

GROUP NEWS

A Word from the Editor.

As I write this, the wind and rain are making their presence felt around the house, and it all seems a very long time since our summer walk in Swainswick. However, not even floods can stop historical research and our next meeting is in a place familiar to many of us who investigate the past. Colin Johnston will be meeting us at the Guildhall to tell us about the latest accessions to the archives. Meet in the guildhall foyer at 7.30 p.m.

While on the subject of times, can I remind people that the March meeting begins at 7.00 p.m. at the Victoria art gallery, as does the AGM in April, at the Museum of Bath at Work.

As you will notice, the newsletter remains in its old A4 format. I have discussed changes with some of you and Trevor Fawcett pointed out that many of you find this useful as you can file the newsletter in folders. However, David Crellin is going to produce some possible other layouts we might use, and I will be delighted to have your opinions.

Kirsten Elliott.

MEETINGS OCTOBER, NOVEMBER 2001 & JANUARY 2002

October 2001 at Green Park Station

The Geology of Bath

Speaker: Elizabeth Devon; Report by Bill Hanna

The Group cannot have gone further back in the history of Bath than we did in our first meeting of the season, when Elizabeth Devon, Secretary of the Bath Geological Society gave her lecture on 'The Geology of Bath'. Taking us on a journey through time, climate changes and environmental development, she showed how the landscape and the streetscape of the city's buildings reflect the geology of the area.

During the Triassic period, c220 million years ago, the land mass that Bath is on was in the area of present day New Zealand, with a landscape akin to the sand and mountains of the Sinai desert. With the passing of some 40/50 million years and further large scale movements of the earth's masses this gave way, (in the Jurassic Period) to rising sea levels, when Bath, Wells, Frome and Shepton Mallet would have been in latitudes 30/40 degrees north of the equator and under water.

In the shallow waters deposits were formed from the shells of sea creatures, coral and sand which formed oolitic limestone. Bath's climate would have been like the Bahamas, where oolites are being formed today, similar to those of Bath stone, though Bath's oolitic limestone is unique in formation, content and colour. That climate progressed to the Ice Age; an ice cliff stretched as far south as Cheltenham. As it melted, the retreating ice left deep valleys, which give form to the Bath area.

Showing the strata in descending order on both sides of the Avon, from the Great Oolite, down through Fuller's Earth (alternately limestone and clay) to Inferior Oolite, lias, Midford Sand and Dyrham Silts, Mrs Devon illustrated how landscape and the built environment reflect geology, with Bath's Georgian crescents and terraces being built on the hard Great and Inferior Oolite strata; later building was on softer ground, requiring deeper piling. Older roads, such as Greenway Lane, can be seen to have followed the hard strata. Prior Park mansion is built on the Great Oolite; below it slumped strata run down to the Palladian Bridge. Beechen Cliff is almost a river cliff, with a cap of Fuller's Earth rock, some Fuller's Earth clay at the lower levels at the eastern end, and some landslips caused by the undermining action of the Avon.

The presentation, with computer graphics and slides, will encourage us to add a new dimension to the way we look about us in our city, and we are most grateful to Mrs Devon for having given us such an interesting insight into the interplay of geology and landscape.

November 2001

Visit to the Tunnels of the Roman Baths Complex.

Guides: June Beere and Marek Lewcun; Report by Dr Mary Ede.

21 members enjoyed a fascinating tour underground under the guidance of June Beere and Marek Lewcun. There is a mass of vaults that extend under the later buildings and streets and are full of archaeological remains from Roman and succeeding centuries. Innumerable quantities of these are stacked up in box after box along the shelves. Before the sale of some Council properties, it was even possible to walk underground from the Great Bath to the Cross Bath. We saw the pumping machinery of the 1983 borehole, and then the archaeologists' workroom, with numerous exhibits including the Roman lead coffin from Walcot and a statue of Queen Victoria from the demolished building facing Bath Street.

We twisted and turned until most of us found it difficult to pinpoint where we were! The area to the south of the Great Bath was equally interesting: We saw the remains of the laconicum (the dry hot room) and the unusual survival of soil deposits from Roman to Victorian times left in the arches under Stall Street. There is also a stone carving, partially damaged, of the Duke of Kingston's arms from his house on the site of the 1900 Concert Hall. Could this not be publicly displayed somewhere? We were told that the smooth, though cracked, pavement on the way to the laconicum was undisturbed Roman but it looked like pennant and was this used before the 18th century? Comments in the next Newsletter would be welcome.

Our grateful thanks go to our enthusiastic guides.

(Note from Editor: Comments on articles will always be welcomed. Just to remind you, my address is 27, Wellsway, Bath BA2 4RR and my e-mail address is kirsten_t_elliott@hotmail.com. The more you all contribute, the less waffle you'll get from me! KTE)

January 2002 at Manvers Street Baptist Church

A Bath Angle on the French Revolution

Speaker: Trevor Fawcett; Report by Andrew Swift

On 16 January 2002 Trevor Fawcett gave us “a Bath angle on the French Revolution,” looking at how it was reported in the Bath papers and what effect it had on the city.

In the years leading up to the French Revolution, England enjoyed a period of peace and economic prosperity after the vicissitudes of the American Wars. Relations with France were better than they had been for years and Bath welcomed many visitors from across the Channel. The Marquis de Mirabeau, later to play a prominent part in the Revolution, visited in 1784. It is likely that Jean-Paul Marat also passed through on his way to Bristol in 1787. Other visitors included the Duc & Duchesse de Polignac and the Comtesse de Polignac, who made a long visit in 1787. The Princesse de Lamballe, who later met a violent end at the hands of the Paris mob, came to Bath the same year, after travelling from France under an assumed name – suggesting that she was involved in cloak and dagger diplomacy. Although we cannot be certain of this, it is likely that, as a confidante of the French Royal family, she was involved in attempts to “buy off” French exiles who had fled to England after falling from grace and who knew rather more than the French establishment wished to be made public.

As France descended into revolution, the citizens of Bath learned of its progress mainly through newspaper reports. The reports in the Bath papers are interesting not only for their description of events but also for the angle they took on them. Initially, both the Bath Chronicle and the Bath Journal took an objective view, even going so far as to express surprise at the Revolution’s mildness. Both papers were keen to stress France’s good relations with Britain and praised France’s move towards a British-style constitutional monarchy.

In 1790, however, the tone of both papers began to change. This change coincided with the publication of Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution*, an immensely influential work which challenged the generally benign view of the Revolution which was current until then. By 1792, when a new wave of radical uprisings swept through Britain, both papers, mindful of Bath’s experience in the Gordon Riots twelve years earlier, had abandoned their earlier enthusiasm for the Revolution. The execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, the institution of the Reign of Terror and the outbreak of war between France and England, set the seal on the papers’ anti-French attitude.

Until the outbreak of war the Revolution had little direct impact on Bath. Bath fashionmongers were still going to Paris as late as 1791 to learn the latest styles and trends. Although the Corporation took an anti-revolutionary stance from the start, a broad consensus of Whigs and Radicals were openly in favour of what was happening. All this changed with the outbreak of war.

The most serious consequence of the war, as far as Bath was concerned, was a run on the banks. Two out of the six banks failed completely. There was a string of bankruptcies and the building boom came to an abrupt end. Many of those who were thrown out of work joined the armed forces. A local defence force was formed as invasion scares grew and large numbers of troops passed through Bath. In April 1795, for example, there were around 600 men billeted in the city, exacerbating local food shortages. The threat of food riots was ever present. In October 1800, a demonstration of 300 local miners had to be dispersed by troops.

Republican sympathies were outlawed. Even owning a copy of *The Rights of Man*, Tom Paine's counterblast to Burke's *Reflections*, could lead to a prison sentence. Hannah More did her bit to support the status quo by publishing tracts enjoining people to be satisfied with their lot. Exhibitions of patriotic fervour were encouraged. Anti-revolutionary mobs carried an effigy of Tom Paine to Beechen Cliff and set it on fire, while a wax effigy of Phillippe-Egalité suffered a similar fate. Nelson's victory at the Nile in 1798 was celebrated on the streets of Bath with illuminations and festivities.

There was a steady stream of émigrés into the city, attracted by its cosmopolitan character and aristocratic milieu. Among the more notable visitors were the Duc & Duchesse de Luxembourg. Two mistresses of Louis XVI's brothers – the Comtesse de Balbi and the Comtesse de Canillac – also fled to Bath. Madam de Sisley, who lost her father to the guillotine, had a benefit concert arranged for her, where her singing impressed the company so much that she got a job performing in London. There was also a fund-raising appeal for the destitute French clergy who arrived in 1792 and 1793. Poorer refugees, meanwhile, sold crafts at a charity shop in York Street.

Fears that some of the émigrés were agents of the revolutionary government, intent on stirring up trouble, proved groundless. These long-term visitors settled into the city, many staying on after the Peace of Amiens. Some were still here in the 1820s and 1830s, a lasting reminder of Bath's role in the French Revolution. Trevor Fawcett provided us with a fascinating insight into this little-known aspect of Bath's history.

Avon Local History Association & Area Archaeological Council

Can I remind members about the ALHA newsletter, which contains all sorts of news, reports, and information about meetings? A copy is sent to our secretary, David Crellin, and there is another copy in the Archive Room. The HBRG is an affiliated society. Here are just a few excerpts from the latest issue.

The History Channel is asking people to send in ideas for programmes based on the history of local places or people. Call 0845 450 1144 or check out www.thehistorychannel.co.uk or www.ourhistorymyheritage.co.uk.

An article about the Gloucestershire record office gives details of its opening times (every weekday from 9 to 5, exceptions being from 10 on Mondays and until 8 Thursdays.) You have to pay to get in £2 a day, and the address is Clarence Row, Alvin Street, Gloucester. There's a summary catalogue of their entire holdings at <http://archives/glos.gov.uk>

The Diary has too many dates to list here, but a couple of interest might be 18th Feb, Marshfield & District LHS, where Stephen Bird is talking about Roman Roads around Bath; 11 March, Nailsea & District LHS, where Peter Goodchild is talking about the Bristol Blitz.

The Mendip Society runs a regular series of walks.

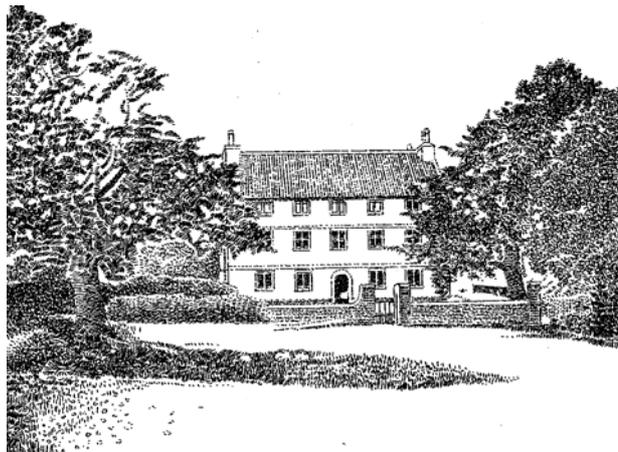
Details of meeting places are all in the newsletter, along with information about all affiliated societies.

Tripping the Light Fantastic!

If anyone is interested in trying out the dances that were typical of those in the 18th century, Bath Minuet Company is running regular Beginners' Classes on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at the Methodist Church Hall in Oldfield Park. Further information is available from the Editor.

New Publications
Selected by Trevor Fawcett

1. *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, general editor Peter Clark. 3 Vols. (Cambridge 2000). This major compilation - 2770 pages in total - represents a kind of stocktaking of British urban studies at the millennium. The three volumes cover 600 - 1540, 1540 - 1840 and 1840 - 1950, each one containing regional studies as well as thematic essays on such topics as (to quote just a small sample) *Church, education and literacy in towns 600 - 1300*, *The built environment 1300 - 1540*, *Politics and Government, 1540 - 1700*, *Health and leisure resorts 1700 - 1840*, *From Shillibeer to Buchanan: transport and the urban environment*, *The provision of social services 1840 - 1950*, and *The representation of the city in the visual arts*. Everyone working on Bath should find valuable information and stimulus here, particularly in gaining a broader understanding of local development within a national context. No excuse either for not dipping into this formidable work when it now sits on Bath central Library's reference shelves at class mark 941.
2. *Georgian Cities* compiled by Cultures Anglophones et Technologies de l'Information (Université Paris Sorbonne). This is not a printed book but a compact disk focussing on aspects of 18th-century culture in London, Bath and Edinburgh, with appropriate short texts, pictures, maps, music, etc. and the usual hypertext links. [Please contact Trevor Fawcett on Bath 312396 if you would like to try it.]
3. *The Map that Changed the World* by Simon Winchester (London, 2001). A biography of the father of British geology, William Smith, including his crucial association with the Bath district.



Rugbourne Farm, Smith's first true home near High Littleton, which he called 'the birthplace of geology'.

4. '*Respect your paper: George Steart's development of artists' watercolour and drawing papers*' by Peter Bower (*RSA Journal*, vol. 146 pt 1, 1999). Concerned with the De Montalt Mills at Combe Down.
5. '*Local Attachments, Geography, Gender and Print Culture in 18th-century English Towns*' by E.B. Child (unpub. PhD. thesis, University of Maryland College Park, 20000). Not actually seen, this thesis centres apparently on Bath's special qualities in empowering literary women such as Sarah Scott, Lady Anna Miller and Jane Austen