



NEWSLETTER 29

JANUARY 1996

## GROUP NEWS

### MEETINGS HELD OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 1995

'Spectacular Meandering' was Kirsten Elliott's title on 18 October, but her talk on the development of Lansdown Crescent stuck closely to the point, with maps, plans and slides providing the illustrations. Apart from some scattered properties and gardens, the Lansdown slopes were still mainly in fields when, in 1785, the banker John Lowder (pronounced 'Loader') and coach builder Charles Spackman began the piece-by-piece acquisition of the plots on which to build a concave crescent, two convex wings stepping down the drops at each end, and a proprietary chapel below. One house (later no. 1 Lansdown Crescent) must antedate the plan, for it is narrower front-to-back, ashlar all round and was erected well before the granting of building leases in 1788 for the main crescent and its eastern wing. These leases stipulated coach-roads in front and behind, a 20-foot pavement, an open pasture below the site and uniform stone façades with railings, over-throw lamps and blue-tiled front roofs - but prohibited future window lengthening, drainpipes or tree planting that would spoil the sweeping effect. Names of builders and trustees intermingle on the leases, probably a device to obstruct possible bankruptcy actions. Ratebooks show the sequence of completion: most of the main block and east wing was occupied by 1792, but the west wing only from 1795. The difference in floor levels and ceiling heights between nos. 1 and 2 Crescent, so apparent inside, was disguised on the façade, while the anomalous no. 1 was also balanced on the west of the Crescent by the much larger no. 20 — the house which William Beckford would later bridge across to Lansdown Place West. (This bridge carries urns with aloes made from aluminium, then a novelty.) 'Lansdown Square' was perhaps never intended to be more than a garden, and the scheme was otherwise completed by All Saints' Chapel, a Gothick structure costing £5500 which opened in 1794 and was revitalised in 1813 by the introduction of a good organ. Its complex share-holding ownership (with the basement a separate property) would cause legal problems when the chapel was destroyed in the 1940s bombing.

For the meeting on 9 November we invited Alan Day and Vaughan Hart of the University of Bath to speak on recent advances in computer applications to the documentation, study and imaging of the built environment. Dr. Day spoke first about the computer modelling of Bath, a process that takes almost as long as building a scale model in wood and card, but which is far more versatile in its uses and no longer constrained by a set scale. So far the project has concentrated on Georgian Bath north of the city, using the data from Ordnance Survey aerial photogrammetry to produce a three-dimensional electronic record of buildings and streets, block by block, at three different levels of detail. This record can be manipulated and enhanced at will to create images of every kind from line drawings to realistic town views — and eventually (when computer power

increases still more dramatically) 'virtual reality' environments. The technique is exploitable in many ways, but is particularly helpful — for experts and lay people alike — in displaying the future appearance and impact of new buildings, landscaping, or other changes before they risk being realised. A good recent example was over controversial plans for Bath High School. Another valuable use lies in plotting planning applications, whereby sites on a city map are linked to their computer models and the relevant documentation. Alternatively, visionary schemes may be explored — a point made by slides showing the area between South Parade and the railway station occupied by a huge pool of water out of which gloriously rises St. John's. Historical urban reconstructions (e.g. based on Gilmore's map) could also be attempted more thoroughly if resources were available. Dr. Hart then demonstrated that he had done just that with some of Inigo Jones's designs for London, notably the original Covent Garden piazza (reconstituted by the computer from Campbell's and Hollar's drawings) and the Whitehall Banqueting House (showing the façade with the proportions and three-colour articulation it once had). Another project has enabled the computer to analyse the real space and perspective implied by a design in Serlio's treatise on architecture (1537 ff.) for a theatre with audience seating, stage and very squashed-up stage set. The potential for the investigation of buildings, townscapes and urban sociology through computers is clearly immense and the University of Bath (whose computer model of Bath is available through the Internet) ranks among the pioneers worldwide.

## **MEMBERS' NEWS**

### NEW MEMBERS:

Mr. Allan J. Keevil, 25 Victoria Road, Bath, BA2 3QY, whose article on the Fosseway at Bath was first printed in Proc. Somerset Arch. & Nat. Hist. Soc., vol.133 (1989), is now researching the history of the Bath Barton.

Mrs. Alexandra Kelly, 7 Claremont Walk, Fairfield Park, Bath, BA1 6HB: she has published on the Holburne family and, more recently, on the Reeve family of goldsmiths in the Silver Spoon Club's journal.

Mrs. Julia Stevens, Brooklands, Burnett, Keynsham, BS18 2TF.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

Ian Crowe, 11 Chadlington Road, Oxford, OX2 6SY.

We also have the good news of another doctorate:

Warm congratulations to Amanda Berry on achieving an Oxford D. Phil. Copies of her thesis, 'Patronage, Funding and the Hospital Patient, c. 1750-1815: Three English Regional Case Studies' [i.e. Bristol, Exeter and Northampton] can be seen at the Bodleian Library in Oxford or at Bristol Record Office.

Graham Finch's sudden death in late September is by contrast a sad event to record. Although he never formally joined the HBRG he always gave us keen support. Members will recall his expert talk to the Group on the evolution and design of Bath shop fronts and, only this summer, his contribution to the guided walk on Lansdown and Sion Hill. His passionate concern for Bath's historic buildings will be greatly missed.

## **RECENT and FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS**

1. Jean Manco, 'Pulteney Bridge' Architectural History, vol 38, 1995, pp.129-145. (Offprints available from Bath Preservation Trust outlets.)
2. N. DuQuesne Bird, 'The goldsmiths and allied craftsmen of Bath 1620-1750,' Somerset and Dorset Notes & Queries, vol. 33, 1995, pp.394-403.
3. Barry Horton, West Country Weather Book (published by the author, 1995). A very patchy chronology of dramatic local weather events over recent centuries rather than the proper survey of weather fluctuations (and their impact on agriculture, travel, the lot of the poor, etc.) which would count as serious history.
4. Trevor Fawcett (compiler), Voices of Eighteenth-Century Bath: an Anthology (Ruton, 1995). 202 pp. £9.00. (Review by John Wroughton.)

This is an admirable publication, which fills a major gap in the existing range of printed material on eighteenth-century Bath. Voices provides an anthology of contemporary texts, illustrating events, daily life and attitudes in this leading Georgian spa. It is divided into eighteen sections each with its own scene-setting introduction. Delightful illustrations, which enliven the text, are provided by Barbara McLaughlin and based on original eighteenth-century caricatures. The extracts, skilfully edited into sensibly manageable portions, are culled from a rich variety of sources including private letters, memoirs, diaries, newspaper reports, advertisements, Corporation records and guidebooks. Of perhaps even greater importance is the fact that individual authors are themselves drawn from widely differing social backgrounds. The observations of eminent personalities such as John Wesley, William Pitt, Jane Austen and Richard Nash are thus intermingled with the forthright opinions of a cook, a Cornish parson, a thief and a school girl. We are therefore provided not only with a three-dimensional view of the city with its sights, sounds and smells, but also an authentic insight into the experience of living there in the eighteenth century. Needless to say, the more glamorous aspects of high society with its medicinal waters, marriage markets, banquets, balls, coffee houses and ice-cream parlours are not neglected — but nor are the everyday problems which lurked just below this highly polished surface. The glimpses we are given of parking difficulties, endless street noise, the constant fleecing of visitors, the nuisance of stray dogs, the ill-mannered behaviour of the young, the threat of strikes, price wars among traders and political sleaze on a local level are both fascinating and reassuring. *Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose!*

Trevor Fawcett is to be warmly congratulated on this well-researched and beautifully presented volume. It will be of considerable value to teachers and scholars of the period in their search for contemporary material and, at the same time, a source of enormous pleasure to the general reader. Documents can all too often be dull and tedious but these are spell-binding. The lively, colourful and gripping extracts based on genuine human experience make this essential reading for all those who are interested in the history of our city.

5. Bath History, vol. 6 (1996). (The editor, Brenda Buchanan, sends this preview.)

Preparations for the publication of the new volume of Bath History are now well in hand and it is hoped that the high standard of earlier issues will be maintained. As before, attempts have been made to secure as wide a range of chronology, method of approach and subject matter as possible and to balance the text with well-chosen illustrations. Rob Bell's discussion of some new perspectives on the early history of Bath Abbey is based largely on archaeological evidence, in contrast to Allan Keevil's study of the Barton of Bath which is rooted in a close examination of documentary material, whilst Joe Bettey's work in the legal archives has provided unusual insights into local life and litigation in this area in the sixteenth century. Brenda Buchanan's essay on the creation of the Avon Navigation carries these studies into the eighteenth century and into Bath's burgeoning but sometimes underestimated importance in textile and agricultural history. Nicholas von Behr contributes a study of the woollen textile industry in Twerton and Helena Lim examines Bath's role in the Bath and West of England Society. Finally, the social, cultural and political life of Bath continues to remain central to our concerns, as is shown by Sue Sloman's article on artists' picture rooms in the eighteenth century and Alex Kolaczowski's study of Jerom Murch and local politics in the nineteenth.

It is hoped that the volume will be available in the spring and the editorial committee look forward to the continuing support of the History Group on this as on previous occasions. HBRG members will be advised in due course when concessionary-price copies are available.

## **BATH RECORD OFFICE**

The previous Newsletter announced the arrival at the BRO of the archive of the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases (after an HBRG member had alerted the City Archivist to the unsatisfactory storage conditions in which it was previously being housed). Colin Johnston adds that the deposit contains:

All surviving 18th- and 19th-century administrative papers, as well as a small collection of medical books of the same period. The core of the deposit is the unbroken sequence of minute books of Hospital Governors' meetings from 1737 to 1948. There are similar long runs of annual reports, which cover the period 1738-1970 and benefactions registers for 1737-1883. Other early material includes correspondence from the 1730s and 1740s, the House Visitor's books of the 1740s and 1750s, the only pre-20th-century admission register covering 1742-52 and a case-book for 1750-58. A few 19th-century photographs show the austere conditions on the wards and also the chapel and board room.

## **OTHER LOCAL NEWS**

1. On Saturday 16 March the Avon Local History Association holds a symposium at UWE's St. Mathias Campus, Fishponds, Bristol, on 'The Annals of the Poor'. Graham Davis, Moira Martin and Elizabeth White will speak about the poorhouse records of the Bath, Bristol, Bedminster and Keynsham Unions. Cost to HBRG members is £5 and booking forms are available from the Secretary.
2. The ALHA is also planning an updated Avon Local History Handbook, again under J. S. Moore's editorship and with an intended publication date of 1997. For those ordering in advance the price is likely to be around £10 and the ALHA needs some idea of likely orders now. Could HBRG members tell the Secretary as soon as possible if they expect to place an order at some future date?

The Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society has instituted a BIAS Brunel Prize worth £150, to be awarded every two years. Entries for the 1997 prize should deal with an industrial archaeological site (or sites) in the Bristol region and comprise a hitherto-unpublished written report or record. Submissions are due by 31 August 1996. Further information from the HBRG Secretary.

4. The Bristol and Avon Family History Society now holds a finding list of nearly half-a-million names recorded from monumental inscriptions in Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire. Taken from Anglican churches, Nonconformist chapels and some cemeteries, the entries are arranged by parish in surname order with geographical and chronological breakdown.

# THE TRAGEDY IN BATH



In September 1870 a Bath murder even made the front page of the Illustrated Police News. According to the report, John Prankard, master of a boys' prep school at no. 1 Spencer's Belle-vue (Lansdown Road), had for some time threatened violence against his three daughters. Discovering the elder two's intention to flee the house, Prankard in a frenzy shot dead 22-year-old Minnie, wounded 19-year-old Kate with two shots and finally took prussic acid to end his own life. Such a sensational event may have been rare at Bath, but the annals of crime can be documented at all levels in the city from at least the 18th-century onwards. Together with policing, justice and law enforcement generally, crime deserves more historical attention than it customarily gets. Another nice subject — or maybe not so nice — for someone ?

## THE ANGLICAN REFORMATION AT BATH

A recent publication — Eamon Duffy's The Stripping of the Altars (1992) - shows persuasively that Catholic teaching, liturgy and ceremonial still had a powerful hold on the popular imagination right up to the fundamental religious changes imposed from the 1530s onwards. Even the cycle of the seasons was marked by the familiar recurrence of fasts and festivals, rituals and processions. Attendance at low and high mass was commonplace. Pious reading matter circulated widely thanks to the spread of both printing and literacy. People venerated particular saints and invoked them in times of trouble or to intercede for the souls of the dead to speed their passage through Purgatory. Parish churches were full of altars, chanties, rood screens, devotional carvings, candles and lamps, wall-paintings, stained glass, holy vessels and priestly vestments. Town guilds were often associated with the cult of patron saints and the maintenance of chapels.

At Bath the detailed evidence is somewhat scanty, though the late mediaeval and early Tudor wills published by the Somerset Record Society (vols.16, 19 and 21) reveal bequests to Bath churches for sacred ornaments, candles, and memorial services to the dead (obits), as well as yielding scattered references to one

of the city's key religious institutions, the chapel of St Catherine — intercessory saint of the craft guilds and freemen - in St Mary de Stall's church. The St Michael's churchwardens' accounts (printed in *Somerset Arch. & Nat. Hist. Proc.* vols.23-6, 1877-80) tell of chalices and other vessels, of fine copes, of processional banners (for Corpus Christi and Rogationtide), of the canopied high altar, the rood with its candelabrum, the Easter sepulchre, the ringing of knells for departed souls, and the large consumption of candles at Easter and other festivals. The first real threat to all this came only in 1535 with Thomas Cromwell's campaign against relics, pilgrimages, the veneration of images, and of course religious houses. In August 1535 Cromwell received from his commissioner, Richard Layton, an exaggerated report on the state of Bath Abbey, evidence for future use, and in 1536 a new Act sought to abolish many of the proliferating saints' days and holidays — though for the present it seems Bath's St Catherine's day (25 November?) was spared. Over the next few years reformers and traditionalists vied for control, but fresh injunctions in 1538 virtually outlawed pilgrimages, the cult of saints, the burning of candles before images, the use of the rosary and the ringing of the angelus, and required every parish to obtain a copy of Coverdale's English-language Bible. In many parts of the country, and probably at Bath, such radical change was contested and resisted, but there was no resisting the suppression of Bath Abbey in January 1539 when Prior Holleway and his twenty monks were expelled. The trade that the Abbey must have brought the town now dried up, and all the burials, masses, and prayers for local citizens came to an end. The Corporation turned down the chance of buying the monastic church cheaply (afraid perhaps of being accused of cheating the King). The building was stripped of its lead, glass and iron, and the site left to moulder.

At parish level, however, Protestantism made little headway during the 1540s until after Henry VIII's death. Ceremony and liturgy at St Michael's, for example, seem little affected up to then. Dirges and requiems for the dead were held as usual. The customary sums were spent on Easter candles and on overnight vigils at the Easter sepulchre. But with the traditionalist Henry out of the way, Cranmer in 1547 resumed the assault, condemning images, candles (except for two at the altar), bells, processions, fasts, plus the whole doctrine of Purgatory, and enforcing his new injunctions by visitations across the country from his commissioners. In 1548 Catholic services were replaced by the austerer Anglican rites. The 1549 Prayer Book swept away many of the remaining church festivals. By 1550 altars were coming down everywhere. Such drastic reform must have affected Bath profoundly, as can be read between the lines of the St Michael's accounts. Thus in 1547-8 two altar paintings (one of them representing St Christopher) were sold off, while that year's expenditure included the cost of visitations, presumably from both commissioners and the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and charges for whitewashing over the church's array of wall paintings, of repainting the high altar, and of buying service books in English and, probably, the 1549 Prayer Book. The following year a labourer was paid 15 pence for pulling down the high altar altogether. This was replaced in 1551-2 by a Communion table with a carpet on it, and we no longer find any payments for lamps and candles. A tantalising gap in the record then seems to follow until Mary's short reign and the abrupt reinstatement of Catholic liturgy. Spending on holy oil, candlewax and tapers suddenly figures in the accounts again; the Sanctus bell is mended; once more the Easter sepulchre is watched; vestments and banners are reacquired; and Rogationtide is celebrated anew with bell-ringing and, doubtless, the traditional procession. Then another tantalising gap in the record takes us into Elizabeth's reign and Protestantism is back with a vengeance. In another generation the reform is secure.

This brief account, stimulated by a reading of the Duffy book mentioned above, has most likely overlooked some of the Bath sources and additional evidence would be welcome. Do any members have further details of the local cult of St Catherine, for instance? St Catherine's Court north of Batheaston would be pertinent here, as too any surviving iconography from the region (like the broken, headless figure of the saint found in St Giles, Leigh-on-Mendip). Taking a wider view, not only is the process of the Reformation at Bath fairly obscure, the entire late mediaeval and early Tudor period of the city could badly do with more research. Such information as we have on the rebuilding of the Abbey, the decay of the cloth trade, the activities of William Crouch, and similar matters, is only a beginning.

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