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NEWSLETTER 51

OCTOBER 2003

## GROUP NEWS

### **A Word from the Editor.**

As some of you may have noticed, one newsletter has not come out. I took this decision when, as Professor Angus Buchanan himself pointed out, his lecture at the AGM had been delivered before to the group, and a record of it already exists. I was then told that the meeting at St John's Bathwick was going to be very much abbreviated, as the council had refused to allow entry into the cemetery. In the event, which sadly I was unable to attend, I understand there was a very interesting talk, of which David Crellin is supplying the details. I took the decision there fore to combine two newsletters. However, the offers to contribute remain disappointingly low, and I have decided, therefore, to step down as editor in the hope that someone else may be able to fire up more enthusiasm. I have said I will continue to end of this programme year (i.e. June 2004) but should anyone feel ready to take over sooner, I will be more than happy to hand over, as increased pressure of work is making it more difficult to give the time to the newsletter that I would wish.

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### **MEETINGS FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, MAY & JUNE 2003.**

**February at the Museum of Bath at Work**

#### **RESEARCHING A VILLAGE HISTORY**

Speaker Alan Dodge: Report Julia Moss

Alan Dodge, a name known to many of us through his book "Freshford, a village history", has lived in Freshford for 37 years. He is founder and chairman of the Freshford Local History Society. He opened his review of research into his home village by reminding us that the first question to ask of any settlement is "Why Here?" In the majority of cases the reason is to be found in the physical landscape,

frequently relating to water. Every village is a microcosm of English history but each is unique. The cloth trade of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries had been responsible for shaping much of the history of Freshford.

He gave a useful graph setting the different strands of research against a time line – the physical evidence (landscape, buildings, artefacts) starting from around 500BC, manuscripts from about 1000AD, printed records from about 1500 and oral records largely starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These different sources of information he then took in turn, illustrating his talk with slides.

In the first category, visual evidence, were field patterns and field names, a useful pointer to use and ownership. Drawing on his own research, he told of the thrill of finding an old stone parish boundary marker hidden in undergrowth. With the aid of a map, we were shown an area of uneven ground at the edge of Hayes Wood which was known to have been part of the boundary of an Iron Age camp. It was safe to assume that the fields adjoining the Wood had been cultivated over centuries obliterating all traces of settlement but excavations of the mounds in the Wood in the 1930s had indeed produced interesting archaeological finds. A case study of a field brought to light the existence of a row of cottages destroyed by fire towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We were shown a fascinating photo of the luckless families outside their burnt out homes, together with the telegram from the bailiff giving the owner of the field (in the same family ownership today) the bad news. In another case an aerial view showed up earthworks around Peipard's Farm which, we learnt, related to a second village in Freshford parish, Woodwick, which had completely disappeared with the amalgamation of the two churches at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Buildings provided a vital second strand in any local history research, windows in particular. A view of Freshford centre showed buildings, some much altered, ranging in date from 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The original old forge was interesting in that today's pantiles overlaid thatch. Evidence could also literally be unearthed. On a token dug up in a Freshford garden, Dunkirk Mill 1795 was shown as a 5-storied building, with windows virtually identical to those on the same building now converted into three houses minus two stories. Two other tokens, once used as local currency, had been found – one marked Peter Fisher 1669 and the other John Curle 1663, both known to be cloth merchants. Just recently a papal bull dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century had been given him by a local resident. Perhaps this was connected with the monastery at nearby Hinton Charterhouse.

Manuscript evidence came from unpublished village records: from registers, church warden's accounts, vestry minutes, school log books, burial boards, parish council minutes, parochial church council minutes and other domestic records, such as those from family archives. The example of the village fire engine showed how one subject can be traced through a variety of such records.

Evidence of history through printed records can come from tracts – and we were shown one from the Civil War period – and from newspapers and drawings. Here was a rich source of material.

Finally, research could be followed through the oral record. This was a potential mine of information. If only more had been recorded before it was too late! Indeed a fitting note on which to end.

## March at the Museum of Bath at Work

### 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY THEATRE IN BATH

Speaker Mac Hopkins Clark: Report Andrew Ellis

Mac Hopkins-Clarke's talk was an extremely welcome sequel to his article in *Bath History IV*. The talk was accompanied by an interesting display of theatre posters, documents, leases, etc. and benefited from Mac's discovery and research into a cache of records at the University of Bristol – removed there on the 1980s restoration of Bath's Theatre Royal – and some more from “a lady who walked into the Holburne one day”.

He subtitled his talk ‘A struggle for survival’ – the struggle which was engaged in by the managers – no fewer than twenty-three of them through the nineteenth century – who followed John Palmer into the new 1805 Theatre Royal, Bath. This struggle in Bath reflected theatre-going in the country as a whole, which for various economic and social reasons went into decline in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Briefly, the managers faced at least five major and virtually insuperable problems:

1. The complex tontine agreement by which funds were raised to remove the theatre from Orchard Street and build the new one in Beaufort Square. Each tontine subscriber received £6 *per annum* annuity and one free admission ticket to every performance (which could amount to 200 ‘comped’ sets per performance!) They were mostly greedy, absentee profiteers, taking more than a realistic share of the profits (if any) of the theatre receipts right up until the Great Fire in the theatre in 1862.
2. The Salary bill. Though the stock repertory company of about fifteen very versatile players cost little (and stayed many years, the public becoming very attached to them) leading national actors (Kean, Macready) were expensive. They were a good draw (e.g. playing thirteen different major roles in thirteen nights) but were paid by a benefit system, taking large percentages of the gross at each performance. Musicians (especially the famous orchestra leader Mr. Loder) added to the salary bill.
3. The manager's revenue suffered because of the wide range of ticket prices. Not only did prices vary according to the location of the new theatre's nearly 2,000 seats, but the custom was for an evening's performance to begin, at 6.30 p.m., with a serious play, followed by an interlude and then a farce, ending at 11.00. Many people (often the majority) preferred to come in halfway through to see only the lighter fare and were thereby required to pay only half price.
4. Another difficulty was a gradual change in the social profile of the audience. As more of the working class took to theatre-going, they felt that having paid their pennies, their opinions regarding programming should be heard. Hence more farces, fewer Shakespeare productions, less revenue from more expensive seats. Mac's theory is that in this influx of the working class into leisure activities lie the seeds of the Music Hall.
5. With the above problems came the moral disapproval of the churches. Time and again managers trying to please the masses and increase receipts were thwarted by moral pressure.

Mac then talked about some of the plucky nineteenth-century managers who struggled (but almost failed) to keep the TRB from going dark.

The first, Wyatt Diamond, was also an actor and came from Orchard Street with John Palmer. He died in 1812 and his son took over and became well respected for his efforts to widen the repertoire – introducing Gothic melodramas, spectacular props, costumes and scenery and even animal acts. In 1823 the long-time stage manager Mr Charlton took over and brought in big London names (for example, John Braham, protégé of Rauzzini) but his popular programming fell foul of the moral authorities and he was sacked.

In 1827 Plim Bellamy (formerly lessee of the Upper Rooms) had a sip at the poisoned TRB chalice but hardly had he introduced gaslighting (by Stothert & Pitt) than he had to admit financial defeat and his place was taken by Mr. Woulds who suffered even worse. He reduced the theatre to a five-month season and the resulting losses led to his bankruptcy, divorce and confinement in Ilchester Gaol.

In the 1840s Mrs Macready, although successful lessee of the Theatre Royal Bristol, came to the TRB, but she could not make it pay and fought unsuccessfully with the unsympathetic tontine shareholders to make the venture more viable. One year she reported to them she had managed to open the theatre 92 nights, but “that exceeded the wants of the town” and she played at a loss of £12 14s 0d a night. Her stepson James Chute was beginning to show some financial success when in 1862 came the fire which, though disastrous in terms of what it destroyed, may have been a financial blessing because the surviving tontine shareholders did not intend to rebuild the theatre and it was through the efforts of the city’s business and political community (e.g. Jerom Murch) that the tontine was paid off and dissolved. With a pool of £8000 from insurance and public subscription the theatre was rebuilt,

Immediately its administration was more business-like, its rent was reduced, its programming became more viable and from the 1860s to the end of the century there was a general – and national – upsurge in theatre-going with better plays, more serious writing (e.g. G B Shaw) and acting (e.g. Irving) greater technical innovation such as limelighting and the musical hall element separated off (in Bat, from 1888 with the building of the Palace theatre.) Greater trials lay in the future, but as the Theatre faced the twentieth century the future looked secure.

### **April – AGM at Manvers St Baptist Church**

Minutes have already been circulated by the Secretary.

The AGM was poorly attended, which was disappointing for the committee. The talk by Professor Angus Buchanan, has already been reported in an earlier newsletter.

### **May at Bathwick**

#### **THE CEMETERY AT ST JOHN’S BATHWICK**

Speakers Members of the Bathwick local History Society: Report David Crellin

Please accept my apologies for the shortness of the report. Originally this meeting had been planned as a walk around the cemetery. However, the council in their wisdom has decided that the site is unsafe and so we had to be content with a slide show giving an overview of the key features of the cemetery. It is also deeply disturbing that they plan to make the site safer by potentially damaging a number of historical remains.

There are number of interesting burials on site which include John Pinch. His tomb is still intact and identifiable.

We were also given a fascinating overview of the development of the church and funerary chapel on the site. The chapel is now sadly in a very bad state (hence the safety issue). Old photographs and prints were shown which gave a clear view of how the site looked before the developments in Bathwick. Not least it was fascinating to see a print of Bathwick house before it became part of a terrace!

We were also told of the disturbing news that the Council plan to make the site safer by potentially damaging a number of historical remains.

Thanks go to the local society for all their investigative work in charting the history of the site and presenting such an interesting talk.

### **June - Summer Outing at SMALLCOMBE CEMETERY**

Speaker/Guide Andrew Ellis: Report Dr Mary Ede.

Bath has a green skyline but also green tongues reaching into its centre. One of these, Smallcombe, lies between the Bathwick and Widcombe Hills and the cemetery is almost hidden up against Smallcombe Wood. St Mary’s Bathwick, in whose parish it is, bought land here in 1855 and its “extended” cemetery was opened in 1856. A few years later the City Council acquired the adjoining area for nonconformist burials (the wall keeping the dead apart). The cemetery is now closed, i.e. no further burials beyond additions to family plots, and is looked after by B&NES. The Anglican Chapel, in a sorry condition today, was designed by Thomas Fuller, (1822 – 98), a member of the Bath coachbuilders’ family who was assistant to and later partner of James Wilson. He was the architect of Bradford-on-Avon’s Town Hall now sensitively adapted for RC Worship, but moved to Canada on winning a competition for the new Parliament building in Ottawa. The nonconformist chapel, in an attractive octagonal shape, was designed by the younger Goodridge (AS).

As might be expected, there are very few ornamented monuments in the nonconformist section but Andrew Ellis pointed out the unusual draped urn on top of Edward Hancock’s grave. He was a prominent wine merchant d. 1883 who was elected to the new reformed City Council after the Municipal act of

1835. The other nonconformist grave of particular interest is that of Frederick Bladwell, of the building firm family who died 1928 after many years devoted service to the Dolemeads Mission. (See Louie Stride's description of him in *Memoirs of a Street Urchin* Page 31.)

Then we passed through the dividing wall into the larger Anglican section and walked along the upper terrace with splendid views over Bath. Andrew had picked out a number of interesting graves and monuments and we picked our way down the steep slope behind him. Among these were those of John Stothert d. 1879 and his son, George Kelson d. 1908 who joined the engineering side of the Stothert dynasty in Bristol; George Fosbery who won the VC aged 30 on the NW Frontier of India in 1865 and went on to a distinguished military career; Herbert Asquith d. 1947 and Lady Cynthia Asquith d. 1960; the commemorative plaque to the parents of A.E. Houseman and their seven children which is topped by a sundial and has been recently restored by the Houseman Society (the poet's sister Catherine was married to the headmaster of King Edward's School and her ashes are here); Fred Weatherley, d. 1929, the songwriter of Danny Boy and Roses of Picardy, Sir Arthur Carlton d. 1931 who managed the Bath Theatre as well as a number of other theatres; Wallace Gill, the son of John Elkington Gill, and himself architect of St Michael's Church House in Walcot St: and, as the piece de resistance, Andrew brushing away the leaves to reveal the inscription, Moses Pickwick. It was a most informative tour in a beautiful setting and we are much indebted to Andrew for leading it.

### **Bath Central Library – A Report by Trevor Fawcett**

The library staff has undergone a further 'restructuring' with most of the changes to have effect from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2003. This will entail the transfer of certain members of staff to other duties, including, alas, Valerie and Pat, with their long experience of the local history stock. However, the present team of Margaret Bailey and Stephanie Round will continue to be responsible for local studies.

Over the past months substantial progress has been made in recataloguing the library's reference collection of local history books and pamphlets, notably books on open access or kept in the 'local store'. From now on these items are recorded in the public computer catalogue, not in the card catalogue. The latter must still be consulted, however, for publications *not yet* recatalogued, and in particular for all material held at the Newbridge store (e.g. most local books in the Dewey 200s class i.e. religion. And for local pamphlets either housed loose in filing cabinets or bound up in pamphlet collections in the general store. The computer catalogue has undoubted advantages. It amalgamates lending and reference stock. Publications can now be sought by title as well as by author. And they can be found by keyword searches. At the same time there are cataloguing problems that remain to be ironed out. One is that the same author may be listed two or more times under slightly different forms of heading. Usually this causes only minor trouble. More serious is the fact that works by authors who use pseudonyms are not necessarily brought together or even linked by cross-references. The method of dealing with sets of miscellaneous pamphlets bound together is also quite confusing and badly needs improvement in future. Some items are also assigned two or even three different classmarks without proper explanation. It appears, moreover, the in some respects the computer catalogue used by the librarians at the reference desk offers better information than the public catalogues. So if you encounter difficulties, consult the library staff direct.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

MIKE CHAPMAN – *The Lost Streams of Bath: an historical survey of the cold water courses in and around Bath* (Published for the Survey of Old Bath, Bath 2003)

This latest topographical study from the stable of Elizabeth Holland and Mike Chapman comes in A4 format and offers 56 pages of text, maps and illustrations on a novel but important theme. Bath's geology has made it rich in springs and streams which historically have played a largely forgotten role in determining the city's built landscape. Mike Chapman has been assiduous in seeking out their courses, which over the years have often been culverted, drained, diverted and otherwise hidden from view. Many of them once served as boundaries, provided drinking water drove mills or had amenity value. All of them are worth knowing about, and this is the very publication to inform you about the Slade Brook, Sham castle Springs, Whitewell Brook, Cornwell, Bum Ditch and the Mud, Lox and Buckle watercourses, to name only a few of those discussed in this comprehensive account. TF

ANNE STOTT *Hannah More: the first Victorian* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

Very well written, the product of many years' research, this is a model biography which manages to be both fair-minded in judging a complex woman and astute in setting her within a varied social and religious context. There can be no question about Hannah More's influence on her own contemporaries, celebrated early on as a bluestocking playwright, at home in the literary world of Garrick and Johnson, she developed from the mid-1780s into an ethical and religious campaigner with close links to the rising Evangelical movement and the 'Clapham Sect' of William Wilberforce. Some of her causes were national – the wrongs of the slave trade, the reformation of manners and morals, the support of émigré clergy, and proto-feminist issues like the triviality of fashionable women's lives. Others were intensely local, radiating out from her cottage at Cowslip Green (1785 – 1801), her bigger house at Barley Wood (1801 – 28), and her sisters' residence in Gt. Pulteney Street, Working from these family bases she and Patty More overcame much local hostility to set up the famous Mendip schools and later endured the 'Blagdon controversy', which produced a crop damaging pamphlets on both sides of a highly personalized issue. The High-Church Rev, Charles Daubeny of Bath was among her severest critics. Bath features too in the story through Samuel Hazard, one of the two printers chosen to churn out cast quantities of improving Evangelical tracts, mostly from Hannah More's ever-ready pen, aimed at diverting the poor from the radical doctrines of Thomas Paine. Yet she was rarely a bigot. She empathised with the poor and saw merit in Dissenters (giving her opponents an excuse to label her a covert Methodist). She supported the interdenominational Bible Society. She enjoyed society and promoted charity events. She read novels and even (in 1808) published one herself – *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. On all this Anne Stott writes expertly and enjoyably. From a Bath point of view her pages on local Anglican infighting help to illuminate the struggles between Orthodox and Evangelical clergy at the spa from the 1790s onwards. TF

Editor's note: Having just started on this book I absolutely concur with Trevor's view. Already, the most important thing about the book, as far as I am concerned, is the way Anne Stott has created from her researches a fully rounded character, with faults as well as virtues. I look forward to completing it.

I have also just started on a new book about **Tobias Smollett**, by Jeremy Lewis, and I will be reporting on that in the next issue.