



NEWSLETTER 35

JANUARY 1998

GROUP NEWS

MEETINGS HELD SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 1997

RECENT WORK BY THE BATH ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST: Peter Davenport, 8th October, chaired by Stephen Clews — The Bath Archaeological Trust was set up in the late 1970s. Its mission includes both research and rescue archaeology (the excavation of the Roman Temple Precincts being an example of its research activity). However, in recent years, it has tended to perform small sampling excavations and to conserve the archaeological record in the ground where possible, in keeping with the national trend. Although modern planning procedures aim to protect the archaeological record, there have been requirements for rescue archaeology in and around Bath, usually where earlier planning agreements were flawed.

One recent rescue site (1994) was the Batheaston Bypass, where an area of historic landscape containing Iron Age hut circles, Roman field boundaries (possibly associated with the villa known to be under Bathampton), field boundaries with major deposits of early Saxon ironwork and a mediaeval trackway. This site has now been destroyed, but much good archaeological data has been recovered.

Another site which received significant attention was at the back of the Hat and Feather in Walcot Street (1989-92). Buildings (including a possible blacksmith's shop) were terraced into the steep hillside, as in modern "split level" style. The frontages on the main Roman road to London included an arcaded paved area. The buildings started at an early date, shortly after the invasion, and a side-street past the buildings had been resurfaced many times between the second and late fourth centuries. Renovation work in Lower Borough Walls recently provided access to the vaults. One vault terminated against the city wall. The construction at this point appeared to be mediaeval, with a 17C paving against it. Search of other vaults on an opportune basis revealed the city wall, of apparently unaltered Roman construction, at the end of York Street. It would have helped to excavate here to locate traces of the massive Saxon wall found further west at the site of the collapsed vaults in York Street in 1994. Renovation work at the old Oddbins shop in Beau Street had been found to have damaged the mediaeval layers but the Roman archaeology remained intact beneath it. A recent evaluation (1997) at Oldfield Boys' School has revealed a large Roman building of at least seven rooms, complete with a tessellated pavement in at least one of them. This has been severely damaged by ploughing in mediaeval times, but is a remarkable find outside the city to the south.

Work outside Bath has included partial excavation of a Roman building in Ramscombe Bottom, under Charmy Down — the site has been sampled, but it is well protected. There has also been

an excavation of a Roman burial in a farmer's field in Kilmersdon. Burials have also been found at Haycombe Drive, but they were disturbed before the archaeologists arrived.

Further away, Wick Farm at Arlington near Gloucester was excavated by the Trust as there were similarities with Iron Acton. The building comprised a 14C and a 17C wing, refurbished in the 19C. The 14C wing had been shortened by one bay at some stage. Excavations had also revealed the foundations of a 13C building and the 12C, which had been deliberately filled when the site was enlarged.

The most recent work has been at the back of the Crescent Hotel. Only a rutted trackway and a ground surface marked by animal hooves was found but it is all valuable evidence about the landscape around Bath.

POST-MEETING NOTE: Since the above report, substantial finds have been uncovered by the Bath Archaeological Trust under Clarks' shoe shop on the corner of Union and Westgate Street.

These have been reported in the local press.

JOHN OSWIN

THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY IN WILTSHIRE AND SOMERSET: Ken Rogers, 12 November, chaired by Colin Johnston — The speaker divided his talk into two parts: on changing techniques and on surviving buildings. Much of his material related to Trowbridge, Frome and Bradford-on-Avon, but he ranged far and wide and made it clear that the quality of cloth from the West Country remained — even after it was overtaken by Yorkshire as regards quantity — widely considered as superior though expensive. It was a woollen cloth, not a worsted, and for many centuries basic techniques — carding, sorting, spinning, weaving, napping, shearing, fulling — remained unchanged. Innovation came with the early Middle Ages and the growing use of water-power. From the towns the industry moved out into the river-valleys, and mills once used for flour were employed for fulling, a process that felted and shrank the cloth, which was then exported to Flanders and Northern Italy for skilled finishing. Fortunes were made, and the benefactions of wealthy clothiers have left their mark on local churches (strictly "cloth" rather than "wool" churches). Equally impressive, too, were the growing number of fine clothiers' houses (in Trowbridge and elsewhere, but particularly in Bradford-on-Avon, which expanded notably in the late 17C). From 1600, Spanish merino wool tended to replace the produce of Northamptonshire and the Cotswolds, and lighter more colourful 'medleys' took the place of heavier woollens. Continental craftsmen were welcomed in later years, though there is no documentary evidence to support the tradition (encouraged by Aubrey) of a large influx of "Flemish weavers".

With the Industrial Revolution came heavier machines such as carding engines and "spinning jennies" and by 1800 the workshops that had often adjoined the clothiers' own houses began to look more like factories. Water-power remained the favoured source of energy as exemplified by the large mills at Twerton, and could still be found in use in the early 1900s. Horse-power was too costly and steam was delayed in the West by the cost of coal, though the opening of the coal canal led to Trowbridge's first steam factory by 1805. But the area was not free from the social unrest consequent upon the introduction of new 'finishing' machines — the gig mill and shearing frame. In fact, West Wiltshire anticipated by ten years the Luddite troubles Yorkshire saw in 1812. By the mid-19C the West Country cloth trade had slumped, overtaken by the North. Briefly, between 1850 and 1870, things looked up, thanks to an American market able to afford the West Country's high prices; but by 1875 — partly because of the rise of the Scottish Border industries — the great days were over. All this the lecturer illustrated with a wide variety of slides ranging from French stained glass to photographs of local buildings. A fascinating and instructive tour-de-force greatly appreciated by his hearers.

MICHAEL BISHOP

BATH AND THE CRIMEA WAR: Bill Hanna, 10 December, chaired by Kirsten Elliott — If the Imperial War Museum has already accumulated a huge database on war memorials, it is thanks to many local volunteers like Bill (and Pauline) Hanna. Their research has already discovered c.125 combatants from the Bath area who took part in the Crimean campaign of 1854-56 — one essential source being the memorial obelisk in the Abbey cemetery which unusually includes rank-and-file as well as officers. Among them, for example, we have Seaman William Shell of 6 Hampton Row, shot on board The Terrible, the very first allied casualty of the whole war; and George Roberts and Robert Warren of the 21st Fusiliers, one dying of sickness in the Crimean winter, the other after lying two days before Sebastopol with his legs shattered by the Russian guns. The well-disciplined 21st was led by another Bath man, Col. Frederick Ainslie, whose vivid campaign letters to his brother have been printed and tell, for example, of the voyage out to the Black Sea, the devastating cholera at Varna (where the Bathonian Col. W. Trevelyan of the Coldstream Guards succumbed), the battle of the Alma, the morale-sapping siege of Sebastopol, and the heroic defence of the Inkerman ridge by Ainslie's 21st and the 63rd regiment commanded by Col. E.S.T. Swyny, whose name is also on the Abbey cemetery memorial. Back home, Bath citizens were also playing their part, sending out home comforts and Bath newspapers, raising money through the Patriotic Fund, and even accommodating 136 wounded Crimean veterans overnight on one occasion — some at the hospitals but 50 in the Guildhall banqueting room. Stothert & Pitt helped fit out a prefabricated hospital designed by Brunel, and Samuel Stothert, chaplain to the Naval Brigade, sent home on-the-spot war reports as well as hints about business opportunities (e.g. tugboats on the Danube). Bath men won V.C.s, took part in the charge of the Light Brigade, died leading attacks (General Sir John Campbell of Gt. Pulteney Street), and in some cases survived to take part in Bath's peace celebrations in May 1856 and the later installation of two Russian cannon in Victoria Park. But one of the city's greatest soldiers, General Richard Guyon, who served in the Hungarian and Turkish armies, was never called on and died of cholera in Constantinople still waiting for a command.

TREVOR FAWCETT

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Mike Chapman, An Historical Guide to the Ham and Southgate Area of Bath (Bath, Mike Chapman & the Survey of Old Bath, 1997) 34 pp. including maps and illustrations, £3.99 (13 to HBRG members, available from Mike Chapman)

Trevor Fawcett, 'Fires, fire-fighting and insurance in 18th-century Bath', Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset vol. 34, Sept. 1997, 125-32.

STRATTON-ON-THE FOSSE

The following note was prepared by Jane Lawes, Director of Excavations at Stratton-on-the-Fosse on behalf of the Bath and Camerton Archaeology Society. It was originally prepared for an open-day in August, 1997.

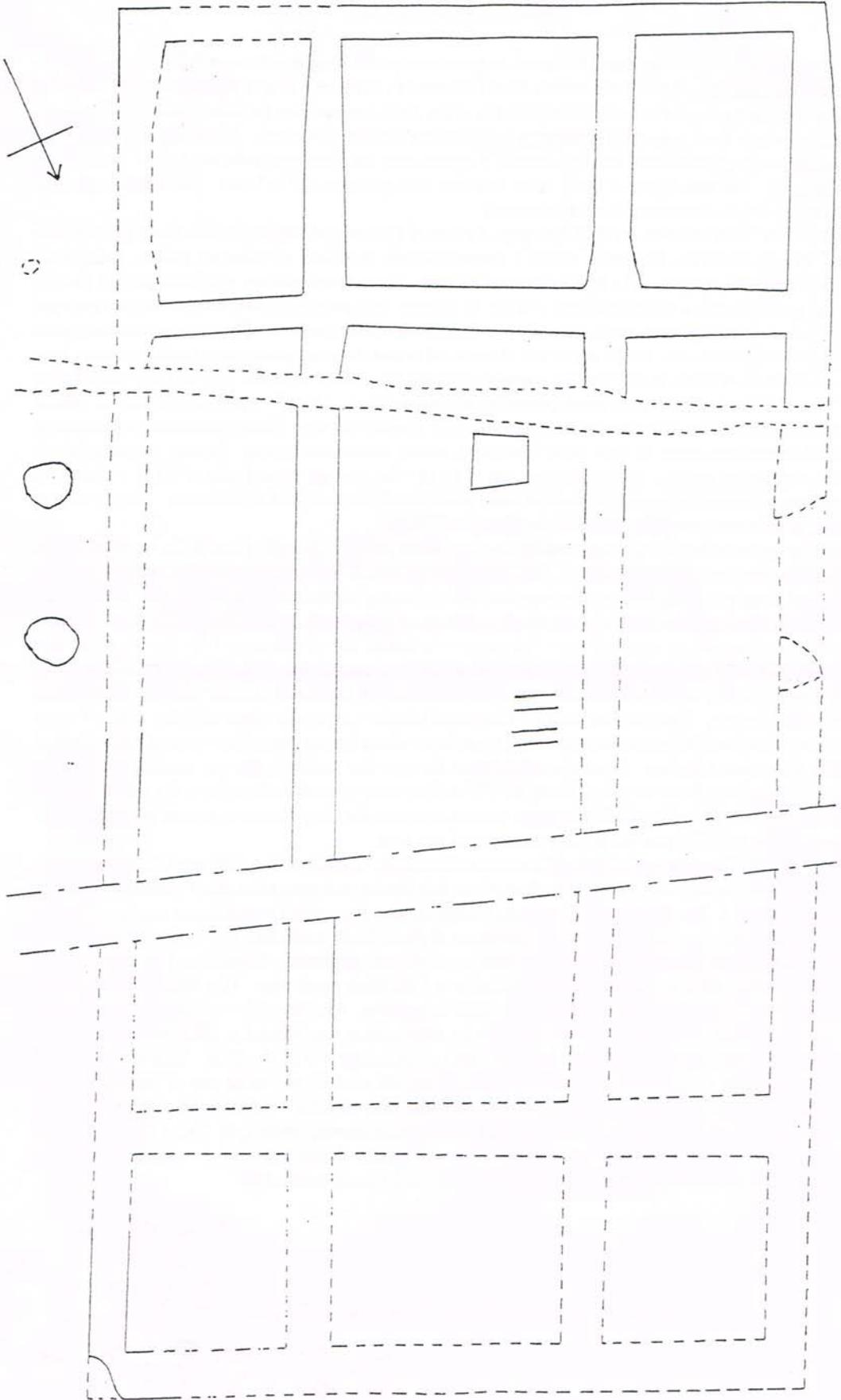
We have now completed three seasons of work on the Romano-British Farmstead found in 1993. In previous years, we have only worked for a very short three-week period, but this year we have had six weeks on the site and have been able to complete the area, started earlier, and open a large space covering the remaining third of the building. The excavation is run for training and research purposes and we have no need to rush the pace of exploration, hence the slow progress. The area opened this year has been enormously exciting as we have found more wall debris than expected. We are hoping to continue in this area next year and remove the collapsed rubble to reveal the sealed layers and walls beneath.

It is now possible to make a tentative ground plan of the entire building, but building phases are still not clear as the rubble is still covering the northern third. The exact layout of the building will be very difficult to recreate because of the action of later stone robbing for mediaeval buildings nearby. One of the most exciting discoveries on the site this year were the column bases found near the east wall facing the Fosse Way and marking the previous grand entrance to the building. It is clear that the building was intended to impress. The entrance appears to have had a portico or porch supported on two stone pillars. Unfortunately the pillars no longer survive, only the pitched footings on which they stood are present and can be clearly seen in section. In previous years we have found some fine pieces of masonry, including a carved roofing finial and a small cornice block that have given a hint at the grandeur intended. The roof was made of pennant sandstone tiles, which were fastened to what must have been an immense wooden superstructure by iron nails, hundreds of which have been found over the last three years.

The curious thing about the building is that the grandeur implied by the exterior structure does not seem to extend within the building itself. The floors are, apparently, of beaten earth or perhaps mortar that has completely eroded away. There is no central heating here or mosaics, not even a tessellated pavement. However there are some good examples of fine table ware and plenty of good-quality cooking pots. Here is an apparently wealthy establishment of reasonable size, but not a top-of-the-range "villa". From the outside the building would have looked very impressive, but the inside implies a comfortable but not opulent existence. We can only speculate on the status of the family who lived here in the middle of the third century and two possibilities are equally plausible: (i) this was the home of a reasonably wealthy farmer; or (ii) it was a wayside inn providing for the travellers on the nearby Fosse Way. There is still no evidence of a bath house which one would expect with an official inn, but that does not preclude the possibility. We suspect that it was abandoned towards the end of the fourth century (as most Romano-British settlements seem to have been) due to the unsettled political situation in Britain at that time. There is no evidence that the building was reoccupied after that date, being left to decay until the stone of many of the walls was reused sometime in the early mediaeval period.

The Sketch Plan opposite shows in dotted lines, the area not excavated at the time of this open-day, held last August. Since then, more work has been accomplished.

Sketch Plan of Building



Approx scale 1:100

THE FATAL RIVER

In the 57 years 1744-1800 at least 170 human corpses were pulled from the Avon at Bath, mostly near the city itself but including the 11-mile stretch from Claverton to Saltford. This is certainly not the complete tally, for it is based on reports in the incomplete file of the *Bath Journal* plus the records of Bath Coroner's Inquests — which dealt only with drownings found within the city 'liberties'. Moreover it is clear from comparisons with other sources that the *Journal's* reports were far from comprehensive, even for fatalities at Bath itself. The true figure is likely to be well over 200, perhaps 250 or more. Nevertheless the 170 known cases may be considered a reliable sample.

Using the word 'child' to cover the 0-14 age range, the total of 170 may be roughly broken down into 95 male adults, 30 male children, 32 female adults, 5 female children, 6 infants of unknown gender, and 2 other persons of uncertain category. The high proportion of males — over three-quarters — reflects the fact that the river was predominantly a masculine zone. All the 25 or more fatal swimming incidents concerned men and boys, since swimming (done nude, it seems) was essentially a male pastime. The 19 who drowned while watering/washing horses etc. and 15 out of the 18 involved in fatal boat accidents were similarly male. Men too were much more likely to fall into the water when drunk ('disguised in liquor'), or as they washed after a day's work, or while they slept or eased themselves on the river bank. Out of 14 probable or certain murder victims retrieved from the Avon nine were infants and one a 10-year-old boy. Other infanticides by drowning may well never have come to light since these were usually chance discoveries. In only one category do females outnumber males — that of suicides, by 17 to 11 — but the aggregated total of 28 is probably an understatement because drownings of doubtful cause would usually be classified as accidents. Being a stigma to avoid, suicide was generally attributed to 'disordered' senses.

Not surprisingly most drownings happened during the warmer months, though in one of the worst accidents three youths were lost skating in winter. Heavy summer growth of water weed resulted in some deaths, as bathers and people who had fallen in became increasingly entangled the more they struggled. Others were said to have suffered sudden cramp or were simply swept out of their depth by the treacherous Avon currents especially near the bridges and mill weirs. Sometimes the bodies stayed submerged for days or weeks and then washed downstream to finish up at Newbridge or Saltford, except that when the site of drowning was known the Corporation would commission one of the licensed river fishermen to undertake the grisly search for the bloated corpses. The river that bordered Kingsmead Meadow, a popular place to bathe, claimed many victims, but so did the slipway at the bottom of Avon Street where horses were often watered and refreshed by being ridden into the river. Beyond a certain point the river bed suddenly shelved, causing the horse to panic and sometimes throw its rider. From the 1750s there were sporadic calls to have the watering place railed round, and in 1796-7 a public campaign seemed to arouse the Corporation to action, yet nothing can have been done, for 1799 saw yet another drowning at this spot.

It seems that many Georgians never learned to swim, and that those who did seldom had any life-saving skills. Several would-be rescuers were themselves dragged to their deaths, and spectators often watched helplessly as someone drowned. But there were miraculous recoveries too. A standard resuscitation treatment was to bleed the patient, rub vigorously with salt, and administer drops of dilute ammonia. Following the foundation in London of the Royal Humane Society for the recovery of persons apparently drowned in 1774 the surgeon Cruttwell, it seems, tried to initiate something similar at Bath three years later. This had no lasting result except that the new Casualty Hospital adopted the RHS procedures. Another effort to launch a local branch came in 1793, and in 1795 one of the key treatises on asphyxiation was printed at Bath, A. Fothergill's *A New Inquiry into the Suspension of Vital Action in Cases of Drowning and Suffocation*. This recommended artificial respiration (e.g. by using bellows to force air up one nostril), moderate use of electric shocks, warming and rubbing the patient, and giving stimulants (wine with cordial), but Fothergill was unconvinced about the value of such procedures as bleeding the patient, administering emetics, or trying tobacco smoke instead of fresh air. Not until 1805 was the Bath Humane Society finally established — for further details see Roger Rolls' article 'Reviving the Dead' in *Bath City Life* March-April, 1997.

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The Newsletter is compiled and typed by Judith Samuel