



NEWSLETTER 12

MAY 1990

GROUP NEWS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. Colin Johnston, Ruth Hayden and Julia Moss sent apologies. Some thirty-four members attended.
2. In her annual report the Chairman mentioned that while the Group continued to keep up its membership, it was noticeable that some members never attended meetings despite what appeared to be a varied programme (for which suggestions were always welcome). The Committee had met only once but the School History Prize working party (which included Lutz Haber and John Kite) had pursued its brief actively, while the Sources working party (which included Ruth Fisher and Sheila Metcalf) had added further details about repositories to the two files now established at the Record Office and Reference Library. Information about the Bath Royal Institution had proved hard to come by, but it seemed that a new body of trustees would eventually be formed, half nominated, half elected. Disquiet about the likely status of local studies in the new Library at the Podium had led to the Group seeking reassurances, but not being fully satisfied by the response. Since then the early retirement of Maria Joyce and Mary Wills, with all their experience, had only heightened concern. The Chairman felt that, while the Group may flourish, history was now under pressure on several fronts. The meeting echoed this, especially in members' saddened reaction to news about Library staffing.
3. Mary Wills presented her last financial statement as Treasurer. Annual expenditure of £234.60 had been more than covered by income of £370.70. Together with the balance from 1988-89 the Group's account now stood at £688.22. The annual membership fee could therefore remain unchanged. The AGM accepted the statement & requested that next year the Sources Project account be presented separately.
4. Judith Samuel was nominated as Treasurer in place of Mary Wills, and Lutz Haberto fill the vacant place so created on the Committee. The meeting then approved the 1990-91 Committee:-Chairman-Brenda Buchanan, Secretary-Trevor Fawcett, Treasurer-Judith Samuel, Other Committee members - Mike Chapman, John Ede, Lutz Haber & Colin Johnston.
5. Under other business Owen Ward drew attention to a recent report in the Evening Chronicle about the intended auction of leases relating to the Theatre Royal, property in Bathwick, etc. The meeting agreed that such dispersals of documents were to be deplored and left the Committee to take any action it felt might be helpful.

VISIT                      T O                      DOWNSIDE                      SCHOOL

Numbers are limited to thirty for the evening visit to Stratton-on-the-Fosse on Wednesday 13 June; priority will therefore be given to HBRG members, though guests will be welcome to take up any spaces that may remain. Bookings, by telephone or letter, will be taken by the Secretary in strict order from 1 May.

## N E W M E M B E R S

Miss Amanda Berry, 14 Belmont, Bath, BA1 5DZ

Mrs. Doreen Collyer, Lyncombe Coach House, Lyncombe Vale Road, Bath. BA2 4LS

Please note also the following change of address:-

Mrs. Connie Smith, 10 Attewell Court, Devonshire Buildings, Bath. BA2 4ST

Mr. ALAN MASON

For the first time the Newsletter has to record with sadness the death of one of its members, Mr. Alan Mason, to whom our Chairman paid tribute at the January meeting.

## MEETINGS HELD JANUARY - APRIL 1990

**Steve Poole** began his talk at Abbey Church House on 4 January with a dramatic account of the destruction of a Quayside brewery in March 1800, the result of arson. As he developed his theme of famine and public order in 1800-01, a picture of Bath quite ignored in Northanger Abbey emerged. The washed-out harvest of 1799 sent the price of a staple wheaten loaf soaring far beyond the means of the city's poor. All the same, as the burden of poor relief fell ever heavier on ratepayers, benefit levels were cut. Survival for many now depended increasingly on soup and rice supplied to the "recommended" needy (at least 30% of Bath's population by January 1801) through a Provisions Committee precariously funded by charitable donations. The Bath authorities feared food riots and still worse - a radicalised working class and deliberate insurrection in collusion with revolutionary France. Hence the efforts made to increase the amount of grain coming to market, to control bread consumption, and to halt hoarding and profiteering. Various disturbances and a spate of threatening letters led to the calling out of the Dragoons and Volunteers, to the setting up of nightly vigilante patrols, and to acts of exemplary justice by the Courts. But the forces of law and order were inadequate and overstretched. It may be that only long-engrained respect for property rights and the English constitution, the failure of any French invasion actually to materialise, and the timely arrival of imported corn, saved Bath from a popular uprising at this dangerous period.

Maps purporting to show the routeways of prehistoric and Roman Britain may easily mislead, as **c** pointed out in his talk on 7 February at 4 Circus. They exclude the many minor roads that must have existed and are sometimes quite conjectural. Thus the line of the so-called "Jurassic Way", passing north-south close to Bath, is partly speculative, while the military Foss Way of the Romans may never have been completed as a fully-engineered highway and perhaps by-passed Bath. Even rivers may have altered course over the centuries, as the Avon certainly has locally. Water transport was undoubtedly important though; one theory suggests that the Stonehenge blue stones may have been transported via the Avon valley. Evidence of flint-working north of Bath implies long-distance prehistoric tracks to East Anglia and Sussex. Several Roman roads met here, though where they crossed the river remains guesswork - except that they probably avoided the boggy ground south of the hot springs. The road over Lansdown (by way of Marlborough Buildings and Winifred's Lane) was important, and another main route is likely to have traversed Odd, Claverton, Bathampton and Banner downs. Villa sites, archaeological finds, the remains of causeways, Anglo-Saxon charters, parish boundaries, these may all furnish clues about the presence of roads. Also important is our knowledge of Roman occupation in the Bath region. Villa estates came late (after 270 A.D.); previously the military exploited the district for its wool, pewter production, stone, etc. which could be traded by the network of communications, including roads to the ports at Sea Mills and Poole Harbour. Stephen Bird's absorbing talk was illustrated by a splendid set of slides - from shots of the M4 to a map by the pioneering antiquary, John Skinner.

Speaking about the Pulteneys on 1 March at the Huntingdon Centre, Dr. Michael Rowe admirably covered a whole family history in the space of one lecture, using twin projection of a large set of slides to illustrate the story. First coming to notice in Leicestershire, the Pulteneys grew rich in London. It was their extensive properties in the City, the West End, and elsewhere that effectively underwrote the later speculations in Bathwick. William Pulteney (1684-1764), while increasing his fortune by marriage and inheritance, had a mixed career as a Whig politician, quarrelling with Walpole, joining the Craftsman faction, and eventually arriving in the Lords (as Earl of Bath) where in 1746 he became Prime Minister for 48 hours, the shortest on record. Inventories of his Piccadilly house, surviving furnishings at Raby Castle, and the record of various mistresses, give some idea of his life style. He bought the manor of Bathwick in 1722 for £12,000 but never had his own house in Bath. On his death the property passed briefly to his elder brother and then to Frances Pulteney, a more distant relation, married to the Scotsman, William Johnstone. As the member for Shrewsbury and a diligent "improver", William Johnstone Pulteney was responsible for Bathwick's urbanisation, though his Somerset properties were small beer compared with the lands he managed in Shropshire, Montgomery, Scotland or the million acres acquired in New York State. Obtaining the Pulteney Bridge access proved expensive, and it remains uncertain why he finally chose the busy Thomas Baldwin to draw up the Bathwick plan. It seems he groomed his daughter Laura Henrietta in estate management, and she it was who enabled building work to continue during the 1790s recession. Michael Rowe briefly summarised events after her death in 1808 and the squandering of many of the family estates. His discoveries in the archives at Raby and elsewhere have already born splendid fruit and yet more is promised.

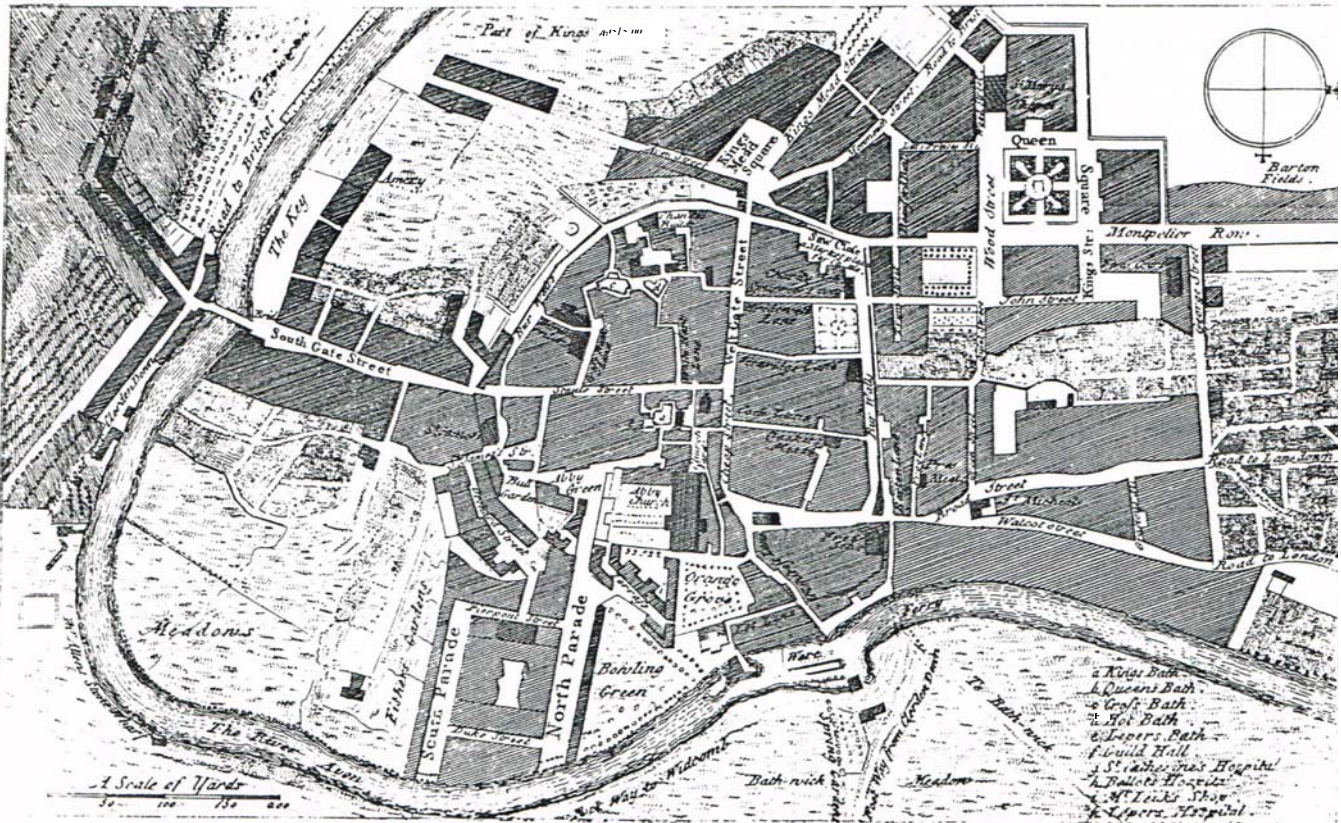
After being delayed by an extra-long AGM, Jennifer Beasley began her presentation of the work of NADFAS (National Association of Decorative & Fine Art Societies) with a tape-slide programme. Founded in 1968, NADFAS undertook the long labour of recording church furnishings on the strength of a pilot scheme in 1972. Volunteers, mostly amateurs, document interiors in a highly systematic fashion, aided by a comprehensive manual. Memorials, items of metal, stone and wood, textiles, paintings, books (including church registers), stained glass, and objects like organs, are all treated. Each one is photographed in black and white, sometimes with additional shots in colour, and described verbally. The final account, with church plan and indexes, is produced in several copies for retention by the incumbent, the diocesan archives, the Council for the Care of Churches, the Victoria and Albert Museum Library, and NADFAS itself. So far the local, self-funded NADFAS team that Jennifer Beasley leads has dealt with eight churches. Some of these she illustrated in a rapid slide tour. Among objects of special note were the Victorian glass at Langridge, stone carvings at North Stoke and Limpley Stoke, various fine examples of church plate, and decorative work at St. Mary's R.C. Church (Julian Road) and St. Alphege's. Documenting churches in such detail has obvious implications for safeguarding their treasures. No wonder the Archbishop of Canterbury called the NADFAS teams "the shock troops of conservation".

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SUBSCRIPTIONS for 1990-91 are now due. It would be much appreciated if they could be paid promptly to save the trouble and expense of sending out reminders. Once again, despite inflation, rates remain unchanged at £4 per person or £6.50 joint (e.g. husband and wife. Membership is more of a bargain than ever! Please make out cheques to the  
History of Bath Research Group and send them to the Secretary at 25  
Northampton Street, Bath, BA1 2SW  
or bring them to the next meeting.

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One of the less well-known maps of 18th-century Bath, this comes from Benjamin Martin's The Natural History of Somerset, (1759).



#### SOURCES FOR BATH HISTORY

Bath Record Office and Bath Reference Library both maintain files containing details of sources noted in local repositories. Those included so far are listed below. One or two repositories have little material concerning Bath itself and their entries are correspondingly brief. Others have more extensive holdings and are listed in some detail. Most HBRG members would be likely to find at least some items of interest to their research during a quick browse through the sheets already filed.

- Avon County Central Reference Library
- Bath Archaeological Trust
- Bath City Record Office
- (including Bath Municipal Charities, St. John's Hospital, Royal United Hospital, Mineral Water Hospital, and Bath Fire and Ambulance Service)
- Bath Postal Museum
- Bath Industrial Heritage Centre
- Bristol Record Office
- Downside Abbey
- Holburne Museum
- Museum of Costume and Fashion Research Centre
- Roman Baths Museum
- Theatre Royal, Bath
- University of Bath Library
- University of Bristol Library
- Wiltshire Record Office

Records for other institutions, including Kingswood School, are pending and will be mentioned in later Newsletters as they are added to the files.

## FIRE INSURANCE RECORDS

Over recent years social & economic historians have found fire insurance registers a valuable source of information for 18th- and 19th-century research. Certain London-based insurance companies, such as the Hand-in-Hand and Westminster Fire Office, restricted themselves to the metropolitan areas, but others handled business throughout the country, including Bath of course, working through local agents. The London Guildhall Library holds 1262 volumes documenting the business of the Sun Fire Insurance company from 1710 to 1863, and another 173 volumes covering the Royal Exchange company, 1753-59 and 1773-1833. These registers, mostly in chronological order, provide a variety of information: policy number and name of agent; date of policy and renewal date; name of policy owner & usually also his/her status or occupation, and address (town and street or parish); sometimes similar data for tenants; type and construction materials of property insured; insured value of property or contents; and duty when applicable. The one barrier to greater use of this documentation is the lack of indexes for most of the period. However, two do exist. A card index to personal names in Sun registers 1714-31 can be consulted at the Guildhall Library; one drawer of cards covers Somerset, with policy holders filed in alphabetical order of names. In addition, an index on microfilm to Sun and Royal Exchange registers 1775-87 is held in several institutions, including Bristol University Library; it has sequences under personal names, place names [e.g. Bath], trades and valuations.

The earliest policies for Bath insurers are recorded in very summary form. Until Bath had its own agent, would-be insurers had to ask a relative, friend or banker in London to act for them at the London office. In 1717, for example, Harry Woolmer, a distiller in Smithfield and presumably a relation of the Bath apothecary and alderman, Edward Woolmer, paid the premiums on behalf of four Bath citizens - John White, distiller, and Samuel Howse, mercer, both resident near the Market House; John Saunders, alderman, of the Queen's Head Tavern; and Edward Bushell, another alderman. From the 1720s details of building materials are mentioned. The imposing house jointly tenanted in 1728 by Beau Nash and Lady Seafort [i.e. the present Theatre Royal front] was described as stone-built and tiled; like the adjoining house it was valued at £300 and the insurer of both was the stonemason Thomas Greenway who had built them. A brick & stone house in Cheap Street, where the apothecary John Orpin lived (owned by James Long of Westbury) had the high valuation of £1,000 on it. Two lesser tenements adjoining the North Gate, constructed part of timber and part of stone were insured for £100 and £200. The Three Tuns inn in Stall Street (of brick & timber) with its accessory building and stone-built stables and brewhouse had cover of £1000, as did another group of buildings that included the Three Tuns lodging. In the Market-place the stone & timber Christopher Inn with a rear extension and stable was insured for £800.

The somewhat fuller record for the 1780s frequently shows a separate valuation for household contents and tradesmen's stocks. Thus on 11 April 1786 William Stafford, a broker living in Abbey Green, covered goods in his house for £200, goods at his shop in Kingston buildings for £130 with another £70 for china and glass there, goods at his "warehouse" adjoining the Old Rooms on Terrace Walk for £200, and finally the contents of a house in Catherine Place, occupied by a Mrs. Barnes, for another £200, making £800 in all at an annual premium of 19 shillings plus 12 shillings duty.

These are typical enough examples and will perhaps serve to illustrate the research uses to which fire insurance records may be put. The Guildhall Library (Aldermanbury, London, EC2P 2EJ) is open 9.30-16.45, Monday to Saturday.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

If the history of Anglicanism in Bath languishes, Nonconformist studies flourish - as two recent books demonstrate. Mary Ede's The Chapel in Argyle Street, Bath, 1789 - 1989 (£5.50) celebrates the bicentenary of what is now the Central United Reform Church in Bath, with a fully documented account of the institution since its foundation. At Satan's Throne, edited in hardback by another HBRG member, Bruce Crofts, spans a still longer period and deals with the whole Bath Circuit from Box to Weston. (Copies available to HBRG members direct from Bruce Crofts of 54 Bloomfield Avenue, Bath, BA2 3AE, tel. 311741, at £9 each or £9.95 including postage.)

From Millstream Books comes a new publication with an industrial theme, Bath at Work by Duncan Harper, a well-illustrated survey of Bath's productive past touching on mills, factories, quarries, communications, public utilities and manufacturing trades generally.

Visitors to Bath, seeing it with a fresh eye, have often set down their reactions in diaries and correspondence. Two newly published additions to this literature are the pages on Bath in the paper-back Memoirs of Mme. Vigge-Lebrun, the French portrait painter, an early 19th-century visitor, and the comments (with two drawings) by the famous Neoclassical architect, K.F. Schinkel, reprinted (in German) from his travel journal of 1826. Copies of both are held in Bristol libraries, the former at the Public Library in College Green (Fine Arts section), the latter at the University Library.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

1. A day school, Beyond the Georgian Faade, tutored by Dr. Graham Davis will be held at Bath College of Higher Education on Saturday 12 May, 9.30 - 16.30 (course fee £25 including materials, refreshments and lunch). Through a mixture of illustrated lectures, documentary workshops and discussions it intends to focus on 18th-and 19th-century Bath slums and on local conflicts over municipal improvement and public health. (Booking forms from the College, tel. 874188)
2. Between May and December the Bath Postal Museum will be marking the 150th anniversary of the uniform postage system with an exhibition, Penny Postage Jubilee, paying special attention to the effect of the postal revolution on Bath itself.
3. Two forthcoming exhibitions at the Victoria Art Gallery concentrate on artists of local interest. The first is a retrospective of Walter Richard Sickert, who spent his later life at Bathampton and is buried in the churchyard there; this lasts from 19 May to 30 June and focusses on his portraiture. In November, once the Gallery has re-opened after structural alterations, a major exhibition is planned on William Hoare, Bath's leading eighteenth-century artist next to Gainsborough.

## NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter is compiled by the Secretary and typed by Judith Samuel, now also the Group's Treasurer. Contributions from members are always welcome - e.g. relevant news items, notices of forthcoming lectures, courses or exhibitions, details of worthwhile publications on Bath history (by members or otherwise), research queries, or notes arising from members' own work on local history. Please contact the Secretary if you wish to contribute to future issues.