



NEWSLETTER 43

SEPTEMBER 2000

GROUP NEWS

MEETINGS MAY — JUNE 2000

GIRLS OF THE TOWN - VICE AND VIGILANCE IN VICTORIAN BATH, Graham Davis, 3 May 2000: Members were treated to a most interesting and very eye-opening account of this much overlooked but very real aspect of life in Victorian Bath. With the subject derived from the very nature of the city, its origins go back further than the 19C, but with greater quantities of more varied documentary sources surviving for the later period it has been possible for a very detailed picture to be painted. Bath had experienced a massive expansion in its size during the 18C and this continued into the 19C, before levelling off, and with this went a proportionate increase in both population and visitors, necessitating an equally large number of lodging houses and public houses in which the seeds of depravity were gradually sown. A clear north-south divide developed in Bath, from the wealthy slopes of Lansdown down to the lower quarters housing the labouring classes and industry towards and alongside the river. The city became a magnet for undesirables in the form of beggars and prostitutes from further afield, for whom rich pickings were to be had amongst Bath's nouveau riche. With the large number of public houses in Bath and their associated problems a strong temperance movement also developed to counteract them, and thus vice and vigilance went hand in hand throughout the century. After the 1824 Vagrancy Act, by which prostitutes could be arrested for 'wandering abroad', the records of the courts and volumes of "information concerning vagrants" have enabled a rich study to be made of the pattern of prostitution across the city, including tables of the numbers arrested in different areas over different periods. A number of cases were cited and the court's evidence read out, such as that concerning Eliza Clark in 1823, who confessed to being a "girl of the town" and was discharged so long as she left the city. She had been recently reapprehended in Walcot Street, where nine pubs offered overnight lodging to farmers attending the busy cattle market, which brought many visitors to that part of town alone. Prostitutes thrived on the city's visitors, farmers and other market tradesmen, travelling salesmen, militia men when they passed through, visitors to the citizens and, of course, those who came to take the waters. Theft was a profitable sideline for the girls, with Eliza Clarke herself having stolen £3 on top of the half crown 'going rate'. There was then the case of the girl who went under the wonderful name of Freelove Flower, who even solicited a police constable away from his beat on Bathwick Hill. Another interesting example quoted was that of Maria Price, who took Charles Callaway to the White Hart, one of a number of coaching inns where good business could be had, before being followed to a house "inhabited by girls of ill fame in Avon Street". A typical picture of life in Avon Street was depicted by Richard Cruikshank in 1825 under the title of "The Buff Club at the Pig & Whistle, Avon Street". The street was notoriously rough, and census enumerators, whose records of occupations include many blanks and of whom some were aged only 15, were often nervous enough to require the escort of a stout police officer. The city's police had a list of fifteen public houses

where thieving and prostitution were rife, but were reluctant to close them down in case the problem spread elsewhere.

The girls of the town lived amongst people struggling to make an honest survival against all the odds of the time in places such as Hat & Feather Yard, Walcot Street, described at the time as a "harbour of thieves, prostitutes, and characters of the worst descriptions, and a receptacle for stolen property" where the language was "most offensive to persons passing by, particularly on Sabbath days". The brothels themselves were often tucked away in the many alleys, some of them appropriately close to the theatre and playhouse. When the Reverend Skinner of Camerton came to the city he remarked that "I was not a little astonished, as I walked through Bath, to observe the streets so crowded with prostitutes, some of them apparently no more than fourteen or fifteen years of age". The prostitutes were recruited from the seasonal female servants, laundresses, needlewomen, and tailoresses who abounded in the city. Charities such as the "Refuge for Destitute Females" in Widcombe and the Bath Penitentiary in Walcot Street (the title can still be seen carved below the roofline of Ladymead House today) attempted to save the young, offering them refuge, support and education. They would then be found good honest work in service, the great irony being that those were the very jobs from which they probably strayed into the path of prostitution in the first place. This was a most fascinating talk, both interesting and entertaining, and the audience showed their appreciation accordingly.

MARK LEWCUN

WILLIAM BECKFORD' S TOWER and LANSDOWN BURIAL GROUND: Visit led by Jesca Verdon-Smith, 7 June 2000.

"I can hardly conceive a pleasanter spot to lie quiet in than the summit of Lansdown"
(William Beckford, 1760-1844)

In a summer of unseasonal weather we were fortunate to have a dry evening in June for our visit to the Burial Ground and into the Tower. Jesca Verdon-Smith, the Tower Trust Administrator, gave us a comprehensive talk on Beckford's background and lifestyle and how he used the Tower. She also brought us up to date on how the Burial Ground Project was proceeding.

Jesca led us on our walk along the cleared paths which link the Burial Ground to the Tower, while pointing out certain features and tombs of particular interest. We admired the restored cast-iron railings which, together with the main entrance gates, are now painted Brunswick green, the original colour, when built by John Vaughan of Bathwick to the designs of the Bath architect, Henry Edmund Goodridge (1799-1864).

The Abbey Cemetery, consecrated in 1844, was one of the first cemeteries in England and was designed by the great landscape gardener, John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843). Here William Beckford was interred in May 1844 in the great pink Aberdeen granite sarcophagus he ordered to be made two years before his death, keeping it in the grounds of the Tower until needed! These grounds and the Tower were given to Walcot Parish by Beckford's second daughter Susan, the Duchess of Hamilton, on condition that her father's sarcophagus was moved from the Abbey Cemetery to the upper slopes of Lansdown, which had now been consecrated. This was done on 28 April 1848.

Our walk took us among the tombs in the oldest section, that is to the North nearest the Tower, many of which have been photographed and the inscriptions recorded by the Bath Volunteers of NADFAS who will resume this work after the Autumn cut of wild grass and by BTCV volunteers.

After the walk in the Burial Grounds we went carefully into the Tower where the restoration work was still underway. Walking gingerly we climbed the 154 steps to the first storey and entered the various rooms, painted but so far, unfurnished and without curtains. We climbed the next flight of stairs to stand under the ornate ceiling below the cast iron cupola (perhaps by Coalbrookdale Company) now refurbished with 22 carat gold leaf to look out over the extensive panoramic views described by Beckford as *"This! This the finest prospect in Europe!"*

The Tower opened to the public on 1 July 2000 and I have returned to see more of this wonderful and worthwhile project, and will do so again before the Tower closes for the winter. It is open until the end of October on Saturdays and Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays from 10.30 a.m. to 5.p.m., admission £2.50 with the usual concessions.

JENNIFER BEAZLEY, FRSA

MEMBERS' NEWS

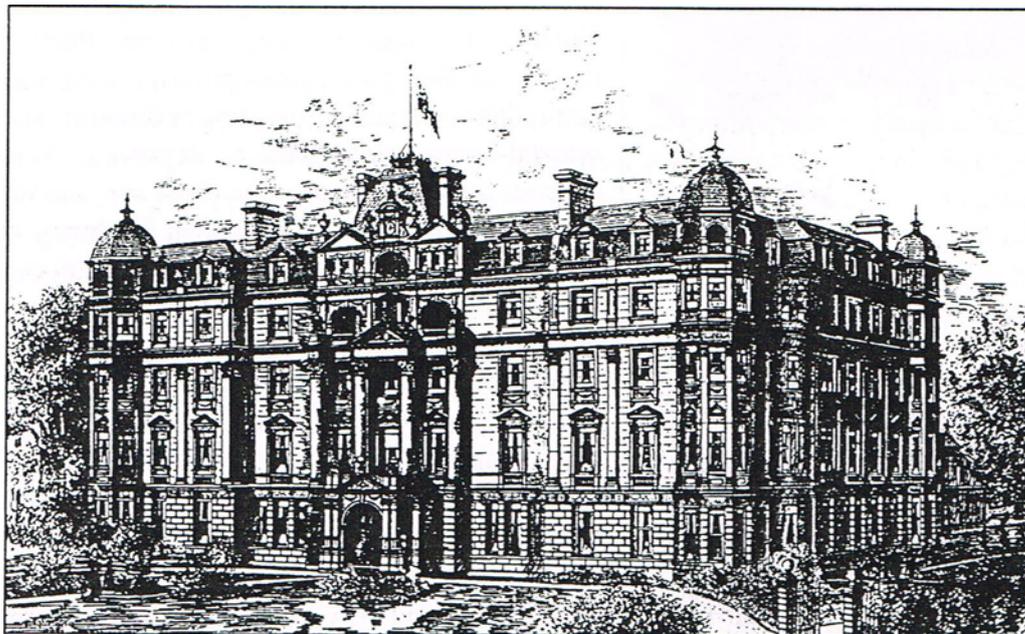
We welcome the following new members: Dr. Peter Carpenter, 24 Windsor Road, Bristol; Mrs. Dawn Hodgson of 2 Park Place, Bath and Dr. Donald Straughan, 9 Beaufort West, Bath.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Survey of Bath and District no.13 (June 2000). The Survey of Bath's latest newsletter contains several valuable short articles in addition to the usual quota of news items. Among them are Elizabeth Holland's account of the leather-working branch of the Chapmans, Ruth Haskins' reminiscences of the Emperor Haile Selassie, Jackie Wibberley's description of finds in the Ken Biggs Architectural Archive, Susan Sloman's inquiry into whether Hogarth painted Susanna Chapman and Allan Keevil's research pinpointing the exact location of the ancient conduit of Cornwell in Walcot Street.

Brenda Snaddon, *The Last Promenade: Sydney Gardens Bath* (Bath, Millstream Books, 2000), £6.50, ISBN 0948975598. An engagingly produced short history of Sydney Gardens, well illustrated in black-and-white and colour. Particularly good measure is given to the 19C, from its lay-out and planting (and the impact of the GWR) to attractions like the floral fetes and bandstand performances. The 20C is covered more sketchily but ends with the Council's recent renovation plan to which the author adds her own suggestions. (Reproduced below from the book is the proposal of 1894-6 for a monster new hotel to replace the existing building. Never built fortunately, but did it influence the design of the Empire Hotel

?)



Two Bristol books: Peter Aughton, *Bristol: a People's History* (Carnegie Pub, 2000) — an account based largely on secondary sources but well supplied with maps and pictures and Francis Neale ed, *William Worcestre: the Topography of Medieval Bristol* (Bristol Record Society vol 51, 2000) — the Latin text and English translation of Worcestre's unique survey of the city in 1480 with an editorial preface and a reproduction of Millerd's 1673 map of Bristol.

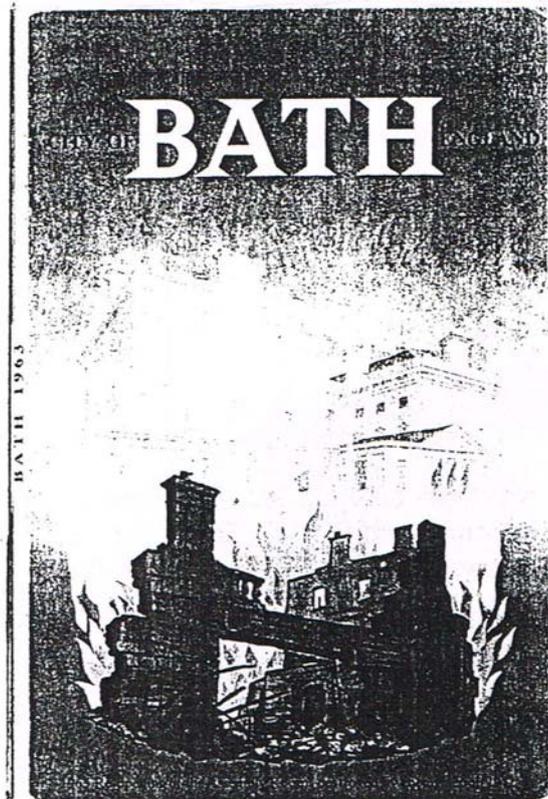
Tim Bullamore, *Fifty Festivals: the History of the Bath Festival* (Bath, Mushroom Pub), £12.99, ISBN 1899142290.

David Falconer, *Bath Abbey, Bath in Old Photographs* (Stroud, Sutton, 1999), £9.99, ISBN 0750923113.

David and Jonathan Falconer, *Bath at War, 1939-1945* (Stroud, Sutton and Bath Chronicle, 2000), £9.99, ISBN 075091995.

Peter Borsay, *The Image of Georgian Bath: Towns, Heritage and History* (Oxford U.P., 2000), ISBN 0198202652. No conventional history of Bath this, but an altogether novel exploration of how the city has been perceived, imagined, depicted and promoted over the past 300 hundred years. In a talk given to the HBRG in 1989 Peter Borsay offered us a foretaste. Since then he has broadened his inquiry and backed it up with an impressive trawl of printed and archival sources in which humble guidebooks and other local literature take unexpected pride of place. But documentation of every kind is brought into play and is shown to reveal not merely objective information but also latent attitudes and hidden

The Cover of the Official Bath Guide 1963
Showing the Restored Assembly Rooms
Risen like a Phoenix from the Ashes



agendas.

Bath figured prominently in Peter Borsay's influential earlier book, *The English Urban Renaissance*, and it image. As he reminds us, it is a place people have felt a 'compulsive propensity to mythologize'. Few comparable cities have been so much portrayed in word and picture. Over few does the weight of heritage loom so heavily. But Bath's Georgian image is in reality a plurality of images evolving over time. Perceptions of the spa to Georgian contemporaries were mixed and contradictory: health-promoting or diseased, sociable or scandal-loving, pleasurable or depraved. Wanting to distance themselves from a frivolous age, the Victorians took a more moralistic line on their forebears, but then, towards 1900, a more nostalgic, sentimental view of the Georgian heyday began to prevail. And despite the modernist movement's protest around the mid-20C or the findings of serious historical research, it is nostalgia which still colours the past. This book identifies two key components in the sustained fascination with Georgian Bath — the emphasis on personalities (at an anecdotal level) and on the great architectural set-pieces. The trio of Nash, Allen and Wood head a pantheon of Bath names which runs from Gainsborough and Sheridan, Pitt and Nelson, Herschel and Beckford,

Jane Austen and Dickens to the mythical Bladud and Sally Lunn. In architecture too, despite the competition of the Roman Baths and the mediaeval Abbey Church (which the Victorians played up so strongly), the tendency has inevitably been to stress the Georgian. This was vividly apparent in the furore about the 'sack of Bath' in the 1970s and in the priorities of the preservation movement throughout.

Although the volume is rather sparsely illustrated, some of the visual images it does offer are telling — covers from official guides and promotional railway posters for example. The 1909 Pageant, the Bath Festival, museum displays, guided tours, pictorial maps, iconic Bath views, commemorative mural tablets, documentary film, all come under Peter Borsay's purview of the varied media promoting or exploiting Bath (and in a future edition he might add something on television period drama and, of course, the Internet). Three whole chapters, full of valuable insights, discuss the commercial, socio-political and psychological uses to which a positive Georgian image has been put, and a final section sets the case of Bath in a national context and draws lessons from this local study that may apply to the investigation of the wider heritage phenomenon and indeed to the enterprise of history at large. Altogether this is a rich, searching and thought-provoking book that no-one interested in the identity of Bath should ignore.

Review by TREVOR FAWCETT

HISTORICAL GAZETTEER OF BATH

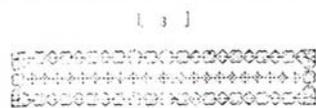
Since work started a considerable file of information has already accumulated, but this is a large-scale project which will require the assistance and input of as many volunteers as possible. A data-collection form has been drafted but will need modification in the light of Allan Keevil's comments following his attempts to use it for recording information on the Brougham Hayes district. Helpers need not wait for this, however, and could record any obviously relevant details on the history of streets and buildings: namely, dates of lay-out and construction; the developers, architects and builders concerned; information about subsequent changes, demolition and rebuilding; plus any other useful material on the site and its history. At present the data files are being simply word-processed, but a small subset has been edited in a separate file and placed on disk at Bath Record Office. This sample short list of entries is available for general consultation. Any comments you wish to make on the examples so far provided will be very welcome. If you would like to offer help on the project, please contact me first in order to discuss the streets or sources of information you would like to cover. Work on directories, maps and Council records, for instance, would all be especially useful.

TREVOR FAWCETT

WILLIAM GYE, 'THE HUMANE PRINTER'

The annals of Bath are crowded not only with famous names but with many lesser figures who deserve to be celebrated in some future dictionary of Bath biography (a DBB - now there's a project!). William Gye certainly has claims to be better known. Born in 1750, son of a Yeovil apothecary, he may well be a younger brother of the Bath apothecary Richard Guy (d.1782). Presumably after a trade apprenticeship he set up as a general printer in Westgate Street around 1771, the year he printed W. Shirley's *A Narrative ... relative to the Rev. Mr. Wesley's ... late Conference*, a 24-page pamphlet commissioned by a bookseller in Kingsmead Square (sample page below). Besides everyday jobbing work (commercial stationery, handbills, legal documents, calling cards, etc.— an example is 'James Attwood' copied below) he printed sermons and other small publications, mostly of a religious character. He sold books in a small way and, like most provincial printer/booksellers, probably dealt in teas and patent medicines as a sideline. More ambitiously, in May 1773 he tried his hand at publishing a newspaper, *The Bath*

Courant, which has left no residue in either Bath Central Library or the British Museum and must have been very short-lived (perhaps only seven issues); Gye's partner in the project later went on to edit his own journal, *Salmon's Mercury*, of which copies do survive.



A
LETTER to a FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,

TO prevent any false Representations of what pass on the Objections made by me and others to the doctrinal Points of the Minutes of Mr. Hylly's Conference, held in LONDON, August the 7th, 1770; a short Narrative of Facts will be the best means to clear up the whole most fully to you, Sir, and to any who may impartially wish for Information; and is particularly due to those Ministers of the GOSPEL, who by Letter or Protest, expressed their united Sentiments with ours, in supposing those Minutes dangerous to the fundamental Truths of Christianity, I shall therefore begin with presenting you with the Extract itself, that gave us the Alarm.

EXTRACT

From the Minutes of some late Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Hylly and others, at a public Conference held in London, August the 7th, and printed by W. Pove, Bristol.

Take heed to your Doctrine.

"We find in 1744, 'We have kill'd too much toward Calvinism.' Where?"

A 2

1. 1771

BATH

JAMES ATWOOD,
Smith, Brazier, and Tin-Man,

TAKES this Method to return his sincere Thanks to all his Friends, both in Town and Country, for their past Favours; and to inform them he is removed from his late Shop in *Stall-Street*, to a large and more convenient one (see carrying on the above Branches)

AT THE
Upper End of *Cheap-Street*,
Facing the MARKET-PLACE,

Where he humbly solicits their future Favours; and every Article in the above Branches will continue to be sold at the most reasonable Rates, and the Smith Branch executed with Neatness and Dispatch.

A. L. C. ent Variety of *Bath-Stoves*, and all Sorts of Light and Black Grates.

BATH: Printed by W. GALE, in Market-Street.

In 1774 Gye married the 16-year-old Mary Batchelor by whom he would eventually have sixteen children. His address was now 4 Westgate Buildings. It is uncertain when he became interested in the unhappy lot of prison debtors, but the Society for the Discharge and Relief of Persons Imprisoned for Small Debts (or Thatched House Society) — set up in London in 1772 — was imitated sooner or later in Bath, and by the 1780s William Gye was fully engaged in the cause. Though he collected donations for the Bath prison in Grove Street, it was the county gaol at Ilchester that most obsessed him. Over thirty miles from Bath, dozens of small debtors lingered in this forgotten institution, often for years, remote from friends and relations and the usual sources of philanthropy. After assessing their plight on the spot in December 1786 Gye set energetically to work, running off large quantities of his pamphlet, *The Test of Philanthropy, Charily and Benevolence*, and helping to organise a charity concert at the Guildhall. For the rest of his life he would serve this cause, constantly raising funds to pay for the release of the neediest debtors and to supply provisions and coals to the rest. At his shop he collected old clothes for the prisoners. In 1794 he issued an influential metal trade token bearing the words 'Remember the Debtors in Ilchester Gaol', and in 1797 a 12-page poem, *The Confin'd Debtor*, priced expensively at a shilling to benefit the funds. The token and the poem's title-page both carried the same graphic image (used also by the Society in London) — showing a female figure of Charity holding an olive branch and directing a boy with a large key to open the prison from whose grated window hangs a box for donations.



During the 1790s William Gye remained prominent in other ways. By 1793 he had moved his shop next to the *Christopher Inn* in the Marketplace. When war broke out with France his business extended into issuing the certificates that exempted residents from militia service (provided they paid for a substitute). Unlike some printers Gye was no radical. Pointedly he and his printing shop staff all signed the Loyalist Association declaration in 1793, and he was a keen supporter of the working men's benefit clubs legitimised by the Friendly Societies Act of the same year. In 1793-4 he revised and printed the rules of a dozen or more such clubs, represented their members at Bath Quarter Sessions, and published the details of their annual beflagged processions through the city.

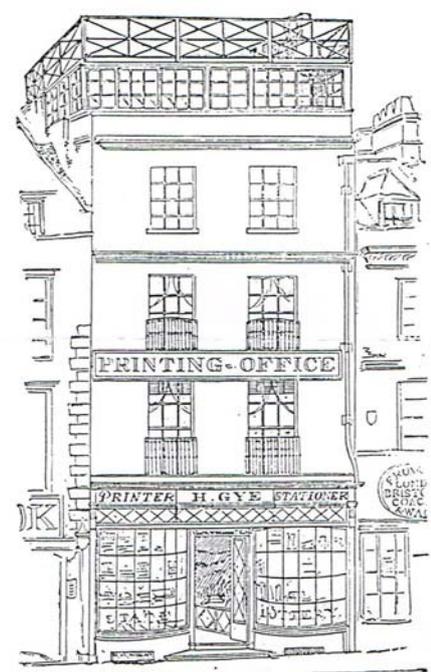
He became embroiled too in the case of Mrs. Leigh Perrot, Jane Austen's aunt, being a trustee for the bankrupt owner of the shop from which the lace was alleged to be stolen. He was even suspected of being complicit in the accusation and did eventually profit from his situation by printing an account of the Taunton trial. The fact that the Leigh Perrots were lodged for months at Ilchester, though not too uncomfortably in the gaoler's house, must have been especially piquant to him.

Gye's death of an apoplectic seizure in April 1802 came suddenly. References in the obituaries to the 'public esteem' in which he was held were sincere, and a huge congregation attended his funeral service at the Abbey Church. Eleven children survived him (though his eldest son William had died aged 20 in 1797). His widow Mary, still only 44, took charge of the printing business, initially with her son Frederick until he left c.1806 to found the printing firm of Gye & Balne in London. Another son, Henry, presumably then took his place and the firm was prospering well enough in 1808 to renew the old stock of typefaces with twenty founts suitable for a wide range of work from fine books to fancy posters. Around 1815 Henry Gye became sole proprietor. The *Bath Directory* he brought out in 1819 illustrates his Marketplace shop with its glassed-in roof extension. By this stage his brother Frederick had struck gold in London with a winning lottery ticket which launched his future public career as head of twin tea and wine firms, as proprietor of Vauxhall Gardens, and as M.P. for Chippenham. Henry Gye died in 1828 and his Bath printing business was sold to Charles Hunt.

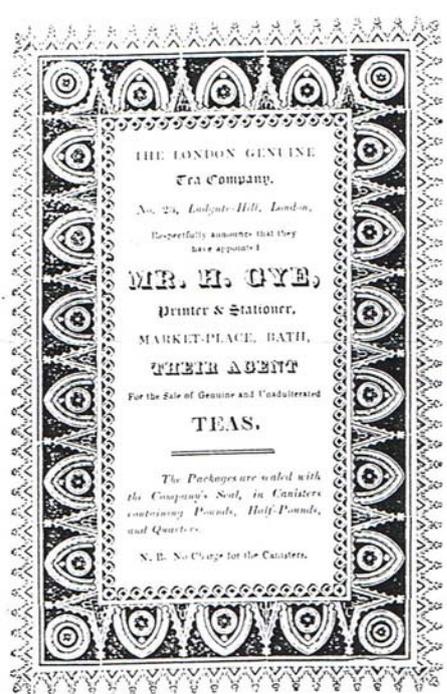
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AN
OUTLINE
OF
CHRONOLOGY,
CONNECTING
SACRED WITH PROFANE HISTORY
(DESIGNED FOR YOUNG PERSONS)
TO WHICH IS ADDED
A POETICAL CHRONOLOGY
OF
ENGLISH HISTORY,
With Explanatory Notes.

BATH,
PRINTED AND SOLD BY M. GYE, MARKET-PLACE.
SOLD ALSO BY
CRAMPANTO AND WHEATON, JEWRY-STREET, AGENTS; AND
JORDON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON;
W. BROWNE, TOLL-PORT, BRISTOL; AND
MOST OTHER BOOKSELLERS.
1805.



A large and valuable Stock of Writing Papers always on Sale, at the above Old Established Cheap Writing Paper Warehouse, Market-Place, Bath.



Please note the next issue will be out on 1 February 2001, and that I intend that to be my last. Who is willing to be my editorial successor?

The Newsletter is compiled and typed by Judith Samuel.