

## GROUP NEWS

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

While Autumn is a beautiful season, especially for those of us who are photographers, it is always tinged with sadness for me at the thought that summer is over. This particularly applies when, as with this year, summer has been so short. However, the dismal weather has meant that, for me at least, the Archive Room has not given way to gardening or days out. And it was very encouraging to find that Colin has a new assistant called Lucy Jefferis, who is going to be working full time. She is fast learning the ropes, or rather learning the storage system. The bad news for users of the Archive Room is that from 16<sup>th</sup> September it is going to be closed on Mondays. It is hoped that this is a purely temporary measure while Lucy and Colin try to catch up on the backlog of organisational work. The end result should be a more efficient Records Office.

As the summer comes to a close, so too does the exhibition at the Holburne, on September 15<sup>th</sup>. I have attached a review of it, and if you have not been, I hope it will tempt you to go. In the meantime, to remind us of summer, we have accounts of the two outings made in May and June. You will also be receiving the programme for the coming year with this newsletter. While on the subject of the newsletter, I will be looking for volunteers to write up the meetings for me. Could you therefore look through the programme, and if there is a lecture which particularly interests you, at which you know you will be present, please think of acting as group reporter.

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### **MEETINGS MAY and JUNE 2002**

#### **May 2002 at Partis College**

Speaker: Elizabeth White; Report by John Ede

Elizabeth White welcomed a dozen members at the low-key entrance gate to this remarkable establishment. Only after climbing the drive, among trees, does one come to the large rectangular lawn with buildings round three sides and a splendid view on the fourth. The impression is part country mansion and part college quadrangle. The establishment was planned by Rev. Fletcher Partis and his wife in the early 1820s but his death in 1824 left her as a remarkable benefactress who must have given away something like £100,000 in the next 20 years. The official opening of the College was in 1826. The architects were S. and P. Flood Page.

It was designed for “decayed gentlewomen” – unmarried daughters or widows of clergymen, officers in the armed forces or professional men of similar social standing from business or trade. They needed a personal income of at least £330 p.a. and had to be members of the Church of England. Letters of application had to be supported by their local Anglican priest. If they became unable to run their house they had to leave. In the 1920s a sanatorium wing was built at the expense of the Wills family but had to close in recent times when State financial support was withdrawn.

The remarkably complete survival of letters from applicants shows how the plight of these women arose and selections were read to us. Early deaths of fathers abroad in the Empire, the abolition of slavery on which many fortunes had been based and many other reasons including speculation and fraud and giving up money for the males of the family were among the reasons for their poverty. If there was no money for getting married a daughter had little to hope for except the demanding and underpaid post of governess or companion.

Partis College was designed for such people in their later years – over 40, later 50. Each resident had the privacy of a small house behind her own front door and her own key. There was accommodation for a maid and a small garden behind. At the same time they had as neighbours their intellectual and social equals. Mrs Partis was very good in her relationship with residents. The College was run by a board of Governors of good social standing. Except for Mrs Partis they were all male until, probably, after World War II!

The centrally placed chapel was completely altered by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1862. Regular attendance at services was expected but seems not to have been specifically laid down. Present residents are expected to attend on Sundays and at least one weekday service.

Elizabeth White has worked extensively on the archives and illuminated her clear account of the history of the College with personal details of residents from their letters of application and the result was a most informative and delightful evening for her audience.



*This rather murky picture is on a postcard showing the College Chapel altar in 1905.  
(From the Akeman Press Collection)*

## **June 2002**

### **Visit to South Stoke.**

Guides: Robert Parfitt, Jenny John and John Brooke; Report by Trevor Fawcett.

South Stoke is an ancient parish. Its boundaries already fixed at the time of the re-grant charter of 961 AD returning it to Bath Abbey, and probably even by 870. Beginning our tour at a vantage point overlooking the Cam Brook valley, we could see its extent. Iron Age and Roman finds have been made on the south-facing slopes and more can be expected, especially from Fortnight farm (just outside the parish boundary). An old packhorse trail running from Bath and through the village crossed the Cam Brook at Bishop's Bridge on its way to Twinhoe and so over to Wells. Nearer to hand we could also see Hodshill House - still a farm in Skinner's sketch of 1828, but extended by Thomas Hunt in the 1840s. Fullers' earth deposits on the estate were extensively mined by the Handley brothers from 1883.

Next stop was beside the great Tudor tithe barn (c. 1485-1500), whose splendid oak-timbered, stone-tiled roof was re-done in the 1930s. The attached dovecote once reared squabs - young pigeons - for the dinner table. Mentioned in a terrier of 1136, the manor still yields £26.60 in fee farm rent to the Earls of Sandwich. The present manor house, which Pevsner dates c. 1670-5, has 15C arches. St James's church nearby was originally Norman (and retains a 12C doorway), but has undergone successive rebuilds - 14C, 18C after the destructive freak storm of 1703, and 1845 (enlarged by G.P.Manners), with further internal changes in 1895. Along from the church the village centre still resembles 19C photographs, though shops, post office and stocks have all gone. "The Priory" of 1850 was built for Thomas Hunt. The date of the Packhorse Inn remains in question, though 1674, when the Gay family perhaps remodelled it, is inscribed on the front. Just downhill, the school (1901), now the village hall replaced a Victorian one on a different site started by the long-serving vicar of St James's, Rev. Henry Claverley.

Further on, South Stoke Hall and South Stoke House drew our attention. The Hall, medieval in origin, has undergone changes, including a grand early 19C extension on the south side for the Rev. Charles Johnson, then the parish incumbent, who had married a bishop's daughter and needed a vicarage befitting his status. Between the Hall and South Stoke House (once the residence of Walter Pitt, JP of Stothert & Pitt) lies a tract of land that Bristol archaeologists plan to excavate; preliminary trenches have already thrown up Roman pottery. Via the older part of South Stoke Hall and its inner yard we reached our final halt, Brewery House, home of John Brooke - one of our three expert guides on this rewarding village tour. Here, 18C cottages had been transformed c. 1834 into a busy brewery (storage for 500 barrels) with maltings and manager's house. This continued production down to 1910. Inside the house a few documents had been laid out and gave rise to some further discussion on the local fullers' earth industry, Georgian tea smuggling, etc., so rounding off a very informative evening.

### **NEW MEMBERS**

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Research Topics: Transport, Pubs

## Pickpocketing the Rich - Portrait Painting in Bath 1720 - 1800

### *The summer exhibition at the Holburne Museum*

This exhibition at the Holburne takes its title from a joke by Gainsborough, who referred to his business as 'picking pockets in the portrait way'. But entry to the gallery to see it is picking nobody's pocket - it is one of the most stunning exhibitions the museum has mounted, with a chance to view some pictures rarely seen. What is more, all the portraits have a Bath interest. If members have not yet seen it, do go: this really is one not to miss, not only for art-lovers but also for those who love Bath and its history. Do allow yourself plenty of time. The exhibition runs over all three floors, and includes many Holburne old favourites as well as many eminent visitors.

There are several paintings and pastels from the Mineral Water Hospital, including William Hoare's famous picture of Dr Oliver examining three would-be patients, not to mention Hoare's delightful self-portrait. There are some on loan from the council, although one, a painting of the elderly Beau Nash, can only be seen in the catalogue as it hangs in the Mayor's parlour. But not to worry, there are plenty of other images of Bath's most famous MC, including a pencil sketch loaned by Her Majesty. It's by Thomas Worldige, and is the earliest known image of the Beau, when he was aged 62, and still looking quite dashing.



But the giant of the exhibition is Gainsborough. The Holburne has some of his work already, most notably his portrait of his friend Dr Rice Charlton, but there are some wonderful and unmissable loans. Chief among these is that from the Dulwich Art Gallery of Thomas Linley, father of the famous singer Elizabeth. Gainsborough was a friend of his, but Linley was, to put it bluntly, not a nice man. He gave William Herschel, for example, a terrible time. He was argumentative, jealous and money-grasping. And in this devastating portrait it's all there. Gainsborough is surely the great painter he is because, at his best, he captures the inner being of his sitters and not just the facial resemblance. He's still my number one. But don't take my word for it. The exhibition runs until 15<sup>th</sup> September, and is a pure delight. You could then follow it up by buying Susan Sloman's new book about Gainsborough. Which leads us on to.....

### New Publications

**Gainsborough in Bath** by Susan Sloman, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002  
Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art

Reviewed by Kirsten Elliott

This book is, as I write, literally hot off the press. I hope members will excuse the review being a little sketchy as I rushed out to buy my copy in time to include a review in this edition. It is, however, one that would certainly have been on my shopping list anyway, as not only is it the culmination of Susan's years of studies into Gainsborough in Bath, but it also contains many fascinating details about life in Bath which he would have observed during his stay here. Above all, it expands our knowledge about the people in the portraits, Gainsborough's thoughts behind the pictures, and the influence they had on other people. Let me give a couple of examples.

In explaining the picture now known (correctly) as *Peasants and Colliers going to Market* Susan Sloman discusses that often neglected figure, the Somerset coal miner. As we read letters and diaries of the rich and famous coming to Bath it is easy to forget that Bath was also a mining town, with pits only three miles from the city centre. Gainsborough's painting, shows two smartly dressed peasant girls (and apparently such girls did dress up very smartly to go to market). Following them are three grey-faced shabby men, riding on pack ponies. These are the colliers. Threatened by the imports of better quality coal when the river was opened up to traffic in the 1720s, the Somerset collier's livelihood was further threatened with the increasing number of closures of land, particularly on Mendip. As Susan Sloman says, while it is perhaps going too far to see this as a campaigning picture, the dignity that the artist has given the figures implies that he had considerable sympathy for them. The painting also shows a beggar at the roadside – not some rough tramp but a dark-haired woman nursing two small children. Like many of today's street people, she also has a dog. Perhaps, suggests Susan Sloman, he based her on the gypsies which he would have seen on Lansdown.

The insight which the book gives about the portraits is also fascinating. Take the well-known picture of Ann Ford, third wife of Philip Thicknesse. Most of us, I am sure, are aware of the story about the bass viol, not to mention Mrs Delany's shocked reaction to the picture. But what I did not know is that it contains a little in-joke, or rather a series of jokes and references. Gainsborough (who had a wicked sense of humour) has reversed the image of Sir Peter Lely's portrait of Barbara, Lady Castlemaine – one of Charles II's favourite mistresses. Gainsborough knew, and had worked for, relatives of Barbara Villiers, so that's little joke number one. He did not, it appears, greatly care for Ann Ford, so there's the second joke. But he *was* a great admirer of Sir Peter Lely – hence this charming reference to the earlier work. The book also shows a painting by Zoffany of Mrs Warren Hastings, painted in 1783-4. It is quite clear that at least the top part of the pose is influenced by the *Ann Ford* portrait, although the shocking "crossed legs" of Gainsborough's painting have been replaced by the more normal method of sitting with the knees apart (popular because it showed off the decorative over-petticoat.) However, even Zoffany decides to be a little outrageous. Instead of neatly crossed ankles, one foot is raised on a footstool, achieving that same daring swell of the thighs which was probably the cause of Mrs Delany's horror.

The depth of research that has gone into this book is astonishing. It's not just an art history, not just a biography, but a fascinating look at Gainsborough's Bath. At £35 it is not cheap, but its wealth of illustrations, many comparing Gainsborough's work with that of other and, dare I say it, lesser mortals, makes it worth every penny. I wish I had been able to use it when I prepared my walk for Bath Festival which I called *Gainsborough, his family and friends*. The popularity of that walk showed there is a lot of interest in this artist, so I am sure this book is going to be very successful.

**Brunel** by Professor Angus Buchanan, Hambledon & London, London, 2002

*Reviewed by Dr. Andrew Swift*

Perhaps no single person had such an impact on Bath as Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Many books have been written about this perennially fascinating figure – those by LTC Rolt and Adrian Vaughan are two outstanding recent examples – and one might be forgiven for assuming that there is little left to say. Professor Buchanan's latest book should be enough to convince the most sceptical reader that, even with a subject so well covered as the life of Brunel, there is plenty of new material to discover.

The book's subtitle is "The Life and Times of Brunel," and Professor Buchanan brings an encyclopaedic knowledge not only of engineering but also of the arts, politics and society to place Brunel in the context of his times. Setting Brunel against this background does not diminish his achievement, but makes it seem even more remarkable that he achieved so much in such a short pace of time.

Brunel was a gambler on an epic scale. Some of his achievements -- notably the Great Western Railway -- were unqualified successes. Some, like the atmospheric railway in South Devon, were dismal failures. On some, like the Great Eastern, the jury is still out. And perhaps his most memorable single achievement – the Clifton Suspension Bridge – was abandoned, only partly built, and looked set to be another White Elephant until the money to complete it was raised years after Brunel's death.

Much of this is familiar territory, but Professor Buchanan approaches it with a new eye, challenging received opinions and weighing in with new research. It is, however, when dealing with the lesser known aspects of Brunel's life – and especially his early life -- that the book comes into its own.

As a young man, before he became the legendary workaholic, Brunel was keen on music, drama and painting. He was a gifted astronomer and counted Sir John Herschel among his friends. This range of interests had a profound influence on his later development, for, of all the great engineers, Brunel is the one who most deserves to be called a great artist. Brunel paid close attention to the visual impact of his works. Love it or loath it, the intrusion of the railway into Sydney Gardens was a dramatic gesture on a grand scale. Similarly, the Gothic tunnel entrances at Box and Twerton, and the sweep of Gothic arches across the lower part of Bath (even though it has been much hacked about and hemmed in since Brunel's day), are still visually striking over 150 years later.

There is much in this book which will be of especial interest to Bath readers. For example, the 1841 Census records "IK Brunel, Civil Engineer," as a guest at the White Lion Hotel, High Street, Bath, only a few weeks before the final section of the Great Western Railway from London to Bath opened and destroyed the White Lion's coaching business. For me, though, the most exciting discovery is that, on 17 September 1830, at the age of 24, Brunel visited William Beckford in Bath. Professor Buchanan does not elaborate on the meeting (any more than he elaborates on hundreds of other minor episodes), but the Beckford-Brunel connection seems a fruitful one to explore further, especially given Henry Goodridge's later involvement with the Great Western Railway. Perhaps the remarkable similarity between Beckford's Tower and Brunel's atmospheric pumping station at Dawlish (now demolished) was more than simply fortuitous.

To sum up, this is a comprehensive and stimulating study which proves that, even with a subject so well covered, there is plenty left to discover.

**An Eye for the Magnificent: William Beckford 1760 - 1844** edited by Derek E. Ostergard, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2001.

Reviewed by Kirsten Elliott

This mighty tome was published as the companion and catalogue to the exhibitions held in New York and at Dulwich. It is, one has to say, a book for the specialist, particularly at £50, but to a Beckford enthusiast like myself it was a must. It is sumptuously illustrated and is a series of articles about Beckford, by many illustrious academics. There are six articles relevant to Beckford in Bath, by Tim Mowl, Alexander Marr, Bet McLeod, Jeannie Chapel, Sidney Blackmore and Christopher Woodward. The first of these is an overview of Beckford's life, based on Dr Mowl's researches for his book *Composing for Mozart*. Alexander Marr's article is entitled *William Beckford and the Landscape Garden*. Although it does not deal with the estate in Bath, it does explain the influences which helped to inspire Beckford. He points out the close relationship between Beckford and his great-uncle, Charles Hamilton and comments on the similarities between Painshill and Fonthill. I would add that there are even greater resemblances between Painshill and Bath, most particularly the constant element of surprise rather than the open vistas which Hoare used at Stourhead.

This article is followed by Bet McLeod's study of Beckford the collector. The problem here is that, due to his predilection for the flamboyant, all too often the items appear frankly rather tawdry when you see the illustrations, although an actual view of them, as was possible at the exhibition, showed why Beckford had bought them. They are opulent rather than gaudy. (The chair now upholstered in leopard skin is a bit OTT but this touch of extravagance may be due to the present owner who is, I understand, from the pop world.) Beckford's art collection is discussed by Jeannie Chapel. Among the pictures Beckford owned was one called *The Father of Psyche sacrificing at the Temple of Apollo*, by Claude. It has in the middle foreground, what appears to be a choragic monument although this one is circular rather than octagonal. Beckford continued to add to the collection after his arrival in Bath, and the Tower was of course almost an art gallery in its own right.

Sidney Blackmore's article *The Bath Years* gives details of Beckford's life in Bath, before as well as during his years in Lansdown Crescent, of which there is a most attractive engraving. Most importantly for members of the HBRG is Chris Woodward's article about Beckford's Tower. This is based largely on the work done for Bath Preservation Trust by Dr Patricia Hughes, in which I was delighted to be involved. (Just on a personal note, it was extremely gratifying to find my own name in this star-studded company, thanks to Chris, who referred to the studies I have done on the ride, pointing out that these were what had caused its re-evaluation. All I have to do now is draw a new map of the estate and perhaps we will see the back of Hugh Crallan's map - although, to be fair, it was one of its mistakes that got me started on Beckford research in the first place. It was also pleasing to discover that there was not a single mention of the Islamic Summerhouse in the entire exhibition or the book - it's taken me a long time to knock the nails into its coffin but I seem finally to have succeeded.) I have to say that I do not agree with Christopher on some of the conclusions he draws, but three cheers to him for being controversial and thought-provoking. There is still much to be discovered about the estate, Beckford, and his relationship with Goodridge. I am in hot pursuit of all these hares, together with a fourth topic which accidentally led me to find a very useful website.

The most serious omission from the book is its inexplicable lack of an index. It was when I put into a search engine the words *Beckford* and *Freemason* I made the serendipitous discovery that there is an index on the Internet. It is at [www.bgc.bard.edu/publications/indexes/beckfordindex.pdf](http://www.bgc.bard.edu/publications/indexes/beckfordindex.pdf). If, like me, you do not like pdf files (has *anyone* got Acrobat to work?) there is an html version which I printed off. Beware - it runs to 49 pages - but it's well worth it.

## **WANTED: ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS**

### **1. THE FORGOTTEN CENTENARY**

**Did you know** that this year is the centenary of the birth of a writer whose books about Bath have sold far more than Jane Austen's and are read all over the world? That writer is of course ... Georgette Heyer. Before you throw up your hands in horror and turn to the next item, I should point out that she saw herself as a very serious historian, and some of her research on Bath raises some quite interesting questions. I became involved when I created a walk for the Bath Literature Festival as a little light relief from some of the other topics. In the course of reading what is admittedly candyfloss I worked out that she must have had a copy of the edition of Patterson's Roads published in the 1820s. (This was subsequently confirmed for me by a lady who is doing a PhD at Melbourne University on Georgette Heyer. You can see that some people take her very seriously indeed.) I also became interested in Dr Wilkinson who ran a series of lectures at the Kingston Rooms. He was a great one for debunking pseudo-scientific theories, and he also believed that women should be educated in science. Another more shadowy figure is M. Guynette, MC at the lower rooms until he disappears during the 1814 season. This was something that Miss Heyer had not allowed for, and in a book that is clearly set in 1816 she still has him there. But why did he disappear? Does anyone know? Did he, as I suspect, abscond with the funds, since the operator of the rooms was left without any money and a benefit ball was held for him? Or am I doing him an injustice?

The oddest thing about the books is the language which is at times very racy. But research indicates that the upper class fashionable set really did talk in this sporting idiom. Jane Austen's characters do not do so because she was firmly middle class. The most glaring oddity is describing someone as a "dead bore" but apparently Miss Heyer was almost incorrect in using it, not because it is too modern, but because this term was most "trendy" about 1780. In fairness to Georgette Heyer, I should add that her book "An Infamous Army" which deals with the Battle of Waterloo, is still used at Sandhurst as a textbook, so accurate is her description. And that book is definitely not candyfloss - in fact parts of it are decidedly stomach-churning. Perhaps it is time for a re-assessment of her historical research, even if the books will never be great literature. Any answers to my queries or comments on Miss Heyer's historical credentials will be welcome.

### **2. BOOK CHOICE**

If you were Training Chairman for the Mayor's Honorary Guides (as your Editor is) what book would you recommend to trainees as a good, readable, overall view of the history of Bath? At present we are still recommending David Gadd's *Georgian Summer*. However there are certain drawbacks to this. Firstly it is now somewhat out of date and secondly it is out of print. We have our own library with a good selection of Bath books, so that is not insuperable. But is there a better one? And what book would you recommend to visitors - one that is in print?

Answers to these questions, new questions, and comments will be welcome. Please let me have them by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2002. See Page 1 for my address and e-mail address.

#### **CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

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