



NEWSLETTER 20

JANUARY 1993

G R O U P N E W S

MEETINGS HELD OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1992

The Building of Bath Museum provided an attractive venue for this season's opening meeting on 7th October. But while it gave members a chance to discover the character of this enterprising new venture, such a rich array of exhibits and information could hardly be absorbed in half-an-hour, and no doubt individual return visits are already planned. Appetites whetted, the meeting then settled to hear Christopher Woodward, curator of the Museum, introduce the chapel (the first 'Gothick'-style building in Bath) and the museum itself - which deliberately seeks to interest visitors of all descriptions, from the least knowledgeable to the most expert. The speaker then proceeded to develop a particular theme the collaborative nature of the building process in 18th-century Bath. It was not really an architect-dominated system. Though an architectural profession arose after 1750 in London, most of Bath's Georgian "architects" trained initially as masons, joiners, plumbers, etc. and learned to design on the job and with the aid of published pattern-books. Earlier builders like Greenway, Killigrew, and the Harveys came out of this craftsman tradition, as indeed did the elder Wood. However, Wood's youthful experience in London and Yorkshire, together with his assiduous reading of architectural treatises, had given him a theoretical understanding his rivals lacked, and hence a higher status. Designing buildings in Bath was nevertheless not enough to earn a living by, so bread-and-butter work could not be scorned, especially surveying, dealing in building materials (e.g. John Eveleigh) and supervising construction teams. Most local architects were also enmeshed in property speculation. Documents tell only part of a story that involved the creative co-operation of all the building trades and forged long-persisting links between developers, architects, joiners and carpenters, glaziers, plumbers, plasterers and decorators. Family connections were often crucial, though there were sharp rivalries too (e.g. between the Woods and the Atwoods). Corporation influence sometimes determined who received commissions. Most of Bath's domestic terraces and crescents were built to a fairly standard plan; innovation was largely confined to decorative details, and the odd maverick doorcase or carving tended to be the result of a client's whim. How far architects influenced interior design features remains uncertain, as does the extent to which external carving was done in situ or under the architect's direct control.

An intimate friend of Bill Wedlake for many years, Peter Greening was the ideal person to speak (with excellent slides, on 12 November) about this distinguished Somerset archaeologist. Despite leaving school at 13 to work on the family farm at Camerton, the young Wedlake had already been enthused. In due course the ploughboy who watched the soil for prehistoric flints was to recognise an Anglo-Saxon cemetery when a quarry re-opened at Camerton in 1926. Aided by Fr. Ethelbert Horne of Downside and Dr. Arthur Bulleid, discoverer of the Glastonbury Iron-age lake village, Wedlake was soon employed at

Glastonbury Abbey, and also assisted Mortimer Wheeler for four years on the famous dig at Maiden Castle in Dorset. Wheeler was so impressed with his new right-hand man he took him to France and in 1938-9 they excavated hillforts in Brittany and Normandy. The War obliged Wedlake to join the Admiralty at Bath and focused his attention on local sites, especially his old interest of Camerton on the Fosseway. The Camerton Excavation Club, which he founded in 1947, gradually revealed much of the Roman site including its pewter-making facilities, though it has been left to modern metal-detectors to find the evidence of the Roman fort Wedlake had always suspected. In 1951 he was invited to study the bombed St. James's church area of Bath before it was buried under new shops. No definite proof of a Roman wall was found (and Peter Greening



personally believes there was none), but the 13th-century Ham gate was identified with its cobbled way. He kept a close watch too on other redevelopments. At St. John's Hospital he noted the Roman ditch and the incorporation of Romanesque elements from the Abbey in Elizabethan constructor⁴ before Arlington House went up he verified Irvine's earlier observations and around Bath he inspected various discoveries of Roman burials. In 1956, after another stint with Mortimer Wheeler (on the Stanwick site in Yorkshire) Wedlake mounted his second major excavation - at Nettleton Shrub on the Fosseway, north east of Bath. Here his team laid bare a Romano- British healing shrine complete with a 3rd-fl%y_century octagonal shrine dedicated to Apollo; the impressive finds, from murals and inscriptions to utensils and a striking votive plaque (see illustration) are now in

the Bristol Museum. His final dig returned him to Glastonbury in the late 1970s to work on the Abbot's guesthall there. All Wedlake's excavations were scrupulously published, though his notes from the manuscripts of the Rev. J. Skinner, the Camerton antiquary, are still to come posthumously. He died aged 85 in 1989.

On 9 December the curator of Bath Industrial Heritage Centre, Stuart Burroughs, spoke about the too-little-appreciated Bath engineering family, the Horstmans, a collection of whose products is held by the Centre. The story began in 1853 when Gustav Horstmann arrived from Prussia, via Geneva and London, and found employment with a Bennett Street clockmaker. His inventive genius was soon apparent when he won a prize for a highly accurate micrometer capable of measuring fragile objects. In the 1860s, now in business on his own account, he obtained a patent for a self-winding clock thermostatically controlled, though neither this nor the micrometer went into commercial production. The firm moved from Bladud Buildings to 7 George Street in 1876 and thence to its future base at 13 Union Street in 1884. Here G. Horstmann & Sons undertook all kinds of work with clocks, watches, chronometers and optical instruments, plus electroplating and gilding; among their contract jobs was the daily winding of the Abbey Church clock. Meanwhile, Gustav's wife and daughter undertook millinery work from the new family residence at 34 Brock Street. Gustav died in 1893 but three of his five sons continued the enterprise. A particularly significant invention was the solar dial, a self-regulating timeswitch patented in 1904 and gradually improved thereafter. These devices found application in the variable time control of gas lighting not only in Britain but as far afield as New Zealand. Eventually, in the 1930s, a further Horstmann development led to the automatic, battery-spark ignition of gas lamps. As the firm expanded, its manufacturing side spread to Walcot Street and Newbridge Hill. During the 1914-18 War much effort went into screw gauges for munitions factories and in bringing other British companies up to Horstmann precision standards. But though Otto Horstmann (who had earlier specialised in bicycle technology) received an MBE for his contribution, the company was libelously accused of collaboration with Germany. Another brother,

Sydney, also got an MBE. Ever since 1902 he had been interested in car engineering, patented an automatic gearbox in 1904, then developed a more successful motorcycle gearbox. With outside financial backing Sydney built his first 8 h.p. vehicle in 1913, and after the war produced a series of innovative models until 1928 when car manufacture came to an end after years of under-capitalized struggle. His idea of 1927 for a 'slow motion suspension' came into its own for tanks and other military vehicles in the Second World War, when Krupp in hostile Germany also tried to take advantage of it. Another idea bore wartime fruit in the mass production of thread grinders. The original Horstmann firm weathered the interwar depression by diversifying into other areas gardening equipment, domestic clocks, even mousetraps and beehive cages. However, a versatile range of (now electric) timeswitches, gears and similar wares remained their forte and kept up their international reputation. Although Stuart Burroughs did not pursue the company's history into the recent period, this was well represented at the meeting by the presence of several members of the Horstmann family. A display of products added another dimension to the evening's interest.

OTHER MEMBERS' NEWS

Warm congratulations to Brenda Buchanan on the successful completion and acceptance of her London University Ph.D. thesis, 'Capital investment in a regional economy: some aspects of the sources and employment of capital in North Somerset, 1750-1830'.

Dr. John Wroughton's revised edition of his The Civil War in Bath and North Somerset, first published in 1973, is now out under its new title, A Community at War. It incorporates fresh research from his doctoral thesis and includes many more illustrations. (Published by Lansdown Press at £11.95.) A dayschool on the same topic will be held at King Edward's School on Saturday 13 March 1993 under the auspices of the University of Bristol's Department of Continuing Education: speakers will be J.H. Bettey, R. Hutton and John Wroughton himself.

Please note the following change of address: -

Doreen Collyer has removed to 'Caldey', Pulteney Road, Bath, BA2 4HA.

URBAN HISTORY BEYOND THE PALE OF BATH

It is easy to be so immersed in the parochial scene one forgets that to engage on any aspect of local research is in fact to participate in a far wider enterprise with a national or even international context. Useful correctives to the narrow view appear in every issue of the Urban History Newsletter (sponsored by the Centre of Urban History, University of Leicester) and the 6-monthly journal Urban History (published by Cambridge University Press). Thus the Autumn 1992 number of the Newsletter reported on the first open conference of the European Association of Urban Historians held at Amsterdam last September, referred to several ongoing projects (including one on the history of (Maidstone), and called attention to institutes and centres for urban studies as far afield as Moscow, New Delhi and Tokyo. Two new bibliographical tools that are mentioned cover primarily British urban history topics: a database of c. 17,000 references culled from Urban History Yearbook 1974-91, and a forthcoming index of 1500 relevant urban history theses. Among subjects of conferences coming up in 1993 are three centred on the metropolis: recent archaeological discoveries in London; London and its regions; and the aristocratic town house in London, 1400-1930. Details are also given of the well-established Historical Geography Research Group: its Research Papers series contain a variety of publications of interest to local historians (e.g. Gazetteer of English Urban Fire Disasters 1500-1900, Cholera in London 1848-9, People and Places in the Victorian Census, and Nineteenth-Century Trade Union Records).

ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES WORKING PARTY

The Working Party has met once and has also communicate by letter. It is hoped to arrange a meeting with Mrs. Liz Beavan at Bath Central Library in the near future to discuss aspects of the Library, particularly its use for local history research. Work on listing repositories with archival material on Bath history proceeds, albeit slowly. The latest source added to the files (at Bath Record Office, Bath Central Library, and 4 Circus) covers documentary material on the history of Jolly's shop catalogued by the University of Glasgow.

Much important manuscript and other material bearing on Bath's past lies scattered in record offices, institutions and private collections throughout the country and even abroad. It would be helpful if HBRG members who come across references to likely sources would report them to the Working Party. A further valuable service members might be able to offer would be to check on potentially useful Bath sources which have already been located but not yet examined or listed. If for example you happen to be visiting any of the following places, and could spare a little time to look at the odd document to note its value for Bath research, the HBRG Secretary could provide details of what item(s) to check: Aberystwyth, Birmingham, Cardiff, Douglas (I.o.M.), Hertford, Ipswich (or Bury St. Edmunds?), Keele (Staffs.), Lincoln, Northallerton (Yorks.), Northampton, Norwich, Oxford, St. Andrews, Stafford, Truro, Warwick, Wigan. In addition indexes of manuscripts are worth trying at record offices and major libraries in any town for Bath references. London presents the biggest challenge of course; the Public Record Office, British Library, and other institutions must hold many riches still unexploited by researchers on Bath. In due course one or more members of the Working Party will examine the computerised indexes of the National Register of Archives in Chancery Lane. These indexes should point to items in private as well as public collections.

BUBONIC PLAGUE AT BATH IN 1604

Correspondence printed in the R.C.H.MSS. report on the Salisbury papers (9 Salisbury 16-17) not only brings to notice an early 17th-century visitation of plague, it also highlights Bath's connections with powerful national figures - in this instance the King's chief minister, Secretary-of- State Robert Cecil. Having stifled Essex's treasonable plot in 1601 and assured the smooth accession of James I in 1603, Cecil was now at the height of his power. Indeed he rose from Baron Cecil to Viscount Cranborne during the period of this correspondence, on his way to the Salisbury earldom just nine months later. Physically deformed, he suffered chronic ill health, and in summer 1604 must have sounded cut Dr. John Sherwood, one of Bath's leading physicians and a Roman Catholic, on a possible medical visit. (No compunction there about the principal minister of state dealing with a Papist!) Sherwood replied on 21 July from Tockington, north of Bristol, where he'd removed his family out of harm's way from the latest epidemic of plague.

If you stay your coming until the 20th or 22nd August our Baths will be the most temperate. Before that time we shall assuredly find the greatest danger of the plague, which hitherto has not been violent in respect of the number dead, but somewhat the more to be feared for seven or eight several houses scattered in several parts of the city, out of which there have not yet died 26 persons. But if it grows so hot that you cannot repair thither without danger I will give you notice. At that time the King's Bath will fit you best, both in respect of its spaciousness and the coolness and conveniency of your lodging, much severed from places infected than any fair lodging about the Cross Bath. . . . There are by the Cross Bath two fair houses, the better Mr. Horton's, but that is very near a house now infected, the other for the present Captain Wood's, but in the street and close to the Cross Bath. I speak more sparingly

of the King's Bath because it is my own, but all circumstances considered most convenient for you and most agreeing to your directions. Bed-hangings and plate for your own use is necessary. For the gentlemen that attend you I will provide stable, beer, and all things mentioned in your letter, and will use the best means I can to hinder the recourse of such who with accomplements of kindness will disquiet you.

Sherwood's convenient accommodation was of course Abbey House (for this and Horton's lodging-house see Jean Manco in Bath History IV). Despite a letter from his elder brother, Lord Burghley, who was about to seek relief at Bath for his swollen feet, Cecil was still not reassured and sought further advice from an old family friend, Captain John Winter of Dyrham*. Winter delivered an objective report to Cecil, now Viscount Cranborne, on 24 August

According to your letters I have learned the true state of the Bath concerning the sickness. It began there on 6 May last and from that time until 18 August there have died in all of that diva-aasP fifty persons. From 18 August until this present 24th there have died only three persons out of two houses, one being an inn at the sign of the Swan in the parish of Stalls, and the other likewise an inn in the parish of St. Michael's without the Northgate of the city. Which inns with two other houses only, one being the house of John Elmer very near the Cross .Bath, and the other the house late Thomas Chapman's deceased in the parish of Stalls, are the houses now infected in the city. I learn two other houses have likewise been infected near to the place where you mean to lie, which were the houses of one Richard Bayly and of Thomas Smith which one month or more past died out of the same; but none since that time have died. If hereupon you hold your determination for coming to the Bath I will do you all the service I can, and could wish you to have there with you as few attendants and followers as you may. And as for your gentlemen and the provision for your horses my house at Dirham and such provision as I can make shall during your abode in Bath be ready to stead or pleasure you. P.S. There lie 2 sick of the sickness at the Swan and 6 already have been buried out of the house.



[continued on next page]

Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, in an engraving of c.1605 by Renold Elstrak (255 x 171 mm.). Robert, his father William (Baron Burghley), and elder brother Thomas (1st Earl of Exeter) were all devotees of the emerging Bath spa.

It appears that Cecil appealed too to Captain Wood, keeper of the second Cross Bath lodging-house, since a note to Wood from the Mayor, John Sachfield, listing weekly plague victims from the end of June, also ended up in the Salisbury archive. Another letter soon reached Cecil from the solicitous Winter, who had vetted the situation in Bath personally and who enclosed the report of one Christopher Stone, dated 15 September, declaring that three more houses had been infected in the previous week, but that all was clear from the Swan outside Northgate to the Swan in Stall Street, and from Thomas Brinkworth's house as far as the bridge.

Despite reassurances and all the preparations to welcome him, Cecil deferred his visit at the last moment, possibly when he was already on the road. As a result he missed a planned civic reception, as well as the christening of Winter's child (called Cecil in his honour) and all the entertainment Winter had laid on expectantly at Dyrham. Dr Sherwood bore the brunt of the local criticism as he explained on 22 September:

I imagined the citizens of Bath would censure me hardly for your sudden return, and was nothing deceived: the meaner, for their present gain: the better sort in hope to renew their old charter with more immunities, which are already too many: all for love of themselves, without regard to the health and safety of those by whom the burden of our estate is supported. They rail and revel at their pleasure, but I esteem it less than nothing, as my conscience witnesses I have dealt honestly. I suggested no untruth. I numbered the persons dead of all diseases about the midst of May to the end of August, 72, and the several houses out of which they died, about 24. How modestly I have dealt therein shall appear by the breviat I have sent, to the just reproof of those who by false suggestion of others in favour of the place, impugned my report. Of the number mentioned in the schedule there have not died above 5 or 6 since I saw you; since which time 3 houses were newly infected, the inhabitant of one a cook retaining to you, who had provided 3 beds for the meanest of the train; and himself no doubt would for the most part have been in your kitchen, a thing of terror to those that truly love you. God be praised these dangers are avoided, and the respiting of your bathing shall not, I hope, much prejudice your health

Bubonic plague struck at unpredictable intervals, normally in the summer months, with worst effect in the poorer areas of large towns and ports. Nationally the epidemic of 1603-04 was not one of the severest, though London and Bristol were hard hit - Bristol registering over 2000 deaths in 1603. Mortality in Bath relative to population was probably much less, for it had no large poor districts and some of its buildings were of stone. Nevertheless a rising spa could not afford bad publicity about fatalities, and a State Secretary stricken by plague would have been a calamity. Eight years later, in 1612, Cecil lay ill at Bath from his own infirmities. In spite of his expectations of dying there and being buried in the Abbey Church, he managed in the end to drag himself away, only to succumb at Marlborough on his way back to London.

* John Winter (or Wynter) succeeded his father George Winter, Clerk of the Queen's Ships, in 1581. (The Winters had acquired Dyrham some years earlier from the long-established Denys family.) His uncle was Admiral Sir William Winter of Lydney, Surveyor of the Navy 1557-89 and a prominent figure in the defeat of the Spanish Armada. John Winter himself had commanded the ill-fated ship Elizabeth on Drake's voyage of 1578, but had not circumnavigated.

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