



NEWSLETTER 28

SEPTEMBER 1995

GROUP NEWS

MEETINGS HELD MAY - JUNE 1995

On 11 May we joined forces with our sister society, the Widcombe and Lyncombe History Study Group, which (as Doreen Collyer explained) first developed from 1989 under the Widcombe Association but now meets independently 8-9 times a year, building up an archive on the parish as it goes. The first of the evening's three contributions came from Andrew Ellis and Mary Hamlen, and centred on the history of St. Mark's School. Opened to poor parish children (both infants and juniors) in 1845 after a find-raising campaign by local worthies, the School becomes better documented from 1862 thanks to the logbooks mandatory from that date. The next two headmasters lasted only briefly, but standards and attendances improved 1864-71 under the third, who was keen on annual exams and prizes, cricket and school songs. The School reached its zenith from 1872 onwards, as the inspectors regularly testified, during the 38-year headship of David Clark. St. Mark's ended in 1963 when it merged with Widcombe Junior School but its lengthy series of logbooks illuminate and reflect parish affairs, health and social conditions, educational policy and even national events. Brian Howard then turned our attention to secluded Lyncombe Vale and the long-lasting market gardening business of the Kitley family. The nursery at the western end of the Vale probably existed from the early 19C under the seedsman and florist Edward Bartlett, but by 1841 was leased by the philoprogenitive James Kitley under whom the firm prospered. In the 1860s he employed ten men and ran two stalls in Bath Market, and in due course the nursery passed to sons and then grandsons. Nevertheless in the 1880s, when the Kitleys finally purchased the land, the business represented only a fraction of the extensive nurserymen's trade at Bath - a history itself worth pursuing. Our last speaker, Connie Smith, began by recalling another family business, the 18C stonemasonry/stonecarving firm of the Greenways, creators of St. John's Court. Around 1704 Thomas Greenway built an imposing Classical house in Claverton Street and in 1707 converted one room to take a cold plunge bath, 15' x 8' in size, which soon became well frequented by Bath visitors. An attempt to sell it in 1748 failed and Cold Bath House remained in the family's hands until 1800. Cold bathing there ended c.1835 and the building served other uses (e.g. housing the Southern Dispensary for a short time) eventually becoming badly dilapidated before its final demolition for road widening in 1960.

Members who joined the Lansdown-Sion Hill walk on 14 June were supplied with two maps showing the area in 1740 and c.1840, before and after the fields were covered with streets, buildings and gardens. Indeed Thorp's survey map of Walcot parish in 1740 marks every field boundary and shows that the gradual release of individual fields to builders determined the eventual pattern of development - first around Morford Street/Montpelier (1760s), then Rivers

Street (1770s), Burlington Street (1780s), St. James's Square, (1790s), Cavendish Road (early 19C), ending with Sion Hill Place (c.1820). Much telling detail can also be spotted on the ground to supplement the documentary evidence - for example in Rivers Street the contrast between John Wood II's terraces and the humbler houses on plots he never secured, the inferior designs of Burlington Street, the sudden change of level near Portland Place where the understreet vaults end, the funnelling out at the top of Northampton Street (perhaps to improve the views from Rock House above), the details of windows in Upper Park Street - a steep ascent no longer dominated (as Dickens found it) by the pinnacled bulk of All Saints' Chapel. On the other hand the regularity of St. James's Square belies the patchy sequence of its erection and the complications that arose when the four main developers - overcommitted financially - had to surrender forty leases to the landlord Rivers Gay. The fine private gardens of the Hon. Charles Hamilton and Christopher Anstey were soon sacrificed to Northampton Street and St. James's Square, the Glaciere tea garden fell to Cavendish Crescent, but other plots were slow to be released - hence the late building up of Harley Street (1820s) or the truncation of Great Bedford Street when the Little Butty Piece could not be obtained. The new desire for views, healthy sites, and miniature private estates encouraged the spread of cottages miles and substantial villas on Sion Hill in the decades around 1800, though again field boundaries and land ownership conditioned what was built and where. Towards the end of the walk we were given entrée to two private Sion Hill gardens, allowing detailed views of the buildings, before our final port of call when Sue and Ron Sloman kindly entertained us at their own house - a perfect finale to the HBRG's season. The team of guides for the preceding tour of the neighbourhood comprised Jane and Arnold Root, Francis Kelly, Graham Finch, Trevor Fawcett and Kirsten Elliott.

PROGRAMME 1995-96

The tenth anniversary of the HBRG falls late next April when it is hoped to mark the occasion by a special event, perhaps a celebratory supper. Details of this will appear in the January Newsletter. Otherwise the programme for 1995-96 follows the familiar pattern, with a majority of speakers drawn from our own members - proof not only of the range of expertise within the HBRG but also of the willingness of members to contribute. Three speakers make welcome returns - Angus Buchanan (on his retirement now reflecting on the University of Bath's progress), Sue Sloman (continuing her reappraisal of Gainsborough's Bath career), and Steve Poole (taking forward his study of local political radicalism first published in Bath History vol. 3). Kirsten Elliott, Sally Butler and Mac Hopkins-Clarke join our speakers' ranks for the first time, respectively presenting their research on the development of upper Lansdown, on early Swainswick, and on the Bath stage. In November two lecturers from the University's Centre for Advanced Studies in Architecture (CASA) will describe, among other topics, the computer modelling of Bath's physical environment, and in January a practising local dental surgeon will focus attention on Georgian teeth and dentistry. Finally, in June we shall be guided round a particularly rewarding ancient neighbourhood by Mary Stacey, currently Avon's Conservation Officer working on the Historic Landscape Assessment Project. Please note that we are experimenting this season with a new venue - the BRLSI in Queen Square, now refurbished and hospitable.

MEMBERS' NEWS

Warm congratulations to Alex Kolaczkowski on obtaining her Ph.D. from the University of Bath with a thesis on 'The Politics of Civic Improvement: Bath 1835-1879 with special reference to the Career of Sir Jerom Murch'.

We also welcome two new members:

Mr. J.S. Farrow, 10 Lime Grove, Bath, BA2 4HS; whose special interests lie in Bath's intellectual life c. 1780-1820 and in William Matthews, Quaker and second Secretary (after Edmund Rack) of the Bath and West Society.

Miss Helen Geake, 1 Royal Crescent, Bath, BA1 2LR; whose special interests are building construction and archxological history and the Bath district in the 5th-9th centuries A.D. She has recently succeeded Christopher Woodward at the Bulding of Bath Museum.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. Jean Manco, 'The Buildings of Bath Priory' Somerset Archxological and Natural History Proceedings for 1993, vol 137 (1995) pp. 75-109.
2. Alex Kolaczkowski, 'Jerom Murch and Unitarianism in Bath, 1833-45' Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society, vol. 21, no. 1 (1995) pp. 15-29.
3. K.R. Dark, 'Town or "Temenos"? a reinterpretation of the walled area of "Aqua Sulis"', Britannia, vol. 24 (1993) pp. 254-5.

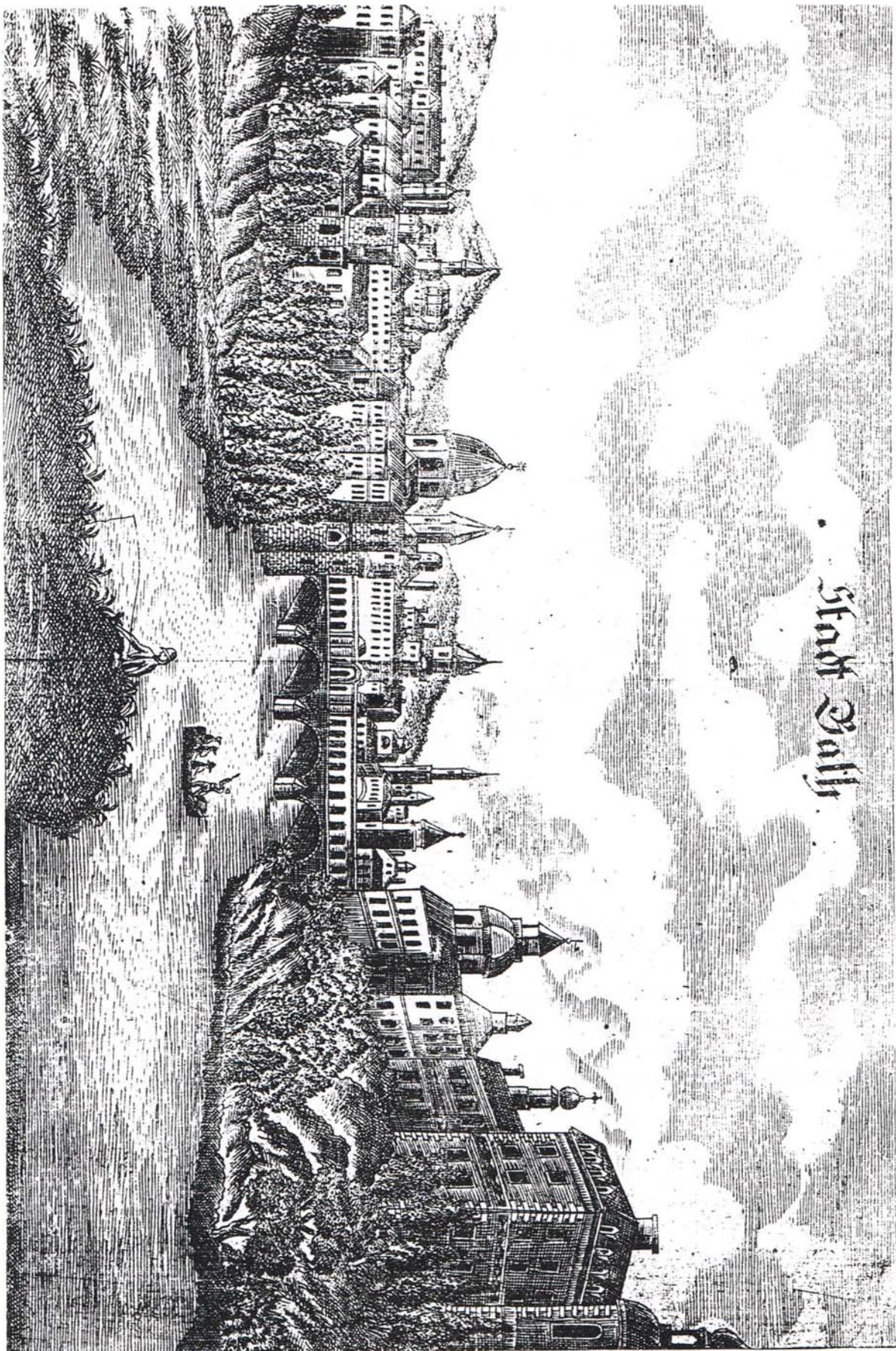
Rolf H. Bremmer jun., 'An old English rhyming curse' [from Bath Abbey], Notes and Queries, December 1993, pp. 434-5.

Colvin & Moggridge and Debois Landscape Survey Group, Royal Victoria Park: a Survey of the Landscape [for Bath City Council], 1993.

6. Susan L. Sloman, 'Gainsborough in Bath, 1758-59', Burlington Magazine vol. 137 (August 1995), pp. 509-512. [Proves that Gainsborough worked in Bath during the winter season 1758-59.]
7. Bath City Life is running a series of short pieces on controversial Bath MPs: William Prynne (John Wroughton, in Winter 1994/5 issue), William Crouch (Jean Manco, May-June 1995), J.A. Roebuck (John Wroughton, July-August 1995), the elder William Pitt (Trevor Fawcett, Sept-Oct 1995). A possible future subject - Chris Patten.
8. Stuart Burroughs has an item on the early years of the Horstmann engineering firm in BIAS Journal no. 27, 1984. The same issue also includes brief articles on the water supply to houses in Georgian Bath, on digging Bath Stone, and on the restoration of Cleveland Bridge.

A VIEW OF BATH IN 1824

The work of psychologists, art historians and others interested in visual imagery has demonstrated that even apparently exact representations of the visible world, indeed even documentary photographs, are usually far from being objective, neutral and unproblematic. No depiction of Bath therefore can be absolutely taken on trust, and certainly not the hand-crafted pictures, drawings and prints we so often rely on for evidence of past street scenes, building details, interiors, etc. Yet with meticulous-seeming artists it is all too easy to be taken in. By contrast the extreme distortions in the view opposite are obvious at a glance and show that assumptions and expectations about how a town 'ought' to look can modify an image, not necessarily with deliberate intent, to meet those expectations. Here in fact we have a Central European perspective on Bath, complete with Romanesque towers and Baroque domes, an easily assimilated townscape for the citizens of Zittau, a town in S.E. Germany close to the Polish and Czech borders. This copperplate version (possibly at several removes from the original drawing) appeared in the monthly *Zittauer Neuigkeitstrager* [the Zittau News-Bearer] for October 1824. It was accompanied by a page or so of descriptive text in which Bath is called one of the 'most remarkable and famous cities not just of England but of all civilised Europe', especially striking when viewed from a high point on the other side of the Avon [Beechen Cliff, no doubt]. The fact that the author puts the population at 25,000 and says that the newer buildings date from 50-to-60 years earlier suggests that at least part of the account derives from a source nearer the 1780s/1790s than 1824. Another section, however, speaks of the 50-plus physicians and surgeons resident in 1802, with 29 apothecaries besides. The writer refers to the cheerful spectacle of the beau monde taking their evening promenade in the sweet meadows [Crescent Fields?] and to the fact that Bath's high season occurs in the winter months, quite unlike the custom at its less stylish German equivalents. 'It goes without saying', he adds, 'that the citizens constantly try to empty the purses of their rich visitors and that the doctors above all know how to invest in the goldmines here'. He ends by pointing out that Bath is not famous for manufacturing or any trade but 'Galanteriewaaren', [fancy goods, 'toys', etc.] which attain great perfection here, the luxury shops bearing comparison with any in London.



REGISTRATION OF CITY PROPERTIES

Following the concern expressed at the last AGM about the failure of the City Administration to respond to letters, the HBRG Committee has again pressed for action on the registration of city-owned properties to ensure that no important documentation can be lost to the Bath Record Office in any future sales. We have finally elicited replies on 29 June and 18 July) from the Chief Administrator, Mr. Graham Russell, who apologises for the tardy response and writes as follows:

Despite our best endeavours to establish a system to ensure the City Archivist had sight of all pre-1870 documents relating to property before they were released from the Council's custody, evidence shows that this has not worked. The solution which you are now advocating on the registration of all property earmarked for sale is certainly one way to help resolve [any] difficulty in the future, as will a more rigid system to allow the Archivist the opportunity to keep copies of all leases, etc. passing out of the Council's possession.

My colleague in charge of the Conveyancing Section will issue the appropriate guidance to his staff

I can, however, give no undertaking at the present time with regard to the registration of all City property. Such a task would be very time-consuming when all staff are busy dealing with Local Government Reorganisation.

The issue will, however, be one left on the table for discussion with colleagues in the new authority at the earliest opportunity.

STOP PRESS:

NEW HOME FOR HOSPITAL RECORDS

The archive of the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (Mineral Water Hospital) has just been deposited at Bath Record Office on indefinite loan, so making this important material much more readily available for consultation and safeguarding it from the risk of physical damage and deterioration.

The Newsletter is compiled by the Secretary and typed by Judith Samuel.