk. If you copy me in on any reply I can post the answers to the rest of the group too.
- An enquiry from Mr A Woodhead: I am enclosing a photo of a terracotta lady found in my house at Frankley Buildings. For inclusion in your next newsletter, in the hope that someone might know who she is and possibly what building she may have come from. She has a very obvious mole on her cheek. If you have any relevant information please contact me at david@auc.co.uk and I will pass the information on to Mr Woodhead.

