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NEWSLETTER 48

MAY 2002

GROUP NEWS

A Word from the Editor.

As the newsletter is already quite lengthy, with the minutes of a quite lively AGM and three reports, I have decided to hold over the book reviews. This will include Professor R.A. Buchanan's book about Brunel, which some of you will, I am sure, have already discovered is fascinating reading. If, over the summer, any of you find some particularly enjoyable books which you think will be of interest, do please let me have information about them. These can include old books. While mentioning Brunel, can I draw your attention to information about the BIAS Brunel prize, details of which you will find after the reports. Finally, I am sure that everyone who attended or helped at the Local History Fair on the May Bank Holiday weekend found it extremely enjoyable and interesting. I certainly did!

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The Annual General Meeting of the History of Bath Research Group 11th April 2002 at the Museum of Bath at Work

MINUTES

1. The meeting was attended by 18 members and apologies were received from Angus & Brenda Buchanan, Michael & Philippa Bishop Michael Rowe and Bill & Pauline Hanna.
2. The minutes of the meeting of 12 April 2001 were confirmed.
3. In her chairman's report Mary Ede identified a number of areas of significance for the year
 - a. Due to the departure of Amada Berry just after last years AGM the committee took it upon themselves to organise meetings on a group basis. This resulted in a change of style in the programme with rather more meetings on site at interesting venues. In general there was support from the floor for this new style but Trevor Fawcett did comment that it might be difficult to keep coming up with new ideas for visits.
 - b. Mary raised the issue of progress on the gazetteer. It was agreed that this would be taken as a separate agenda item.
 - c. The format of the newsletter was discussed. David Crellin had produced a copy of the last issue in an A5 format which was circulated. As before some members expressed the fact that the A4 format was more convenient for ring binders. It was agreed that the next newsletter would be produced in both formats and that feedback from members would decide the issue.

- d. Mary expressed her thanks to the members of the committee for their support, in particular for the sterling work that Kirsten Elliot had done on the Newsletter. And the variety of jobs handled by David Crellin. These thanks were echoed from the floor.
4. David Crellin presented the treasurers report in which he outlined the financial state of the group via a statement of affairs which at present is unaudited. The group has a present balance of £584.51 David agreed to get these audited as soon as possible. Having increased the subscription last year the financial position of the group is now healthy and there is no need to increase the membership subscription this year. Trevor Fawcett asked why the cosy of printing and mailing was zero for this year. David pointed out that he does not charge the group for these costs. Trevor expressed the view that these costs should at least be identified for future planning and as a result it was agreed that David would charge for postage in future but pointed out that the cost of printing was not significant at the present time.
5. Election of the committee. There is one vacancy on the committee, which is the position of meeting secretary. Julia Moss has volunteered to carry out this duty on a trial basis. She, together with the existing committee, were unanimously elected on block.
6. The gazetteer. Trevor outlined his position which is that he had had very little response from his suggestions in the newsletter to get volunteers working on the project. As a result he had found that he had moved on to other projects. Elizabeth Holland expressed the view that the project should be integrated in some way with the work going on at the Records Office for inputting data from the city deeds into a database. Mary Ede suggested that a meeting should be arranged in which interested parties should be briefed on what needed to be done. It was also suggested that a simple project to date all the streets in Bath would be a good place to start. On a show of hands it was clear that there were not many members present who felt they had the time to contribute. It was agreed therefore that David Crellin and Kirsten Elliot would form a small committee to see if they could identify a way forward for the project.
7. Suggestions for activities. David Crellin suggested that it would be nice to visit some of the houses in Bath; possibly ones being restored. Marek Lewcun pointed out that this could be difficult for insurance reasons. However if it were to be possible the feeling of the meeting was that it would be a good idea. Owen Ward hope we could visit Freshford as suggested at the last AGM. Joint meetings with other societies were another suggestion.
8. There were no items under any other business.

MEETINGS FEBRUARY, MARCH & APRIL 2002

February 2002 at The Guildhall New Accessions to the City Archive

Speaker: Colin Johnston; Report by Kirsten Elliott

The speaker to the History of Bath Research Group on Tuesday 12th February needed no introduction to most members. Colin Johnston, City Archivist, has been a source of unfailing help and encouragement at all times to those interested in discovering more about the city's history, and he now proceeded to introduce us to some of the latest accessions.

He began by quoting a remark he had heard by Louis de Berniere: History comes about through anecdote. As he explained, some of the most interesting documents that had recently come into his hands included anecdotes which cast a fascinating light on the events of their day.

William Tuck's notebooks introduced the reader to everyday life at the Argyle Chapel. The famous speaker William Jay was portrayed not as the stern preacher that perhaps we all imagine but a man of humour, wit, and kindness. There is a description of a

middle class wedding in which the happy couple rides off in a chaise and four to Shirehampton Inn for the honeymoon. H.E. Goodridge is mentioned, and his engagement to Miss Whitchurch, which tragically came to nothing when she died at the age of 22.

National events come under the microscope – in 1804 there is martial ardour as Napoleon builds his camp at Boulogne, only to see his hopes destroyed at Trafalgar. In 1831 there were the reform riots. The account of events in Bristol began to circulate in the lowest part of the town, and Capt. Wilkins of the Yeomanry decided it was best to take refuge from the mob in the White Hart. The Mayor sent round to the chapels for help. The rain dispersed the mob for a time, although the upright citizens who turned up to help had to difficulty getting into the Guildhall. There was fighting along Cheap Street and Westgate Street. The mob did break through into the coffee room from which they were driven out, but fighting continued. Finally, as is well known, the crowd was dispersed when Captain Figgins took the advice of a chef, and greeted the adventurous rabble that broke in through the windows with red-hot poker.

A more recent archive shed light on the final days of Newton Park as the home of Earl of Lady Temple. These were the letters from the family to the land agents. The letters show how concerned Earl Temple was about the size of his overdraft, and the agents are continually being pressed with instructions about selling property, checking on estate crises such as the paralysis of a cow, and amazement at the “inadequate sum” that is to be paid into his account. Intermingled with this are instructions forbidding roundabouts at the village fete and expressing his disapproval of a tariff reform meeting that was to be held in the village with his permission. Tenants were banned from attending,

The countess was concerned when she was informed anonymously that the coachman was spending a lot of time drinking beer at the Globe. She feels certain that this cannot be the case, but should be checked. Drains also were a cause of concern. Eventually the house and contents were sold. There are details of the items that Sothebys took to London, leaving the local auctioneers to spread the furniture out for the house sale in order to make the house look full.

Letters from members of the family who lived at Battlefields House give a poignant picture of life at the end of the reign of Edward the Peacemaker and Europe’s descent into war. One of the girls notes how nearly everyone is on black at the races due to the death of Edward, and then, four years later, Rolf, known as Beetle, goes jauntily off to war. He writes home with joke ads about Sunny France and descriptions of his billet at Ypres. Three years later, he is dead, another grim statistic in that grimme of wars.

William Lonsdale, in 1825 left an account of his geological exhibition. His manuscripts also contain poetry, and writings about corals, shells and fossils. There is correspondence with advice on publication, how to rectify confusion and dealing with classification problems. Also new to the Archive Room are letters from William Pulteney to his agent, dealing in particular with the problems of his eponymous bridge.

Thanks to Dr Anne Borsay, the archives of the Mineral Water Hospital are now at the Guildhall. Unfortunately the two letters from Samuel Richardson to Ralph Allen quoted in 1971 have not been found. Nevertheless the Patients’ Book makes fascinating reading, with comment on patients ranging from cured or much better to improper case or, finally, dead.

In the Hospital archive Ralph Allen's signature is to be found, and a further association with the great man are the early title deeds of Prior Park, when John Thomas owned the property from 1809 to 1828. This includes a plan of the estate, as well as comments about the problems on the estate such as damage to the trees caused by a fall of snow. For those who consider the 19th century to recent to be interesting there is a document dating from 1634 about the tenants of Weston purchasing the manor, a rather unusual occurrence.

By far the biggest addition to the records is the Ken Biggs Archive. He acquired the records of the company Beresford Smith which date from 1820 to the 1980s and include some fascinating architectural drawings, some of which were on display. This important set of documents show the intentions of architects such as Manners and Gill, Mowbray green and Decimus Burton, the latter particularly interesting given the newly developing spa. The evening concluded with members admiring these and also a set of early calotypes that showed a Bath long gone. It was an evening to remember and everyone was grateful to Colin for introducing us to this new source of research.

March 2002 at The Victoria Art Gallery The Bath Collection

Speakers: Katharine Wall and Kirsty Hartsiotis: Report by Philippa Bishop

The Group met in the semi-basement area of the Victoria Art Gallery, now devoted to offices and storerooms. After a brief introduction by the Keeper of Art, Katharine Wall, we were divided into two groups to be shown in turn the storerooms and the computer system on which the collection is currently being catalogued. Katharine took us into the air conditioned store where the oil paintings are arranged on sliding racks: a great improvement, we were told, on earlier days when they had to be stacked against each other on the floor of an upstairs room, with consequent damage to many of the elaborate frames. We were privileged to draw out the racks, and examine any of the pictures that we wanted. Katharine had already explained that it was only possible to have a fraction of the total of 12,000 items in the collection on show at any one time; so it was a pleasure but no surprise to come on a number of old friends temporarily on the racks, as well as some not so familiar.

We were then taken to the store that houses the works on paper, with its formidable array of solander boxes piled against both walls. She had brought out some examples of the watercolours and prints by artists including Robins, Spen, Fayram, Nattes, and Poole that will need various degrees of conservation before they are suitable for inclusion in the forthcoming exhibition about the Baths.

One of the most fascinating recent "finds" was a watercolour by Henry Venn Lansdown (together with his accompanying note) recording the occasion in 1855 when the entrance to the (then unexcavated) Roman Baths was open for a short time while the Kingston Baths were being emptied and cleaned of mud (a process which apparently took place on a regular basis every fourteen years). This glimpse of the antique remains, which had been discovered during the building of the Kingston Baths and then covered up again, would have predated the interest taken in the site by the antiquarian James Irvine during the 1860s as well as the actual archaeological work undertaken from 1871 onwards. Further research would be needed to extract the full amount of information from this discovery.

Back in the office the Museum assistant, Kirsty Hartsiotis, had got out for our inspection some topographical views of Bath, together with two 19th-century commemorative mugs, and a representative group of some of the miniatures and silhouettes which cannot always be on display because of the limitations of space. She explained the work she was doing in transferring the details from the old hand-written accessions register to a computer system, and the ways in which she was adding to the basic description of each item, wherever possible with a photograph taken on a digital camera.

We are most grateful to our two guides for patiently answering all our questions and for giving us such a useful insight into the resources of the collection. Thanks are also due to Michael Rowe for organising the event.

April 2002 at the Museum of Bath at Work
From Priory Property to Coffee Republic
Speaker: Kirsten Elliott Report : David Crellin

(This was a short talk to follow the AGM)

Kirsten started the talk by pointing out that the title of the talk should have been followed by a question mark (my mistake for which I offer sincere apologies). Was the shop that is now the Coffee Republic opposite the Guildhall once part of the priory estate?

In order to answer this question Kirsten explained how she had been asked to carry out an historical survey of the building by the current owners during the refurbishment. There had clearly been at least three building phases which were possible to identify and in addition, the arms which now adorn the pediment of the rear of the building appear to have originally been on the front based on a contemporary print. Kirsten outlined her analysis of the building phases based on analysis of wall positions, and other tell-tale signs. She also noted that the building had been refronted in the late 18th or early 19th century. The new façade stretched right across the neighbouring shop on the other side of Northumberland Passage making it highly probable that the man responsible for this was James Evill, the jeweller. On the lower stories the windows had been replaced over the years but not on the top storey where she was certain the windows were consistent with the date of about 1800. This despite a view to the contrary the surveyor subsequently called in to take a further look at the structure.

Clearly this was a building with an interesting history but the most exciting part came when Kirsten when up into the garret where the timbers immediately gave the impression of considerable age. Wanting some reassurance from an expert source that her impressions were correct Kirsten contacted Peter Davenport who was also excited by the impression of age. There is a real possibility that this is one of the earliest surviving buildings in Bath. Confirmation of the exact age awaits dendrochronology which is in hand.

Kirsten at first felt there was a possibility that the building was once owned by the Priory but this seems now to be unlikely. Who owned the building in the medieval period however, is still somewhat in doubt as the lively discussion after the end of the talk indicated and we all await with interest the outcome of further research. Kirsten was just relieved that her initial report had engendered sufficient interest that the planning department had decided to follow it up, with such interesting results.

Bristol Industrial Archaeology Society

THE BIAS BRUNEL PRIZE

1. The society has established a prize known as the BIAS Brunel Prize, to encourage archaeological and other research into, and the publication of work on, the industrial archaeology of the Bristol/Bath region.
2. The Society chose to devote the income from the residual funds passed to it by the former Brunel Society to the foundation of this prize. The revenue will be subsidised, if necessary, so that an amount of £150 will be made available every two years, having been awarded for the first time in 1997.
3. Competition of open to BIAS members and to other persons or groups with an interest in the industrial archaeology of the Bristol region.
4. Entries should consist of a written report or record which should:
 - conform to the guidance notes for BIAS Journal, and should not have been published elsewhere, either privately or otherwise, in whole or in part, nor submitted for another prize competition
 - reflect original research into and/or recording of IA sites in the region, with source references
 - be submitted by 31 August in the preceding year (e.g. 31 August 2002 for the 2003 competition).

Entries will be considered for publication in the BIAS Journal.

5. A Panel consisting normally of the Society's President, Chairman, and Journal Editor together with up to two co-opted members, one of whom should be if possible from outside the Society, would decide on awards. The decision of the panel, who reserve the right to vary or withhold the award, will be final.
6. Further details can be had from Mike Bone, "Sunnyside", Avon Close, Keynsham, BRISTOL BS18 1 LQ.

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A Welcome to New Members

Dr Andrew Swift whose research interests include Transport and Pubs.