



G R O U P N E W S

Annual General Meeting

1. Apologies were received from L.F. Haber, Ruth Hayden, Colin Johnston, John Kite, Brigitte Mitchell, Chris Pound, Judith Samuel and Owen Ward. Some 33 members and several visitors were present.
2. In her introduction and report the Chairman spoke of the Group's role as being complementary to that of the Historical Association and mentioned its value in fostering good-quality history at a time when the discipline was under threat both at academic and school level. She cited the debate about the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution to show the contemporary local relevance of historical understanding. In thanking the Group's Committee, and also those concerned in producing the Newsletter, the Chairman paid special tribute to Chris Pound's constitution and regretted that he had to stand down owing to pressure of professional work; he would however continue to promote the republication of historic Bath maps. The working party on sources for Bath history would also become more active on the forthcoming receipt of a grant of £300 from Bath City Council towards its intended survey. Any further recruits for this work should contact the Secretary.
3. The Treasurer's statement showed income up to 31 March 1988 amounting to £320.20, principally from subscriptions. Expenditure on meetings, refreshments, stationery, printing, photocopying, postage, etc. totalled £188.65, leaving a balance of £116.18 on the year and an overall balance of £152.66. Her recommendation that subscription rates stay unaltered was endorsed by the meeting.
4. Colin Johnston had been proposed for the Committee in place of Chris Pound. With this one change the meeting approved the following Committee for 1988 - 89: Chairman - Brenda Buchanan,
Secretary - Trevor Fawcett,
Treasurer - Mary Wills,
other Committee members - Colin Johnston,
Marta Oliver,
Judith Samuel,
John Williams.
5. Several other matters were raised from the floor, the most important suggestions being (1) that the Group might meet in the second or third week of the month in future to avoid clashing with other societies, and (2) that the Group might be able to offer a modest annual prize to encourage history students in local schools. The Committee will consider both proposals.

MEETINGS HELD JANUARY - APRIL 1988

Dr. Haber's account of the Emperor Haile Selassie's exile in Bath was based not only on documentary material like biographies, contemporary newspapers and Foreign Office papers but also on the testimony of Bathonian eyewitnesses, several of whom came to hear him speak at the Huntingdon Centre on 7 January. Driven from Ethiopia by the Italian invasion, the Emperor reached Bath in August 1936 and settled for nearly four years at Fairfield (Newbridge Hill) with his family and entourage of servants, secretaries, political advisors and Coptic priests. Meanwhile he kept up diplomatic pressure behind the scenes and eventually made a triumphal reentry to Addis Ababa with British forces early in 1941. Despite unpaid debts his Bath sojourn had been locally popular. In 1954 he was welcomed back to the refurbished Fairfield and given the freedom of the city. Bath had made its impression in surprising ways, it seems. By coincidence, the day after Dr. Haber's talk The Guardian reported that the Emperor, influenced by the pews of the Abbey Church, had decreed that the Cathedral in Addis Ababa must be similarly provided. It is still the only Ethiopian church to have seats.

On 4 February Mr. A.J. Scrase, a part-time researcher for the Small Towns Project, began by outlining some of the sources available for establishing a demographic and occupation database for Somerset from the late mediaeval onwards. Diocesan and Protestation surveys, Hearth and Poll tax returns, censuses, parish registers and later directories and rate books, yielded information of mixed quality. Leases and rent rolls, though, were potentially rich quarries, as Mr. Scrase went on to demonstrate in his reconstruction of occupancy and development of sites in Wells down to the early 19th century (when local town maps also became useful). Several case histories, described with the help of lucid street and property plans, made the point - as well as confirming economic and social trends across the centuries (e.g. the increasing legal subordination of women by the 17th century).

We were glad to welcome a speaker of Dr. Penelope Corfield's calibre on 2 March to speculate on the phenomenon of Bath's European pre-eminence as an 18th century resort. Why did Bath succeed where so many other places with mineral springs failed to develop? Its rise into the most promoted, talked-about, illustrated, satirised centre outside London was underpinned by national commercial expansion, the existence of a particular political culture and improving transport network, urban specialisation, rising standards of consumption and contemporary medical optimism. Bath capitalised on its early lead by creating a glamorous urban showcase away from the dull Hanoverian court, promoted the mingling of landed gentry and commercial parvenus, and supplied a range of amenities - much copied at other spas - where the idle rich, the retired, the invalid, the nubile young, the gamblers and the clerics, together with the great substratum of servants, could all find their satisfactions. By the end of the century it was more popular than all the other English and European spas put together and a harbinger of the holiday resorts of the future.

Following the AGM on 13th April Mary Wills and Maria Joyce presented a session on the sources for local history available in the Reference Library, illustrating their talk with copious examples of handbooks, bibliographies, indexes and other reference tools. They distributed copies of a very useful list of titles, including general and regional periodicals, and kindly made available advance copies of the revised list of Bath Guides, Directories and Newspapers. Even those who regularly haunt the Reference Library and consider themselves fairly familiar with the sources could find new material and ideas here. Pressure on the ever-willing Library staff from members of the Group can, it seems, only increase. It was apparent this evening from questions and comments how much the Reference Library is appreciated.

SOCIAL EVENING AT PRIOR PARK ON WEDNESDAY 1 JUNE

Continuing the enjoyable series of June social meetings we move this year to Prior Park. There will be an opportunity to view the interior of the original mansion (including the chapel which was spared the fire in 1836) and to rediscover the features of the 18th century landscape garden. As usual on these occasions a charge will be made to cover the cost of wine, refreshments and other expenses. So that we can cater appropriately please indicate on the membership renewal form (enclosed with this Newsletter) whether you will be coming to this meeting and also whether you will be bringing a guest. The charge per person is £1.50, preferably paid in advance. The total may be included on the same cheque as the subscription renewal.

NEW MEMBERS: Mr. Basic Greenslade, 13 Pulteney caAdenz, Bath. BA2 4HC
Mrs. Ruth Hayden, 40 Cranwells Park, Bath. BA1 2yE
Mr. Alan Mason, Tregunter, Charlcombe Park Bath. BA1 577
Mrs. Barbara Milner, Victoria Art Gallery, Bridge St, Bath.
Mr. John R. Oswin, 32 Connaught Mansions, Gt. Pulteney St., Bath. BA2
4BP
Dr. Tony Walter 75 Southcot Place, Lyncombe Hill, Bath. 1A2 4PE

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Mr Marek J. Lewcun, 13 Canterbury Road, Oldfield Park, Bath.

DIRECTORY OF MEMBERS: *The original Directory is now much in need of revision. A new one will be compiled on the forms sent out with this Newsletter and should be available for distribution to members in September.*

CONFERENCE ON EARLY STUART BATH

Early application is advised for a one-day conference on this unfamiliar period of Bath's history to be held at King Edward's School, North Road, Bath, from 9.30 to 4.00 on Saturday 18 June. The speakers and topics are as follows:-Professor Robert Alexander (Point Park College, Pittsburgh) on "Drama and Amusement in Stuart Bath"; Stephen Bird on "The Stuart City: a Visual Tour"; Dr. Roger Rolls on "Asylum Chronicorum Morborum: the Flowering of Medicine in 17th Century Bath" and John Wroughton in a double capacity - firstly presenting "The Citizens of Bath" (the important results achieved by the Survey of Old Bath through the researches of Elizabeth Holland and Marta Oliver) and secondly offering the fruits of his own work in "Quality of Life and the Impact of War". The conference fee of £9 includes morning coffee, lunch and afternoon tea. Application forms are available from the HBRG Secretary or the Headmaster's Secretary, King Edward School, North Road, Bath, BA2 6HU.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

1. Bath History, vol. 2, just published, contains articles on the earliest Guildhall, dance and teachers of dance, the Cross Bath, Beckford in Bath, Bath Abbey, Bath (medical) cases, and chair transport.
2. Two archaeological reports are announced: Temple Precinct and Sacred Spring Report, vol.2 (April) and the Bath Archaeological Trust's Newsletter 6, featuring work carried out in 1986-87 (due mid-June).

3. The next number of Avon Past comes out in May and will concentrate on Bath topics. Contributions are expected on 'An eighteenth-century riding school and tennis court at Bath', 'The Civil War and St. Thomas a Becket, Widcombe, 'A Sheridan drama', and 'Bath and the Methodists'. Copies can be obtained (£1.75 inc. postage) from Mrs. L. Hamid, c/o Avon Community Council, 209 Redland Road, Bristol, BS6, and probably also from outlets in Bath.
4. The Somersetshire Coal Canal Rediscovered: a Walker's Guide by Niall Allsop (Bath, Millstream Books, 1988) £3.95. The capricious 'Indian-ink painting' on Bath buildings (remarked by 19th-century guidebooks) derived ultimately from North Somerset coal; that was carried into the city originally by pack animals but increasingly from 1798 by the canals. In the opening section of this attractive recent addition to the growing Millstream list, Niall Allsop sketches the economic rise and fall of the Somerset Coal Canal, whose prosperity peaked around 1850 before inexorable competition from the railways forced its closure in 1898. Not the least intriguing part of the story tells of the efforts to devise a faster, more water-efficient lock system, and notably the ingenious but ill-fated caisson lock that even Jane Austen was aware of; this device is further discussed in an appendix and reconstructed in fine drawings by Mike Chapman. The meat of the book, though, consists of descriptions of eight walks, not just through rich landscapes but also deep into the industrial past. Each walk is explained by a clear map, photographs, and a full text that provides ample historical context and draws attention to the physical features along the route as well as guiding the footsteps. The purpose may be pedestrian but the style happily is not. Moreover both armchair and actual ramblers are helped in exploring the canal through its time dimension by a selection of early photographs. This is a well-planned volume, solicitous even for peckish and thirsty travellers, and it ends with an account of a successful hoax.
5. Appropriately enough, Camerton during the canal period is the topic of a short article in the Spring 1988 issue of the Avon Industrial Buildings Trust Magazine: Other pieces in the same number deal with the Midland Railway in Bath, Cattybrook Brick Co. and the Crew's Hole industrial site (Bristol), and the Nailsea glassworks.
6. The Hospital of the Nation: the Story of Spa Medicine and the Mineral Water Hospital at Bath by Roger Rolls with photography by Clive Quinnell (Bird Publications, 1988, 192 pp, hardback, £18.50) celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Hospital with a lively, informative text and a wealth of illustrations covering the history of the institution and its changing medical treatments. (See also under Exhibitions below.)
7. Maria Joyce contributes the following notice of Tales from the Pump Room: Nine hundred years of Bath: the place, its people and its gossip by Thomas Hinde

(London, Gollancz, 1988) £14.95. The Pump Room is the imaginary setting for Hinde's tales of Bath. Visitors and residents, fictitious characters and historical events are dealt with in the first three parts of the book: Tales of the Past; Tales of the Great Days; Tales of Later Times. Part Four, The Second World War and After, covers a variety of topics, e.g. the air raids on Bath, Bath Preservation Trust, The Yellow Door at No. 22 Royal Crescent, and the Pump Room today. Inevitably a publication like this relies heavily on other sources. Hinde quotes extensively from them, including Peach whose facts cannot always be relied upon. It is a chatty book, which aims to entertain the present-day visitor to Bath with gossip from the past and will no doubt find its buyers and readers.

The text would have benefited from more careful proofreading. Some examples: Queen Square is spelt Queen's Square throughout; Brian Fothergill (not Forthegill) is the author of William Beckford's biography; F. Fleming (not Flemming) wrote Life of . . . Timothy Ginnadrake (not Grinnadrake); John Dawson (not Arthur) manufactured the first Bath Chair. The 14 illustrations are well reproduced, but unfortunately no source or credit is given for any of them, an omission which will be pointed out to the publisher.

EXHIBITIONS

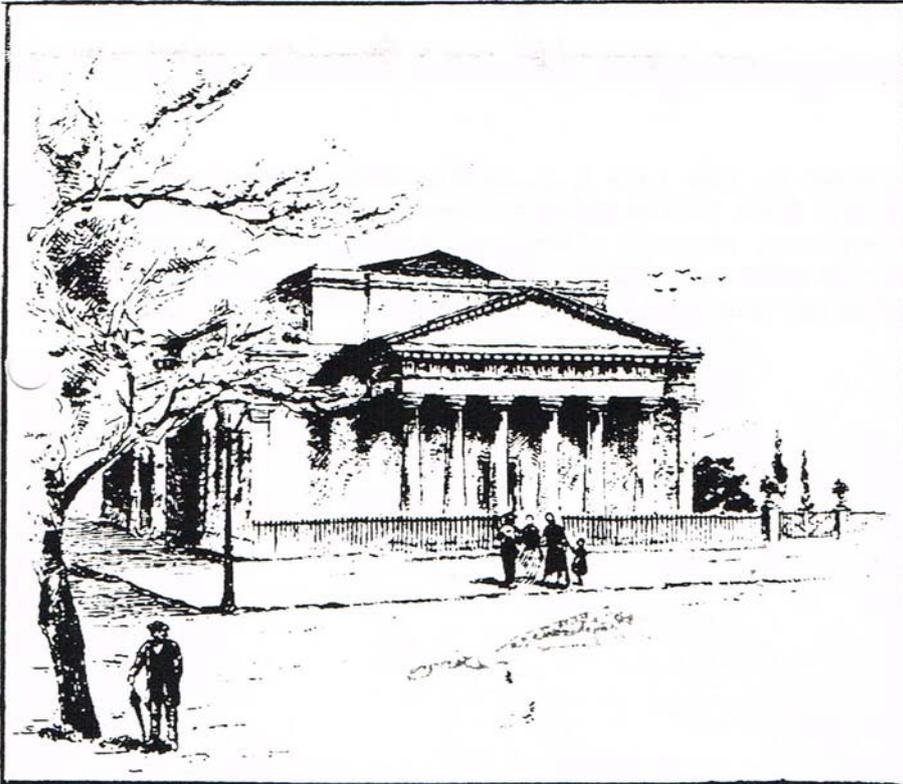
In addition to the well-displayed exhibition on the Somerset Coal Canal referred to in Newsletter 5, and the forthcoming bicentenary show on

Gainsborough in Bath (Holbourne Museum, 1 July - 14 August)

there are two current exhibitions relating to the Hospital celebrations that deserve to be saluted:-

Cured by the Bathe: an Exhibition of Spa Medicine (at the Holbourne Museum until 12 June) ties in with the Hospital of the Nation volume mentioned earlier. A rich mix of items from the Hospital itself and from public and private sources has been assembled, including early medical instruments, electrification equipment, and a needle bath rescued quite recently from the New Royal Baths. Among the manuscript documents are registers, subscription books, accounts, minutes, and case books detailing the practical side of running the early Hospital, while a fine display of portraits gives some idea of the personnel involved. Other material on view includes a scale model of the original John Wood building, a stone cherub (freshly cleaned of paint) that once adorned the Cross Bath, photographs illustrating 20th-century spa treatments, and even a decorative Bath Oliver biscuit tin. A video programme runs at intervals describing hydrotherapy techniques in the 1950s. The prints and plans in this exhibition are complemented by an exhibition curated by Barbara Milner and Philippa Bishop at the Victoria Art Gallery, The Springs of Old Bladud, which ends all too soon on 7 May. Even seasoned Bath specialists can find many points of interest in topographical-cum-biographical displays of this kind, here neatly put in context by short historical statements and apposite quotations.

BATH ROYAL LITERARY & SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION



As the prospect of the Bath Reference and Lending Libraries at last uniting on the Podium site draws nearer, minds are being concentrated on the future of the BRLSI collections now based in Queen Square and elsewhere. Various opinions on the subject were aired at an unofficial meeting held by a ginger group, 'Friends of the BRLSI', at the Pump Room on 23 March. However, more informed debate should become possible in due course when the current Trustees, Avon County Council, produce an expected discussion document. By the time this Newsletter appears, Diana Smith will have given a public lecture (on 26 April at the Geology Museum) describing the history of the Institution and its collections.

C E N T R E F O R U R B A N H I S T O R Y

The University of Leicester has had a premier role in establishing urban history as a legitimate field of study in this country, particularly through the efforts of the late Professor H.J. Dyos. He helped establish the British Urban History Group, which continues to hold regular conferences to stimulate professional debate, and in 1974 he founded the Urban History Yearbook. The Centre was set up by the University in 1985 as an inter-disciplinary research institute bringing together historians, archaeologists, geographers, economists and others engaged in the study of urban development in Britain and Europe from Classical times to the 20th century. Nationally it collaborates with the Urban History Group and the Pre-Modern Town Group in publishing the biannual Urban History Newsletter and in other activities. Internationally it maintains links with academics and institutions abroad. Apart from the Small Towns Project, current research projects of the Centre's staff include urbanism in the Roman West, late mediaeval towns in the West Midlands and North, Italian 16th and 17th century cities, Scottish urbanisation, the landscape of towns and the Jewish community in East London.

The Urban History Yearbook (available at the Universities of Bath and Bristol) is a valuable resource for anyone working on the history of British cities and towns and their broader context. Each issue contains a number of survey articles, a classified bibliography of recent books and articles, a commentary on relevant completed theses, book reviews, and reports on conferences worldwide. The classified bibliography is usefully indexed under individual places.

Membership of the Centre is open to individuals at £8 per annum (£5 student rate) which includes free subscription to the Newsletter, reduced charges for workshops and publications, and other privileges. It is also possible to subscribe to the Newsletter alone at £2.50 per annum. Details can be obtained from the Secretary, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, Leicester, LE1 7RH.

JUST RECEIVED:

COLD ASHTON PARISH SURVEY, recorded by the late E.J. Cuffe-Adams and edited by Mary V. Campbell for the Bristol and Avon Archaeological Research Group (1988). Covers buildings, routeways, field systems, ancient sites, springs and ponds, and other natural and man-made features, in succinct detail and with 7 maps. A very useful model for similar surveys. Copies available at £2 - contact HBRG Secretary.

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