



NEWSLETTER 13

SEPTEMBER 1990

GROUP NEWS

MEETINGS HELD MAY - JUNE 1990

On 3 May the Group met at the Victoria Art Gallery. After a glass of wine members heard Sue Sloman, keeper of art, outline the history of the collection since J.M. Brydon's municipal gallery opened in 1900. The cost of the building (over £14,000) had been largely met from the bequest of Mrs. Arabella Roxburgh; Queen Victoria's statue on the exterior was donated by the "women of Bath". The city had been accumulating pictures ever since Van Diest had painted his series of Corporation portraits in the earlier 18th century. The collection grew especially by gift - as in the case of a group of foreign paintings that once hung at Midford Castle. To indicate the scope of current municipal holdings (in the Gallery, the Guildhall, the Pump Room, and the Assembly Rooms) Sue Sloman showed slides of the two categories most relevant to local history, i.e. portraits and views. Portraiture embraced oil paintings (e.g. Hoare's full-length of the Elder Pitt, once Bath's M.P.), watercolours and drawing; (e.g. Beach's monochrome of Dr. Henry Harington), prints (of Sarah Siddons, Catherine Macaulay, Maria Linley, Bishop Warburton, etc. - all with local connections), silhouettes, and miniatures (such as A.R. Burt's portrait of the Milsom Street bookseller, Henry Godwin, and Lucie M. Hill's Sir Isaac Pitman). The odd photograph, and sculptured busts of Ralph Allen and Beau Nash, were additional visual evidence, while more familiar perhaps, the topographical holdings also have much to offer Bath historians, provided, that is, they are not taken as gospel truth. They range from a fragile fan view of the Pump Room interior (1730s), through the famous series of Malton's drawings and prints, William Capon's prospect from Perrymead (1807) and J. Maggs' romanticised scene outside the White Hart Hotel (1867, just before its demolition), down to a fine modern print of Pulteney Bridge or a street scene by Sickert. The indispensable keys to the whole collection are the indexes originally compiled by Reginald Wright. A new checklist is in active preparation and fresh information is constantly being added to the records. Many items have been photographed by the Courtauld Institute which can supply copies. This rewarding meeting ended with members studying actual examples from the collection, mounted, framed and presented in bound volumes.

Stratton-on-the-Fosse on 13th June was the Group's most distant meeting place to date. By lucky coincidence our arrival at Downside gave members an opportunity of first hearing a short recitaj by the famous Choir School of Montserrat on the eve of its return to Catalonia. Dom Philip Jebb then led us from the Gothic Revival splendour of the church to the modern, six-floor library where he spoke about the history of Downside and its links with Bath. Catholic clergy were practising clandestinely at Bath from the late 17th century, but it was the expulsion of the Benedictine community from Douai in 1793 that led to the foundation at Downside in 1814 after an interlude in Shropshire. Gradually the school grew in numbers and reputation to its present c.500 boys and 45 monks. At the same time it accumulated a rich library - strong in European monastic history, general history, topography, and wide-ranging pamphlets - with an archive of documents ranging from the 12th to the late 19th centuries and a photoarchive that includes an unexpected treasure of 20,000 - 30,000 picture postcards, largely topographical. All this collection is

available to bona fide scholars from outside provided they first seek permission. In addition to the usual catalogues there are various useful indexes: a biographical index of Benedictine monks and nuns; another of boys educated at the school from 1612 onwards; a third covering Benedictine people and places in the photoarchive; and a fourth, still in progress, of the documentary holdings - which include plans of Benedictine buildings around the world. The catalogues and indexes record scattered material about Bath, while further information about Catholicism in the Bath region can be gleaned from early issues of Downside Review and J.A. Williams' Post-Reformation Catholicism in Bath, 2 vols. (Catholic Record Society, 1975-6). A newish periodical, South-West Catholic History, might also be worth watching. Altogether a very practical as well as a most agreeable visit.

NEW MEMBERS

Mr. Terry M. Hardick, Bath Boating Station, Forester Road, Bath. BA2 6QE
 Mrs. Jean Wright, 36 Bathford Hill, Bathford, Bath. BA1 7SL

Please note the following changes of address:-

Dr. Tim Mowl, 41 Cotham Hill, Bristol. BS6 5JY
 Miss H. Mary Wills, 56A East Street, Corfe Castle, Wareham, Dorset. BH20 5EQ

Liaison with Avon Local History Association

So far the Group has had only a passive relationship with the ALHA, though the latter's Newsletter has been circulated at meetings. In future we hope to take rather more interest, with John Ede and Mike Chapman having volunteered to represent the Group at the ALHA's general meetings and to report back.

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Carved from a six-ton block of Bath stone the "Colossal Head" of a Roman deity can still be seen in the Botanical Gardens (extension). It was the last work of a Bath monumental mason, John Osborn, who came from Norfolk and trained under the London sculptor, John Bacon II. After Osborn's premature death in June 1839, the head was bought by public subscription and placed on a plinth and rock foundation designed by Thomas Barker. The author Walter Savage Landor, then resident at Bath, wrote in September 1839: "They have just set up in the Park, a prodigiously fine head of Jupiter, in Bath stone, executed by an obscure artist of this city, who died lately, miserably poor. In my opinion nothing of Michael Angelo is nobler nothing of Thorwaldsen purer. It is colossal. The rain and frost will ruin it."

The engraving is taken from A.B Granville's Spas of England, vol. 2, The Midlands and South (1841) which describes the recent improvements usefully made at the King's Bath, Pump Room, Upper Assembly Rooms and York House Hotel to try. and stem the decline of Bath as a spa.

EVENING ON SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BATH: 23 May 1990

(Report by Jean Manco)

Bath's extraordinarily rich heritage from the Roman and Georgian periods has tended to throw all else into the shade. Yet what a wealth of material has lain buried in relative obscurity. The welcome local historians have given to the illumination of our pre-Georgian past may be judged by the packed hall for the third gathering dedicated to the Stuart period. Once again the venue was King Edward's Junior School, but sadly ours was to be the last meeting in the old school hall, the 18th-century building having now been sold. In opening the meeting our host, **John Wroughton**, took the opportunity to touch on a few highlights of the school's long history.

That experienced speaker **Penelope Byrde**, Keeper of the Museum of Costume, treated us to a polished gem of a talk on **fashionable dress in Bath in the later 17th century**. Our eyes were guided through an expert examination of Thomas Johnson's 1675 drawing of the King's and Queen's Baths as a source for the costume of the period. Johnson's meticulous observation of middle-class visitors leaning negligently over the balustrade in the manner of pool-gazers immemorial provides rare evidence of ordinary day wear from an even rarer back view. Miss Byrde's careful scrutiny also prised a remarkable amount of costume detail from the largely submerged bathers. The accompanying slides were a visual feast. They naturally included the unique surviving Restoration dress in the Museum of Costume, but also surprises such as the lovely 1659 marble tomb sculpture of Chaloner Chute.

Trevor Fawcett then spoke with his usual sure historical touch on **later 17th-century Bath shops**. The subject of Bath retailing is one that the Secretary of the HBRG has made his own. His article in Bath History, vol. 3, describes the dazzling array of luxury goods that made 18th-century Bath one of the strongest magnets for wealthy shoppers outside London's West End. However, his impressively wide-ranging research has revealed a much less sophisticated Bath in the previous century. Bath's food markets were amply supplied in the 1680s, but the luxury trades had not yet responded to the influx of increasingly prosperous visitors.

After an interval to prepare ourselves, we attacked one of the grimmer aspects of 17th-century life. **Roger Rolls**, Secretary of the Bath Medical History Group, addressed the question "**Plague - What Was It?**" Plague, it seems, is entirely due to the taste of the Black Rat for the company of man. It plays host to the plague-carrying Oriental Flea. Having inadvertently killed off its preferred nutrient supply, the starving flea then jumps onto any passing human. The fact that human beings seldom infect each other does much to explain the comparatively gradual spread of the disease. London plague peaks could be a year ahead of those in Bath, as Dr. Rolls has deduced from his analysis of mortality statistics.

The evening was rounded off by a talk on **alchemy and Bath** by **Mike Chapman**. Using Elias Ashmole as his chief source, he gave us an entertaining account of the way in which the mystery of Bath's hot springs attracted alchemists. Ashmole's enquiries in Bath in 1651 yielded some marvellously credulous stories of events over a century earlier, but the presence in Bath of at least one alchemist can be confirmed from other sources. Dr. Summershall took out a lease on a house over the Hot Bath in 1657, but, according to Guidott's satirical comment, manufacturing gold did not prevent him from dying in debt!

During the evening the bookstall sold local history to the value of £150 and the conviviality of the meeting was greatly aided by refreshments served by volunteers. Thanks above all are due to **Elizabeth Holland** for organising another successful Stuart Bath occasion.

Forthcoming Courses and Day Meetings

1. Elizabeth Holland is organising a Seminar on Bath's Saxon Abbey on Wednesday 24 October at 7.30 p.m. For further details contact her at 16 Prior Park Buildings, BA2 4NP.
2. A WEA Course on "The Industrial History of the Twerton Area", tutored by Cynthia Turner, opens at the City of Bath College on 25 September (six weekly meetings).
3. On Saturday 13 October Dr. Graham Davis will conduct a dayschool "Pubs, Pimps and Prostitutes in Victorian Bath". While mostly centred on Bath College of Higher Education at Newton Park, the dayschool also promises a tour of Bath pubs "notorious for vice" in the 19th-century.
4. This year's symposium of the Centre for S.W. Historical Studies at Exeter (which HBRG members are eligible to attend) is on Saturday 18 November and has for its theme "Economic activity in the South West: prehistory to 1990". The previous evening's Harte Lecture by Professor William Ravenhill will deal with 18th-century cartography in the south west. The Centre intends producing a Historical Atlas for Cornwall and Devon, but its fifty-odd contributors will also be considering material from Somerset and Dorset. (Details of the symposium available from the HBRG's Secretary.)
5. The annual symposium of the Council for British Archaeology on 13 October will be held at the Roman Baths Museum and focusses on the urban archaeology of Bath and Bristol.
6. The Avon Local History Association has organised a symposium on "Photography in Local History" for 10 November at Downend, Bristol (Details available).

OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND INITIATIVES

1. An Archaeology Club has been formed at the Roman Baths Museum. Members work on excavation finds and other tasks but also enjoy lectures and site visits. Already there is a waiting list for membership. Contact Stephen Clews at the Museum if you wish your name to be added.
2. With support from English Heritage a complete systematic review of Bath's listed buildings is just getting under way. A master database at Abbey Chambers will record for each building or building group (e.g. a terrace) its location, grading, condition, building type, construction materials, plan form, facade, interior, other features, significant individuals (from architect to famous residents), documentary sources, etc. Any information that HBRG members can supply about particular buildings will be extremely welcome. The database will eventually be able to collocate and retrieve all kinds of scattered material, and so provide rapid answers to enquiries, historical or otherwise.
3. The Survey of Cardiff, established in 1988, shows what a voluntary organisation may achieve. Its aim is to produce a historical and topographical record of Cardiff in published form. Already it has trained some thirty staff through the Employment Training programme, assembled a large collection of visual and other research materials and made good progress towards its first major publication on south Cardiff and the Docks. The Survey also hopes to be able to offer advice to research students and to assist with school projects or investigations by residents into the history of their own houses.

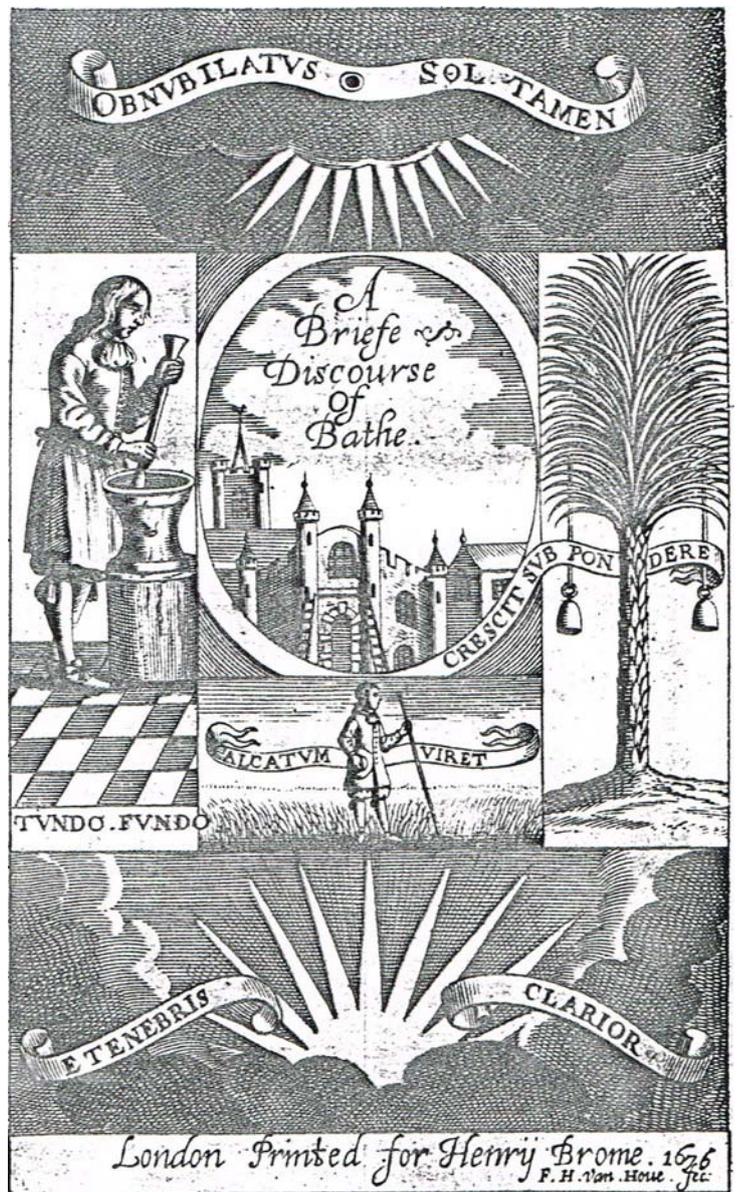
P U B L I C A T I O N S

For King and Country: Edwardians on the Somme, written by 5th-year GCSE students at King Edward's School co-ordinated by Niall Rothnie, is available from local bookshops or the school itself at £4.95. This is an enterprising publication chronicling the part played by Old Boys in the Battle of the Somme and the human cost involved in the combat.

Robert D. Bell, "The Discovery of a buried Georgian garden in Bath", Garden History, vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring 1990) offers a lucid account of the archaeological recovery of the old garden at 4 Circus, now planted and open to the public.

The Centre for Urban Research at the University of Leicester has just issued an expanded Register of Research in British Urban History 1990. There are now three titles in the Centre's "Working Papers" series: English Towns in Decline 1350 1800, Archives and the Historian, and Population Estimates of English Small Towns, 1550 - 1851.

Engraved frontispiece to the first edition of Thomas Guidott's A Discourse on Bath and the Hot Waters there (1676). Guidott, who believed he was struggling against opposition, explained the symbolism as follows: the light breaks through the obscurantist clouds even brighter after the darkness; a weighted palm tree cannot be stopped from growing; crushed spices and trodden camomile smell sweeter than before. It seems that the engraver has somewhat misunderstood the drawing of the Abbey Church from which he was working. And did the tower ever carry a steeple?



E N Q U I R I E S

1. The Group has been asked for any leads towards locating two Harington family portraits so far untraceable. Etheldreda Harington, a love child of Henry VIII, was granted lands at Bath, the estates of Kelston, Batheaston and St. Catherine. She died c.1555 leaving a daughter Esther (or Hester). Her husband John Harington, builder of the house at Kelston, then married Isabella Markham, a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth, c.1560. The Harington family portraits from Kelston were exhibited at Bath in 1907 and 1917, but disposed of at Sotheby's in 1942. The portrait of Etheldreda, once attributed to Holbein, showed her at three-quarter length in an embroidered dress. A possible portrait of her daughter, Esther, also in an embroidered dress, was described in the sale catalogue as "A child holding a book". At least two of the family portraits returned to the Bath area (that of John Harington is now in the Victoria Art Gallery). Did those of Etheldreda and Esther? Can anyone help in locating them?
2. We have also been asked whether any member has information about the 19th-century Bath architect, Edward Davis, designer of Victoria Park, beyond what is given in Howard Colvin's Biographical Dictionary of British Architects? Major Charles Edward Davis, antiquarian and Bath city architect in the later 19th century, was perhaps his nephew.

B A T H H I S T O R Y I I I

A few copies remain at the special members price of £5.50.
Please let the Secretary have your orders.

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

