



NEWSLETTER 19

SEPTEMBER 1992

G R O U P   N E W S

MEETINGS HELD MAY - JUNE

Once the Treasurer's accounts had been passed (outstanding from the AGM) the 7 May meeting settled to Michael Bone's engrossing talk on the local brewing business over the past 200 years. Notwithstanding the work of Peter Mathias and others on the London brewers and on individual firms elsewhere, there is still no standard history against which Bath's own involvement can be measured. The failure of Bath's larger brewers to survive after the 1920s needs explanation, though a couple of 'cottage' brewhouses did remain even in the 1950s. Michael Bone first described the malting and brewing processes, which gave rise to distinctive buildings and structures. As domestic brewing declined in the 19th century, the larger enterprises - typified by Georges's Bristol Brewery - had considerable premises and steam-powered equipment; these produced the Burton-style pale ales which tended to supplant the once-popular dark porters. Large-scale historical maps and present-day physical evidence testify to a once-thriving Bath industry. Examples of malt-houses and stores could be found along the Kennet-and-Avon Canal and the river proper (e.g. Chandlers & Mawer at Broad Quay, J.D. Taylor in Walcot Street), but Bath also obtained malt from outside: Warminster and Marshfield were both prominent malting centres. Among the city's larger breweries were the Northgate, which once straddled the river close to today's Podium; the Walcot and nearby London Breweries; the Bathwick, which was prominent in 'Bath Brewery Ltd.', the group formed against the threat of commercial take-over, and the Avondale at Batheaston. Visible signs of the many brewhouses belonging to individual pubs survive on the ground, in old photographs and in other records - especially outside central Bath at Weston, Odd and Combe Down, Southstoke, Brassknocker Hill, Kensington and Batheaston, while the Corn Street brewery is documented in the auction catalogue of its plant in 1891. So much beer production presupposes a large demand, and Michael Bone ended by touching on the social implications and the rise of the temperance movement. He also handed out statistics on the Bath brewing industry suggesting a peak in the late 19th century.

The annual outing on 17 June took us no further than to Walcot church. Here Jane Root introduced the complicated architectural history of a building that may well occupy a Roman cemetery site, and whose St. Swithun dedication hints at a possible 9th-century re-foundation. The first physical survival is a monument of 1685 from a small church of unknown date and appearance (except that it had no tower) which suffered such severe storm damage in 1739 it had to be completely rebuilt. In the crypt we were able to visualize the size of its successor, erected in the early 1740s to a design by the churchwarden Robert Smith (an alternative plan by John Wood having been rejected). The imminent overrunning of Walcot by

building development had not been foreseen, and the new church, though with a tower, was still of modest dimensions. By the 1770s it was patently inadequate, and in 1775-78 John Palmer supervised a major widening of the church on the north and south, resulting in a squareish ground plan which allowed the enlarged congregation to participate fully in services (rather in the manner of Wren's recommendations for matching architectural to liturgical needs). Once again population growth soon outstripped the available seating, and Palmer was called on to extend the church by two further bays to the east (1787-89) and to rebuild the tower and add the now familiar spire (1789-92). The elegant interior was soon enhanced by rich touches of crimson velvet, gold-lace fringes, and new candlesticks. From the 1840s onwards, however, the influence of the Ecclesiological movement brought successive mediaevalizing changes to the interior arrangements, including a Gothic screen and other furniture, a new East window filled with stained glass, and a corbelled-out sanctuary. The galleries that once hung from the columns dividing nave from aisle were also set back on iron supports, the Hedgemoor landslip having given due warning about the possible vulnerability of the site. Jane Root, while deploring the Victorian alterations, pointed to more recent improvements: the recovery of the 18th-century brass chandeliers, the return of the organ to its old position and rebuilding of the spire. Her newly issued history, The Parish Church of St Swithin Walcot (copies available at £2.50) considerably amplifies her talk, gives the wider parish context and refers to features of the building - such as the very fine collection of memorials - which members examined during their visit. Contact her at 26 Rivers Street, Bath BA1 2QA, if you wish to buy a copy.

#### WORKING PARTY ON LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

As resolved at the AGM, a working party has been formed to concern itself with printed and archival sources for Bath history and with institutions holding relevant material, especially Bath Record Office and Bath Central Library. Any comments useful to the working party should be passed to one of its members, viz. David Crellin, Trevor Fawcett, Ruth Fisher, Elizabeth Holland, Marta Inskip and Jane Root.

#### JOHN KITE

With much regret the Newsletter records the death of one of the Group's earliest supporters, John Kite, formerly Bath's chief librarian, on 17 June. The talk he gave at our meeting in February 1991 formed the basis of his valuable article in Bath History IV. Our chairman John Ede represented the Group at the funeral, and the Secretary wrote a letter of condolence to John Kite's widow and family. An obituary appeared in the Evening Chronicle of 26 June 1992.

#### NEW MEMBERS

Brian Barefoot, Uplands Cottage, Turleigh, Bradford-on-Avon, BA15 2HH

Stephen Clews, Roman Baths Museum, Pump Room, Stall Street, Bath, BA1 1LZ

#### OTHER MEMBERS' NEWS

Congratulations to Barbara Milner on the birth of her son, Charles Theo, on 15 June 1992.

Stuart Burroughs has moved to 27 Carlton Gardens, Widcombe, Bath. EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

The annual series of meetings on seventeenth-century Bath, organized by Elizabeth Holland in cooperation with King Edward's School, continued on 13 May. Three of the four speakers addressed specifically Civil War topics. Stephen Beck illustrated the military standards and insignia used by the combatants to proclaim and identify themselves. The paradoxical career of Sir Thomas Bridges, Royalist governor of Bath, was discussed by Elizabeth White; his sudden capitulation to a small band of Parliamentarians in 1645 still awaits explanation. John Wroughton turned to an earlier event, the dramatic moment in summer 1642 when North Somerset threw in its lot with the Parliamentary cause in spite of Royalist pressure. The fourth speaker, Pamela Belle, touched on both the local Civil War and the Monmouth Rebellion as she demonstrated her use of contemporary documentation in constructing the background and characters of her three novels set in 17th-century Norton St. Philip. This was a rewarding evening enjoyed by a large audience. There were several small exhibitions on view and the bookstall did good business.

On 3 June the Bath Preservation Trust opened its permanent 'Building of Bath' exhibition at the Huntingdon Centre. Handsomely installed in showcases or mounted on screens, this display of splendid wooden models, mock-ups, tools, samples, plans, pictures and other artefacts is thought to be the first of its kind in Britain to focus on the building process and the craft techniques involved in the construction, decoration and servicing of a Georgian house. The economics and social aspects of building 18th-century Bath are also covered, and the well-known scale model of the city, now refurbished, is back on show. The former curator, Polly Hudson, and her successor, Christopher Woodward, have passed to the HBRG a copy of the extensive texts on current display at the museum in the hope of receiving corrections and improvements from our members. Would anyone interested in reading them and commenting, please tell the Secretary? Note too that our October meeting will be held at the new Museum.

Details have been received of the Widcombe and Lyncombe History Study Group. After meeting informally for some years this has now taken on a more regular character with a monthly programme of talks, etc. For more information contact Doreen Collyer, Lyncombe Coach House, Lyncombe Vale Road, Bath, BA2 4LS.

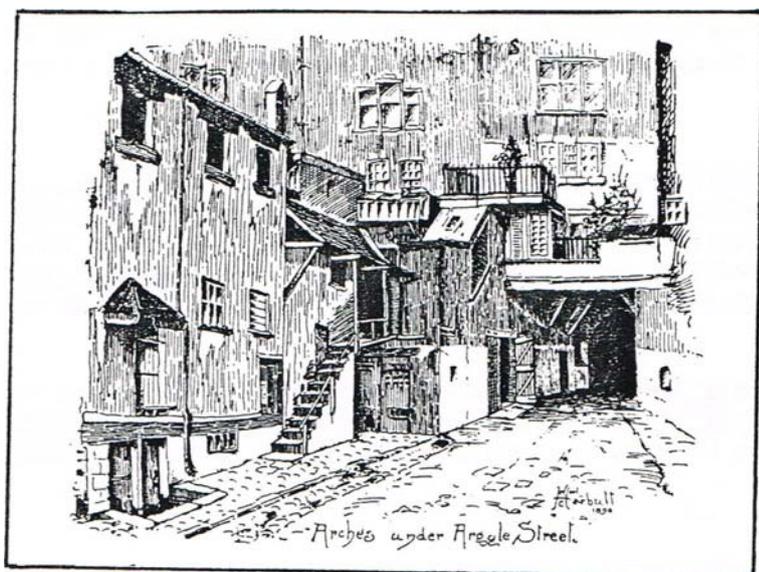
A newly-surfaced printed map of late Elizabethan/early Stuart Bath caused a flurry of excitement in June when it went on display at Bayntun's antiquarian bookshop, for it showed more detail than Speed's well-known town plan. It is hoped that a consensus of opinion on the discovery will eventually emerge. Reduced-size copies of the map can now be consulted at Bath Record Office, the Central Library and the Victoria Art Gallery.

An exhibition entitled "Gainsborough's House in Bath" runs from 24 October to 28 November at the Victoria Art Gallery. It will highlight Sue Sloman's research on the artist's town house (built by John Wood but demolished in the 1890s) and reconstruct its appearance through prints, drawings, photographs, and a scale model. Her article "Gainsborough and 'the lodging house way'" will appear in the Annual Report of the Gainsborough House Society, Sudbury, and offprints should be available by the time of the exhibition.

The annual symposium of the Centre for South Western Historical Studies takes place at Exeter on 21 November. This year's theme is "Power and Authority in the South West since the Sixteenth Century". The Centre is also holding a day school on 17 October focussing on "Small Towns c.1600-1850". Details of both from the HBRG Secretary.

#### OTHER RECENT AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

1. James Russell, "The Roman Villa at Newton St. Loe" Bristol & Avon Archaeology 9 (1990-91) pp. 2-23, including clear diagrams and extensive discussion of the mosaics. The same issue offers brief reports on various local excavations during 1990-91, notably at Walcot and Seven Dials.
2. Archaeology in Bath, 1976-1985, ed. by Peter Davenport (Monograph 28, Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1991) covers excavations in Orange Grove and the Swallow Street - Abbey Green area, as well as other finds and investigations.
3. Eileen Harris and Nicholas Savage, British Architectural Books and Writers 1556 - 1785 (Cambridge U.P., 1990) contains an important entry on John Wood.
4. Timothy Mowl, To Build the Second City: Architects and Craftsmen of Georgian Bristol (Bristol, Redcliffe, 1991) reattributes Rosewell House in Kingsmead Square, Bath, to William Halfpenny rather than John Strahan, the usual candidate.
5. Trevor Fawcett, 'Bath's Georgian Warehouses', Costume, no. 26 (1992), pp.32-9, deals with new trends in 18th-century shopping which prefigured the modern high-street chain store.
6. Catalogue of the Library and Archives of the Royal Bath and West of England Society, recently reissued by the Society, lists books and documents housed at the University of Bath, Bath Record Office, and the Society's offices at Shepton Mallet.
7. Niall Rothnie, The Baedeker Blitz (Shepperton, I. Allan, 1992) puts the reprisal air raids on Bath into full contemporary context.
8. The Bath Medley: English Country Dances & Songs from the 18th Century, ed. Paul Cresswell (Bath, Ashton House, 1992). The HBRG Secretary, writer of the introduction to this booklet, is not responsible for the altered form in which it appears.



Part of old Bathwick Mill and Argyle Street arches, drawn by Noel Harbutt and reproduced in the Bath & County Graphic October, 1896.

## THOMAS FRENCH AND SON

While the Frenches are usually the forgotten names among 18th-century Bath artists, their enterprising work was probably seen by more people than ever visited the studios for fashionable portrait painters. Unfortunately their art was ephemeral, mostly confined to scene painting at the Bath, Bristol and London theatres, and so only to be imagined from tantalising scraps of written description. Thomas French, one of a trio of Frenches working at London playhouses in the 1770s, perhaps settled at Bath early in 1782 after several seasons at Drury Lane.

By then the Orchard Street theatre had, it seems, a new scene room. Having made his mark in The Count of Narbonne (April 1782), French painted some striking transparencies or gauzes for the autumn pantomime The Necromancer, when clever handling of candlelight or oil-lamps allowed enchanting scene changes (from summer to winter, from the Cavern of Despair to a well-furnished kitchen) and produced the spectacle of Vesuvius erupting on a moonlit night - based on a painting by Wright of Derby (conceivably one that Wright had done in Bath

some years earlier). Pantomimes, ballad operas, and the coming melodramas gave scene-painters their best opportunities, since productions of ordinary plays tended to economise by re-using old scenery for wings, backdrops and the painted flats which slid on grooves in the stage.

In the decades up to 1800 the name of Thomas French, increasingly linked with his son's, often occurs in connection with exciting scenic effects at the Bath and Bristol theatres: from Mahomet, The Castle of Andalusia (with its splendid cave scene) and Robinson Crusoe, all put on in 1783-4, to a string of successes in the 1790s. For Columbus in 1793 the painted representation of gigantic rocks suggests the romantic influence of the artist De Louthembourg; here again there was

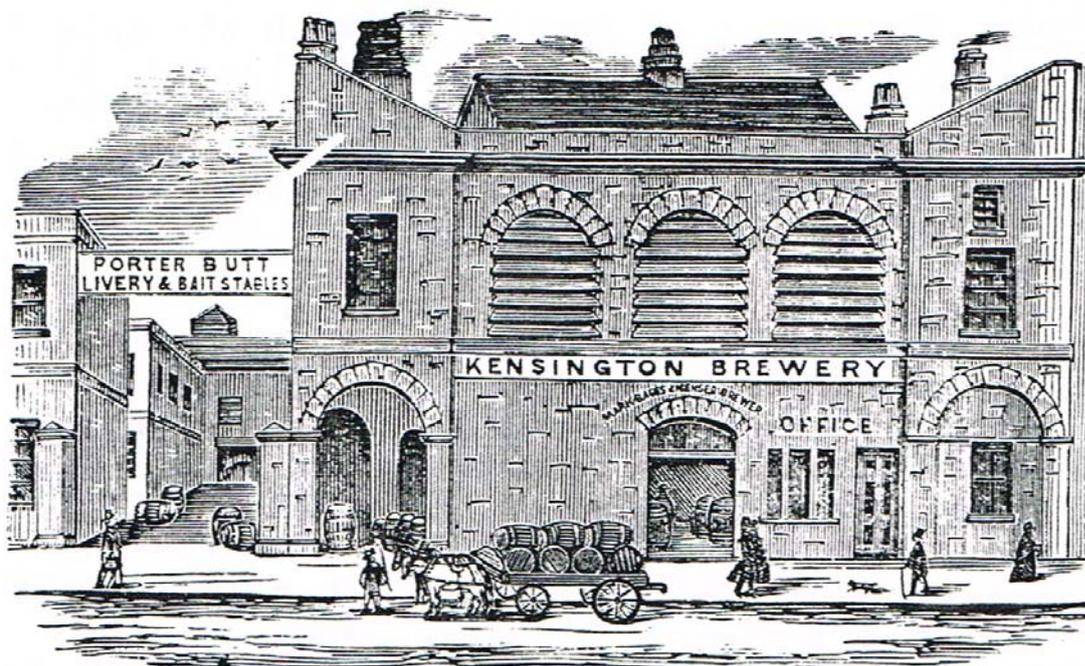
an erupting volcano which the press thought "horribly charming".

In December 1797 the melodrama Raymond and Agnes was staged with "uncommonly picturesque" scenery that included a Gothic library in Don Felix's castle; Agnes's chamber; a view of Madrid with a hotel and convent; a nocturnal forest with a distant hovel; and interiors of the hovel itself, a cavern, and Lindenberg castle. Early in 1798 the Frenches demonstrated their versatility again: first in a representation of the recent royal procession to St. Paul's as it reached Blackfriars ("the grouping of the Spectators in the fore ground was capital"); secondly in a transformation scene in the farce The Chimney Corner, when the snowy hills of Franconia modulated to a comfortable fireside - and "the fall of snow seen through the gothic doorway was perfectly natural". Bath's version of the London 'hit' Pizarro in 1798 again evoked praise for sumptuous

scenic effects, but also brought criticism: the fiery cauldron too much resembled a Wedgwood butter-boat, the trees and branches looked rather like mushrooms and rams' horns, and the colouring was gaudy, perhaps the result of the Frenches straining for exotic effect.

In 1800 however they created a fine set of views of Jamaica for the pantomime *Obi* and some notable stage designs for *Speed the Plough* which involved a castle being set ablaze as well as a rural ploughing scene. Another production, reported by a Bristol theatre critic, displayed a castle hall "that for design, execution and effect, places the YOUNGER FRENCH amongst the most rising Artists of the present day". By now Thomas French junior seems to have been doing the bulk of the work, and it was he who painted the grand architectural piece for the Lower Assembly Rooms in December 1796 when the Prince of Wales received the freedom of Bath.

The elder French, recorded in the 1800 Directory as living at 1 Cottage Crescent, near the Wells Road, eventually died in September 1803 aged 65. His son remained working in Bath until c.1806 and collaborated with metropolitan scene-painters on sets for the opening of the new theatre at Sawclose in 1805. From then on it seems that it was London artists, such as the increasingly dominant Grieve family, who supplied most of the needs of the Bath and Bristol stage.



**Kensington Steam Brewery, Bath.**

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