



NEWSLETTER 10

SEPTEMBER 1989

**GROUP NEWS**

MEETINGS HELD MAY - JUNE 1989

Speaking at the meeting of 4 May (held at no. 4 Circus) on recent excavations in the area, **Rob Bell** began with one still in progress just south of Walcot Methodist church - where first-century A.D. material points to an early Roman community living close to the river crossing by the present Cleveland Bridge. He went on to describe the evidence for Iron Age round houses and an imposing Roman villa or estate at Marlborough Lane; and mentioned also the various finds in the Colonnades/Bath Street area and the Norman hall excavated in Swallow Street. Much of our knowledge of early Bath derives from 18th- and 19th-century discoveries, while many parts of the inner city remain archaeological blanks. However, it seems likely that, as at Wells, the Anglo-Saxon cathedral did not lie under its re-aligned Norman successor. At Acton Court (near Yate) below-ground excavation, close examination of the standing structures (including exact <sup>dating</sup> by dendrochronology), and documentary evidence have all combined in the study of this important moated Tudor building and the medieval house that preceded it. Archaeology is also confirming the accuracy of the Thomas Robins painting of the 18th-century garden at Painswick. Rob Bell's absorbing talk was illustrated copiously with slides.

A fine late-spring evening on 14 June made Kingswood School especially appealing as we were shown round the grounds and main buildings - the latter in a confident Victorian Gothic by the prolific **Janes Wilson**. Before that, our host for the evening **Michael Bishop** had welcomed us to the newly completed Wesley Centre and had spoken engagingly on the origins of local Methodism, the setting up of a school and church among the coal-miners of Kingswood near Bristol, and the school's eventual transfer to its present Lansdown site in the mid-19th century. One prized survival from the original Kingswood establishment, John Wesley's pulpit, has been restored and now has pride of place in the Centre. In addition to a screen display covering the historical background to the school, an adjoining room houses the valuable library, including volumes owned by Wesley himself. An 18th-century edition of Johnson's Dictionary, put out for members to see, enabled us to check his definition of "history" - "A narration of events and facts delivered with dignity". Any (dignified) offers to improve on that?

**NEW MEMBERS**

Mr. M.A. HOPKINS-CLARKE,	Hill House, North Road, Bath.	BA2 6HY
Mrs. SUE LOWE,	109 High Street, Upper Weston, Bath.	BA1 4DG
Mr. STEVE POOLE,	Hill House, Church Street, Coleford, Bath.	BA3 5NA
Mr. ARNOLD ROOT,	26 Rivers Street, Bath.	BA1 2QA
Mrs. JANE ROOT,	26 Rivers Street, Bath.	BA1 2QA
Mrs. CATRIONA ROWE,	16 Darlington Place, Bath.	BA2 6BX

## O T H E R   G R O U P   N E W S

1. The proposal that we might offer a history prize to local schools is still under investigation with the help of Lutz Haber and John Kite. Recent discussions suggest that the competition should run initially for three years and be open to the fifteen or so Bath schools (both state and independent) plus the College of Further Education, which offer History as a GCSE subject. After further consultation with schools it is hoped to produce a more detailed plan in the autumn.
2. The Sources Working Party has begun to lodge interim reports at the Bath Record Office and the Reference Library. These indicate the regional holdings of archival records concerning Bath. The reports are all available for public consultation but may not be xeroxed.
3. In future, HBRG members may occasionally sell copies of any relevant publications they have written (or edited, etc.) at ordinary monthly meetings, provided:-
  - (1) that they obtain prior permission from an officer of the Group, and
  - (2) that they handle the sale themselves.
4. Two HBRG members, Rosalie Wood and John Oswin, have been investigating the history of Connaught Mansions (Laura Place/Great Pulteney Street) and recently staged a small exhibition to mark the building's bicentenary. Since this is a continuing project they would welcome any additional information about the site, building or former occupants.
5. Elizabeth Holland regrets that a few copies of the 2nd edition of her Citizens of Bath lack pages 13-18, but she will replace any defective copy if contacted at 16 Prior Park Buildings. The new edition includes an addendum on the Spanish Armada and Bath, written by Mike Chapman.

### TUCKING MILL, MIDFORD

Dr. John Broome has accumulated a collection of material about the Tucking Mill which is available for any interested member to use. It includes old photographs, notes from William Smith's papers at Oxford, and other items - among them a draft account of William Smith's connection with the Mill up to about 1811. All this material has been on temporary deposit in Bristol University Library but in future can be consulted on application to Dr. Broome at The Cottage, Tucking Mill, Midford, Bath, BA2 7DB (Tel. 837010).

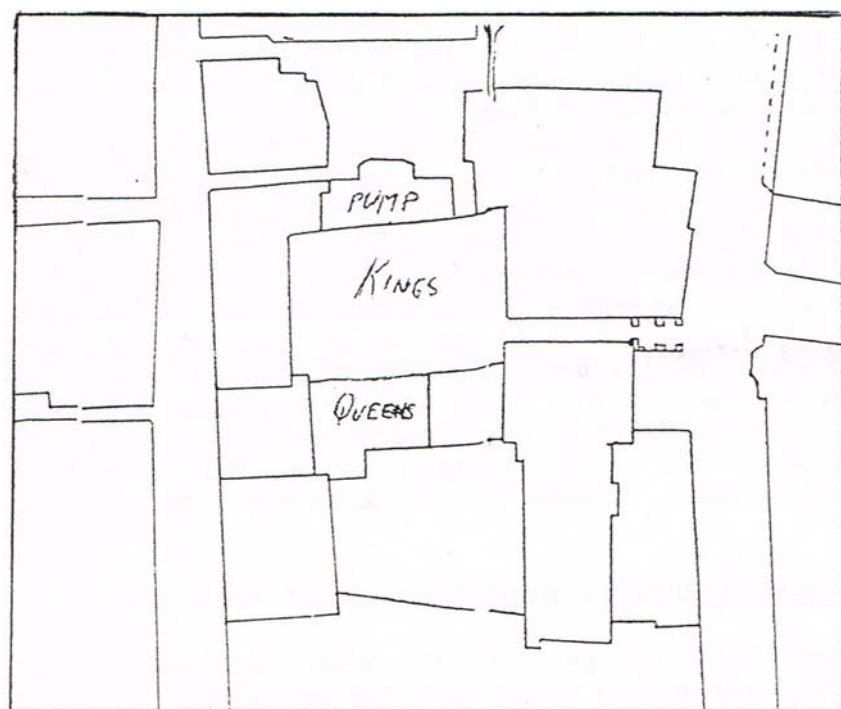
### BATH ROYAL LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION

The Institution question remains unresolved but is at least under active discussion by three interested organisations. The Working Party for the Re-establishment of the RLSI is trying to form an electorate from appropriate institutions and societies for the purpose of choosing provisional new trustees for the Institution. The Friends of the RLSI continue to serve as a pressure group of individuals. The County of Avon's Advisory or Steering Group is concerned with the future constitution of the Trust and the ultimate transfer of the trusteeship. Among its members are representatives from both the Working Party and the Friends, as well as the local authorities, area museum councils, several other local bodies, and the Charity Commission. Meanwhile the HBRG Committee is attempting to keep a watching brief on the proceedings.

## CONFERENCES AND COURSES

The Centre for South-Western Historical Studies, of which the HBRG is a member, announces its 4th Annual Symposium on the theme of "Unity and Variety: The Church in the South West of England from 1050 to the Present Day", to take place at the University of Exeter on Saturday 4 November. Please enquire from the HBRG Secretary if you might want to attend either this or the previous evening's Harte Lecture by Canon John Thurmer on "The Nineteenth Century". Enquire even more urgently if you are interested in a one-day meeting on "The Records of Church History" scheduled for Saturday 9 September, also at Exeter, arranged by the Centre in conjunction with the Devon Record Office.

As usual the University of Bristol offers a variety of courses at centres in Bath and the surrounding district, including a non-residential weekend course on "Bathing establishments in Roman Britain" (Bath, 17-19 November), a day school on "Bath stone" (Bradford-on-Avon, 7 October) and two different residential weekends on Somerset and other West Country landed gentry (Urchfont Manor College, 24-26 November; Dillington College, 9-11 February).



The King's Bath area on the eve of the early 1790s redevelopment. Detail taken from a hand-drawn plan of central Bath, lately found on the reverse of a list of John Eveleigh's assets (?) made at the time of the architect's bankruptcy.

(Bath Reference Library)

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. Kathleen Barker, "Mr. M. and the Bath Company", Theatre Notebook, vol. 43, no. 2 (1989), 50-57.
2. Penelope Byrde, "That frightfully unbecoming dress: clothes for spa bathing at Bath", Costume, no. 21 (1987), 44-56.
3. Ordnance Survey, Roman and Medieval Bath (scale 1:1250) and Georgian Bath (scale 1:2500), two historical maps issued in association with the RCHME and Bath Archaeological Trust (1989).

These long-awaited maps, which supply a wealth of archaeological and historical data in concise cartographic form, promise to be an invaluable springboard for future topographical research. Though geared to the tourist market (and therefore accompanied by colour illustrations, capsule narratives and selective chronologies of events), the maps themselves are a mine of information

for any local historian. Besides much else they plot ground levels, water features, parish and other boundaries, defences, turnpikes, demolished (and presumed) as well as extant structures, building dates & architects, archaeological finds and former street names, all overlaid on the modern city plan. In view of all their virtues it is a shame therefore that they cannot be welcomed unconditionally. The Roman and Medieval sheet (which includes data up to the 1690s) has been produced at double the scale of the Georgian one; but while this clarifies detail in the city centre it means that key Roman sites and excavations outside this area (e.g. in Walcot) have been excluded. Moreover a number of conjectural features (such as the precise line of boundary walls, or even some might argue - the identification of the Bishop's Palace) might have been safer qualified in some way. The real misfortune of this map, though, is that it plots the supposed site of the city brothel - so perpetuating the deplorable hoax printed in the recent "facsimile" of Gilmore's map of 1694. A salutary reminder to us all not to place too much faith in copies however convincing they may look.

The Georgian map has its share of unnecessary slips as well, this time largely because of over-reliance on Walter Ison's 40-year-old findings. Some of the misdatings of buildings are far from trivial, for they concern such important sites as Queen Square (which on rate book evidence was not complete for perhaps five years after 1734) find the Circus (completed in 1766 or 1767, not 1758). In a score or more other places the datings could have been more exact, errors avoided (e.g. the location of Lindsey's assembly room), or useful additional information given. What is particularly regrettable is that, for both maps, individual members of the History Group, asked to help at short notice, spent much effort over a short period assembling evidence which has not been fully utilised. Mistakes might also have been picked up at proof stage given a proper opportunity. In the circumstances, therefore, the naming of the HBRG as a collaborator on the project is somewhat embarrassing; and in fairness to the Bath Archaeological Trust it should be said that it too did not give its imprimatur to every detail shown. Still, necessary as it is to point to failings, the fact should not be obscured that these maps do represent a significant new stage in depicting Bath's physical development and that errors of detail can always be corrected in the revised edition which will certainly follow if the first printing sells well. Please let the Secretary have a note of corrections to either map.

#### LOCAL STUDIES IN THE NEW CENTRAL LIBRARY, contributed by John Kite

Members will be interested to know what facilities are planned for the storage and consultation of local material in the new library. It should be borne in mind that the new library is not a purpose-designed library building. The library departments - Lending, Reference, Children's, Music and Local Studies will all occupy a space on the first floor of the Podium development. The Reference and Local Studies areas will be on the East side of this space, overlooking the river. The plan is for a study area to serve both, providing 48 individual reading places with additional tables for the consultation of large maps, etc. There will be some 364 metres of open access Shelving for local material. For the first time readers will have direct access to the more frequently used sources. (I hasten to add that all of this material will be protected by the library's book security system.) There will be three carrels equipped with microfilm readers. A coin-operated reader/printer, photocopier, and FAX equipment will be available.

The more precious and irreplaceable local material will be kept in a special secure store with its own air-conditioning unit. Bound volumes of newspapers will be immediately available from the large bookstack adjacent to the library, equipped with mobile units to maximise capacity. There will be in addition comfortable casual seating and a periodicals reading area. An exhibition/meeting room complete with kitchen, store and toilet facilities will be available. Looking to the more distant future, the library will be equipped with ample computer outlets.

In summary, members can look forward to greatly improved and convenient surroundings in which to pursue the study of Bath's history.

THE NEWSLETTER IS COMPILED BY THE SECRETARY AND TYPED BY JUDITH SAMUEL