



NEWSLETTER 21

M A Y 1993

G R O U P N E W S

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 7 APRIL 1993

1. Apologies came from David McLaughlin, Arnold and Jane Root, and Mary Wills. Minutes of the previous meeting were accepted.
2. The Treasurer presented the accounts for 1992-3 showing a balance of £636.27 at 31 March 1993, a deficit of £71.79 on the year. In view of the still healthy financial position he proposed no alteration in the subscriptions, but warned of a possible increase in future. At present no bank charges, but the question of interest rate and charges would be kept under review. This year no auditing fee had been charged. The Treasurer was thanked by the meeting for his work over the past year.
3. The Chairman reviewed the programme of meetings and said they had been well-received and attended. Members were invited to comment on past and future meetings. The shifting of dates of meetings towards the middle of the month seemed acceptable. The Chairman also noted that the policy of allowing a concessionary reduction for members who renewed subscriptions in good time had proved useful in encouraging an early response.
4. The Secretary reported on the activities of the Working Party on Archives and Libraries (David Crellin, Trevor Fawcett, Ruth Fisher, Elizabeth Holland, Marta Inskip, Jane Root) which had met on 7 July 1992 to decide its brief and further progress. Little had been added to the Sources files in 1992-93 except the Jolly's archive, but it was hoped to explore repositories outside the region in due course, starting with the National Register of Archives. The matter of the dispersal of Bath property deeds will be pursued. The chief initiative of the year had been in meetings with staff representing Bath Central Library when a dozen specific issues had been discussed, including the arrangement of the open-access local history collections, cataloguing and indexing, the inexperience of some library staff, the need for a practical guide to local history materials, the transfer of items from the Newbridge store, supervision of the use of MSS and rare items, and disruptive noise in the library environment. The Library had responded positively but many desirable improvements were limited by staffing and financial constraints which had also resulted in the cancellation of c.15 subscriptions to historical and archaeological periodicals. Three Working Party members had been allowed to visit the Newbridge Store, and the Calendar of State Papers and RCHM volumes were in process of transfer from Newbridge to the Podium site. The History Group had also been invited to arrange a meeting for its

members to see round the closed stacks at the Central Library. Commenting on the Secretary's report Michael Rowe raised the possibility of the HBRG subscribing to the odd historical periodical if thought desirable.

5. The officers and members of the 1992-93 Committee were willing to stand in 1993-94 and the AGM re-elected them en bloc without dissent.
6. The meeting also agreed that the HBRG should purchase 50 copies of Bath History vol. 5 when it appeared in spring 1994. An announcement was made by Mike Chapman about a new publication on the Kingston Estate in the 1740s. (See under Recent Publications).

MEETINGS HELD JANUARY - APRIL 1993

Organised jointly with the Bath branch of the Historical Association, the meeting on 21 January heard Alan Rome speak about past and current restoration work on three mediaeval structures: Bath Abbey, St. Mary Redcliffe, and Bristol Cathedral. He himself took a midway position in the long-standing debate between the dedicated restorers (or recreators) of old buildings and the minimalist repairers (who were concerned not to destroy the patina of time). History, however, should not be exalted above architecture; decay was hardly picturesque and might be dangerous. The 19th-century interventions of men like Gilbert Scott had been unfairly criticised. Their knowledgeable restorations had in fact preserved many of our cathedrals and churches, and their work - together with the carvings, ironwork, brass-fittings and stained glass of Victorian craftsmen - had somehow become absorbed within the fabric of the buildings. Bath Abbey had undergone many alterations by the time Scott took over. He completed the fan vaulting, rebuilt the flying buttresses to take the extra weight, tackled the decaying facade, pewed the interior, managed the gas fittings with panache, and introduced fine Clayton & Bell glass and Skidmore altar rails but was unable to persuade the Simeon Trustees to admit a reredos (which smacked too much of Popery). His successor, T.G. Jackson, continued the same sympathetic approach in correcting the pinnacles and adding the War memorial cloister. In the recently completed overhaul of the west front insufficient evidence survived to re-carve the 'heavenly host' (the peering angels' heads having been very susceptible to water erosion). By the mid-19th century the splendid interior of St. Mary Redcliffe remained substantially intact (and box-pewed), though the external masonry was crumbling from pollution. During the subsequent restoration the truncated spire was topped off and contemporary designs commissioned for stained glass, etc., though the Victorian encaustic tiles laid on concrete resulted in a 20th-century problem of rising damp. By the 1930s the exterior needed re-facing once more. Bristol Cathedral presented the conscientious G.E. Street with a harder task, since the former Romanesque nave had gone altogether. Taking his cue from the existing chancel, Street designed a more 'rational' Gothic nave but with a different vaulting system, and added two western towers. The architect of Truro cathedral, J.L. Pearson, later made his own contribution at Bristol in the screen, chancel reredos, and reassembled choir-stalls. All these three buildings raised different questions of restoration and we were urged to compare them carefully in this light.

It was, she said, like having Christmas every day of the week: the excitements of documentary research have rarely been better described than in Marta Inskip's account (on 10 February) of opening each fresh bundle of leases at Bath Record Office. Her starting point had been the 1641 property survey of Bath (now accessible in Jean Manco's thorough transcript). A second invaluable source was the 18th-century Furman listing of more than 2500 leases in date order. Some 1500 early leases for Corporation property

actually survive and formed the basis of Marta's study; some of the later examples include plans as well as measurements. Auxiliary sources were Council minutes, Chamberlain's accounts, parish registers, the records of St. John's Hospital, and sundry other documents. From all this a detailed record of city-owned property had been painstakingly built up, district by district, street by street, and collected into systematic, colour-coded files. Because most leases were held 'on three lives', they particularise individual people and their occupations. The most tangible result from collating all the evidence has been Marta's splendid map of 17th-century properties (related to the 1885 O.S. map). This can be regarded as a precision tool. Alongside the files on each property it can launch all kinds of inquiry, e.g. into water supply and drainage, changes of building use, vaults and ground levels, the property-holding of Council members, the links between specific trades and particular families or streets, to mention but a few. The gradual in-filling of gardens and open spars can also be traced. Marta's talk was MI of insights. The Christopher Inn in High Street became so only in the mid-1600s; the earlier Christopher was in Stall Street and became the Lamb, and here a certain William Adams was twice a servant during the 1720s in a career that also took him to the Swan, the Half Moon, the Sun, to a malthouse, to a coachmaker, constantly having to cross parish boundaries to save giving him residence rights. The Bear Inn - previously the Bell - offers much scope for investigation; once a "whirligig", a cage for petty wrongdoers, stood nearby; a freemasonry lodge met there from 1732; the dispute over compensation lasted c.20 years before the property was finally cleared in the early 19th century to create Union Street. This was a fascinating talk, but a large audience was also shocked to learn of the gradual dispersal of the city's property deeds, an unusually rich collection seldom matched elsewhere. The History Group may have to take this issue up with the Local Authority.

On 11 March Alex Kolaczowski gave us the benefit of her current postgraduate research into Jerom Murch, for 62 years a name to conjure with in Victorian Bath, and seven times Mayor. A Devonshire man, he moved from his Baptist roots to non-dogmatic Unitarianism during his time in Norfolk when he also married into a local dynasty of Dissenters. He transferred to Bath in 1833 to revive the Unitarian meeting in Trim Street where the congregation had gone into decline under his predecessor, the antiquary Joseph Hunter. Unitarianism faced serious opposition, especially from Bath's assertive Evangelicals, and the ecumenical Murch met prejudice on all sides. His salary was small; his own trustees were not always supportive; Evangelicals poached pupils from the Unitarian day school; Unitarians were declared to be worse than cholera. Murch was even shouted down at the Trinitarian Bible Society, but slowly he made progress. He rebuilt his congregation, wrote a history of Presbyterianism, petitioned Parliament on issues of the day, and in 1838 won respect for his sensible views at a public meeting about the forthcoming coronation. Having declined an opportunity to move to the Bristol meeting, he soldiered on at Trim Street until his resignation on health grounds in 1846. By now he was becoming a local establishment figure, a governor at the Mineral Water Hospital, member of the Poor Law Board, saviour of the neglected Victoria Park (doing much re-planting himself), and supporter of educational institutions - particularly the Mechanics' Institute (as it gentrified into the Athenaeum) and the Literary & Scientific Institution (which he nursed to comparative health over the next few decades). Though a staunch upholder of Radical Liberalism, he refused help to Roebuck's campaign in the vituperative 1847 election and was much abused as a result for wrecking the cause. It hardly affected his rise as a reformist local politician with a vision of active public service and civic improvement. He struggled to bring a water supply to Bath's poorer districts, and inspired the late-century revival of the spa. He ensured the re-building of the fire-gutted theatre, proposed the Grand Pump Room Hotel, supported Clifton College, backed Major Davis over the recovery of the Roman baths, encouraged the Guildhall extensions. He had a finger in many pies and did the mayoral honours at all the grand civic occasions. Master of Cranwells, he lost his money in a bank crash in 1879 but was saved by his wife's inheritance, and lived on, Bath's leading citizen and eventually knighted, until his death in 1895.

Following the AGM and refreshments (canapés courtesy Lutz Haber) on 7 April, Alan Summers of Whiteman's Bookshop and Millstream Books spoke informally about publishing local history, illustrating his talk with a pile of specimens. The larger publishers are sometimes instrumental in turning what might have been a minor work into a best-seller: The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady has sold three million copies; Sheep, Bell & Ploughshare, about Wiltshire life in Bratton, has large sales in Australasia and Canada. Local studies can lurk in unsuspected volumes, for instance Sharpen the Sickle (a history of the

Farmworkers' Union), The Ecology of Agricultural Systems (a school textbook taking Russia and Wiltshire as its examples), and Action Stations (vol. 5 covers military airfields in the south west). An Art Institute of Chicago publication, Rare Doings at Bath, never had a British copyright and only a few copies were ever imported. At a more modest level of distribution, various stratagems can be used to make publication viable. Alan Summers gave examples of subscription publishing, of commercial sponsorship (e.g. Kegs & Ale on Bath pubs, sponsored by Showerings), of publishing author's ready-to-print copy (e.g. Keith Dallimore's Exploring Combe Down), and of commissioned guide-books for the tourist market. Successful first editions might provide a springboard for improved re-issues - as with Godfrey Laurence's Bathford Past and Present. Personal reminiscences offered much scope, e.g. Fred Flower's Somerset Coalmining Life and Louie Stride's Memoirs of a Street Urchin, and so too should guides to particular Bath buildings. This was a most engaging talk that gave ample food for thought as well as many helpful bibliographical hints and reminders.

MEMBERS' NEWS

Special congratulations to three of our members: Dr. Angus Buchanan, who received an O.B.E. in the New Year Honours' List; Dr. Steve Poole, awarded a University of Bristol Ph.D. for his thesis on 'Popular politics in Somersetshire, Wiltshire and Bristol, 1790 - 1805'; and Ian Crowe, appointed head of history at St. Edward's School, Oxford.

Ian's new address is: St. Edward's School, Woodstock Road, Oxford, OX2 7NN.

New member: Mrs. Mary Dunn, 12 Forester Avenue, Bathwick, Bath, BA2 6QD.

LECTURES MEETINGS, EVENTS

1. The Building of Bath Museum has just concluded a very successful and well-attended series of 8 weekly lectures on aspects of Bath's historic fabric, from construction methods to physical appearance and details of buildings.
2. Following a series of 4 lunchtime lectures at the Guildhall held 15 April 6 May, the Battle of Lansdown (1643) will be further commemorated by a physical re-enactment of the fighting on 7 - 8 August. In addition the Victoria Art Gallery will mount a display on "Bath and the Civil War" from 26 June - 31 July, and the Holburne Museum have organised two talks on the subject and a visit to Combe Hay. A trail leaflet and map of the Battle of Lansdown will also be published.
3. On Saturday 15 May the University of Bristol's Dept. for Continuing Education is holding a dayschool at Green Park Station on 'Routes and travellers to Bath: the growth of a transport network in the 18C and 19C': speakers Angus and Brenda Buchanan; chairman, Dr. Joe Bettey.
4. A Symposium to mark 20 years of Avon archaeology will be held on 9 October at the University of Bristol (Chemistry Lecture Theatre) under the auspices of Avon Archaeological Council.
5. The Holburne Museum has a new exhibition to mark both the centenary of the date its collections first went on show and the bicentenary of T.W. Holburne's birth. 'Holburne 100' runs from 15 May to 18 October.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. J.N. Adams, 'British Latin: the text, interpretation and language of the Bath curse tablets', Britannia vol. 23 (1992) pp. 1-26.
2. Trevor Fawcett, 'Black people in Georgian Bath' and Peter Davenport, 'Excavations at Bath Street, Bath', Avon Past 16 (Spring 1993) , pp. 2-9 and 10-17.
3. Elizabeth Holland and Mike Chapman, The Kinston Estate within the Walled City of Bath: a Composite Plan of the 1740s (pub. for the Survey of Old Bath, 1993). An essential new document reconstructing a significant area of 18C Bath through a fine map; c.40 properties are keyed to very informative text notes.
4. Bernard Stace, Bath Abbey Monuments (Millstream on behalf of Bath Abbey, 1993). A pamphlet on 50 extant monuments, tablets, etc.
5. Barry Cunliffe, The Roman Baths: a View over 2000 Years, ed. Stephen Bird (Bath Archaeological Trust, 1993). A new illustrated guide with visual reconstructions.
6. Maurice Scott, Discovering Widcombe and Lyncombe (1993), now out in a second edition.
7. Colin G. Maggs, The Bath Tramways (Headington, Oakwood P. 1992), also in a new edition, much revised.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FOSSIL COLLECTORS

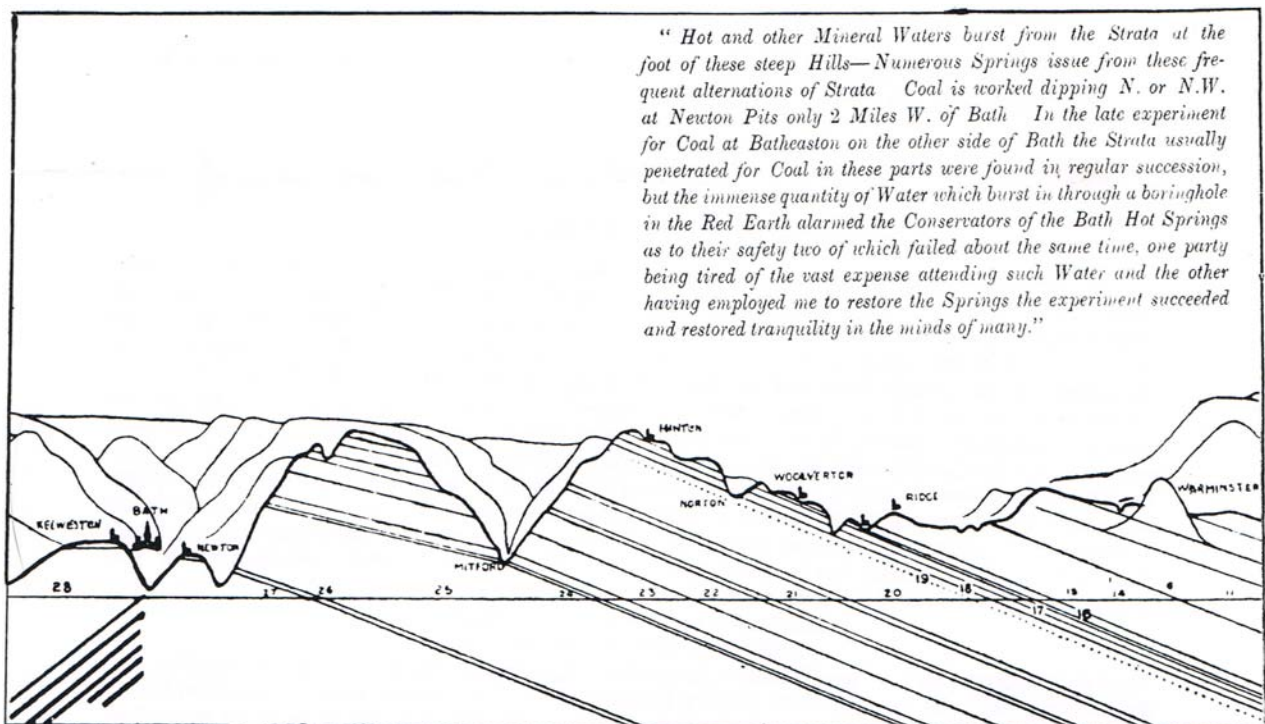
In 1743, announcing the death of a Mr Wrightson, the Gloucester Journal observed that he was well-known for his cabinet of curiosities at Bath, Tunbridge Wells and elsewhere. Presumably this travelling museum was typical of its time in including a selection of fossils (still objects of controversial origin) among its specimens of natural history, minerals, and items of historical and scientific interest. By that date a few Bath residents would surely have built up their own collections, since ancient shells, corals, sea urchins, 'thunderbolts' (belemnites), and spectacular 'snakestones' (ammonites) abounded in the oolite and lias quarries of the neighbourhood. Ralph Allen may well have had examples, and Dr. William Oliver too, both spurred on by the Cornish antiquary and geologist William Borlase. The first definite record of a local fossil collection, however, seems to be that of Thomas Haviland, a thriving Bath apothecary with a private botanic garden, in the mid-1750s. In time a trade in fossils developed. A London dealer advertised them at Bath in 1770 among miscellaneous sale goods, while the jeweller and toyman William Basnett, whose shop faced up Milsom Street, had fossils in stock c. 1780: as the fop in 'The Bath Macaroni' of 1781 puts it, explaining the source of the ornaments on his cane:

The fossil was given me by my mother,
Faith, BASNETT has not such another.

Another supplier of the time was Francis Robins, who exhibited a cabinet of fossils at 3 Montpelier, near the Riding School. By the end of the century Bath's principal fossil dealer seems to have been George Sykes, a stay- and umbrella-maker of 10 Abingdon Buildings. Fossils might also be acquired at auctions. In 1795 for example the private collection of fossils and shells housed at Rock House, adjoining Mrs. Bretton's living quarters in Harington Place, was auctioned on her removal. Was she perhaps the widow of Bretton, the Milsom Street goldsmith?

In his Bath Anecdotes and Characters (1782) Dr. Henry Harington gently mocked the 'natural philosopher' who placed a higher value on a shell from the limestone than a Queen Anne guinea. Such a one no doubt was the eminent tailor Charles Waters, who built up an extensive group of fossils, shells and minerals (finally sold in 1792 after his death). Nevertheless fossil-fancying had now progressed beyond mere cabinet display. The Scientific Society established at Bath in 1779 in particular took a systematic approach. Several members collected fossils - including Robert Madden whose fine library included books on the subject - and its founder-secretary, Edmund Rack, several times records in his journal how he visited local quarries hunting 'petrifications' and then performed experiments on some of his finds. On one occasion he accompanied the Irish botanist John Walcott on a plant-, mineral- and fossil-collecting expedition to the romantic 'little Cheddar' of Wick Rocks, an outlier of Carboniferous limestone just north of Bath (now, alas, largely quarried away). Several times in early 1780 the Scientific Society discussed fossils and examined specimens. Some of the members, including the Quaker Rack and the Independent Walcott, certainly considered them divine revelations. In his illustrated account of local fossils (Descriptions of Petrification found in the Quarries, Gravel-Pits, &c. near Bath, 1779) Walcott stated his view that they were "undoubted natural proofs of the universal deluge ... described in ... Genesis".

All these early speculators missed the crucial point though, the necessity of recording the precise rock strata their fossils came from. It was just this exact stratigraphic location that enabled William Smith, working the same district around Bath in the 1790s, to demonstrate the chronological succession of the rocks and so lay the foundations of modern geology. Smith's first map showing the deposits five miles round Bath dates from 1799. His section of the strata along the Bath-to-Salisbury road, partly reproduced with textual commentary below, was published by John Cary in 1819.



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