



NEWSLETTER 23

JANUARY 1994

GROUP NEWS

CHANGE OF PROGRAMME

Because the opening of the Bath Abbey Visitors' Centre has been delayed, the intended visit on Thursday 13 January has been cancelled. In its place (and on the same evening) Rob Bell will be giving an illustrated talk at No. 4 Circus on recent excavations at Bath Abbey.

MEETINGS HELD OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 1993

Graham Finch's guidelines on the design and conservation of shopfronts, prepared for Bath City Council, have been based on a meticulous survey of Bath's outstanding collection of commercial premises - many of them illustrated during the course of his talk on 13 October. With few exceptions, the city's classical shopfronts are "astylar", simplifying the traditional proportions and decorations of the classical orders: the frieze from the architectural entablature, for example, became the fascia carrying the name of the shop or its proprietor. Until about 1832 the decisive element of the façade - the shop window - was divided into small panels filled with Crown glass; for a short period cylinder glass came into use, but after c. 1845 plate glass revolutionised Victorian design and led to the huge panes of the Edwardian period. When the shop was closed, its windows were protected by external lifting shutters secured by metal bars and bolts. Essential to Graham Finch's project has been the creation of a photographic and descriptive record of some 500 local shopfronts, a task requiring close attention to revealing details like sawn-off tenons and signs of wear on shutter slots. Two carousels of slides provided a feast of examples: carved capitals, fanlights, bow windows, brass plates, mosaic-paved entries, mirrors, paintwork, different forms of lettering, and many variants on glazing bars. Interesting shopfronts can be found from the mid-18th century to the present (chemist shops are good survivors), though rarely without some alteration. Graham Finch also showed enough instances of poor modern design - ill-thought-out proportions, use of dubious materials, fussy additions, and strident colour and lettering - to justify the compilation of his guidelines. It demonstrated too the sensitivity, by contrast, of his own shopfront designs guided by historical understanding. In general he favoured a lively mix of shopfronts in the street, reflecting their evolution over time, rather than an imposed uniformity.

On 11 November Neil Macmillan spoke on "Fuller's Earth at Bath". The term is used of clays that do not become sticky in water but have the soapy property of removing dirt from cloth. More specifically Fuller's Earth refers to Calcium Montmorillonite which in this area occurs as a thin layer only a few feet thick. This was formed in the Jurassic period 160 million years ago from volcanic ash rich in mica. Beds in other parts of England were formed more recently. This earth acts like a chemical sponge when wet and expands to many times

its volume, a process that caused the A46 slip some years ago and was perhaps the cause of the caisson lock failure at Combe Hay. It has many uses in addition to fulling cloth. These include refining of vegetable oils, binding cattle feeds, making moulds for foundries, acting as a carrier for pesticides in pellet form, a number of applications in cosmetics, and the production of cat-litter. The earth was extracted by tunnelling into hillsides where the bed meets the surface and removal was by pony-drawn tubs and later electric-battery locomotives. It needed to be crushed (the "Engineer's Thumb" adventure of Sherlock Holmes involved this process) and for some applications must be finely ground before packing at works like those close to the Bath-Radstock road. With the help of projected sketch maps our speaker took us on a tour of the dozen or so sites where Fuller's Earth had been extracted in the Odd Down, Wellow, Combe Hay and South Stoke area with indications of where signs of features such as adits, tramways and field subsidence after mining are visible. Those who walk footpaths in this area will have more to notice next time. There are still large amounts of the earth unexploited at Twinhoe. Skinner mentions a grinding mill in 1884 when the industry was flourishing, but soon after demand and price fell sharply, though the Odd Down works did not finally close until 1980. The term "fulling" has Latin origins: did the Romans use the deposits near Bath? We can only observe that three of the sites described are near sites of Roman villas.

(Report by John Ede)

The visit to Bath Central Library on 29 November was most efficiently organised by Liz Bevan, the senior librarian responsible for reference services and humanities. Together with Valerie Beanie, her chief assistant, and Jane Carey, librarian-in-charge at the Podium, she guided us in three groups round both public areas and closed stacks, explaining the system and readily fielding our many questions. Richard Ashby, the senior area professional, was also present. The physical arrangement of local history material is complicated by Bath's location where three counties meet and by its temporary lodging in a fourth - and by the existence of a separate classification scheme for literature on Avon. In addition sequences are needed for octavo-sized and larger volumes, for reference and lending stock, for separate categories like directories and electoral registers, and for all the "non-book" items so crucial for local research - maps and plans, cuttings, prints and photographs and slides, and microfilms of newspapers, census returns, directories and scrapbooks. The inevitable complexity of arranging and housing all this material is mirrored in the mixed legacy of finding aids - the old card catalogue with its own peculiarities, the two sheaf catalogues, the local and picture indexes, and the computer-based OPAC system (for most accessions since 1986, though certain local publications are still entered in the card catalogue instead). More difficulties of storage were apparent in the three closed stacks where quantities of valuable, older or duplicate material are held, including school magazines, boxed newspapers, large prints and photographs, guide books, miscellaneous and subject scrapbooks, autograph letters, estate papers, bound sets of pamphlets, trade cards, albums, extra-illustrated works, and treasures of many kinds. The Library has managed to secure special funds for conservation, but the business of cleaning, deacidification, encapsulating and rebinding is inevitably slow and expensive. The commitment of the staff to preserving and exploiting the rich resources for local history is plain, but our tour likewise demonstrated the constraints under which they operate, and the need for understanding on our part and some effort to familiarise ourselves with the system. To this end the Library has just produced a welcome new guide, "Local Studies in Bath", and is preparing a further guide to the catalogues and indexes. Various ideas were floated during our visit and might usefully be pooled if members would pass their suggestions to the Secretary in the near future.

MEMBERS' NEWS

Changes of address: Jean Manco, Flat 5 Avonmead, 48 Stoke's Croft, Bristol, BS1 3QD
Susan Sloman, 2 Sion Hill, Lansdown, Bath, BA1 2UF

New Members: Ann Hopkins-Clarke, Hill House, North Road, Bath, BA2 6HY
Andrew R. Ellis, 32 Calton Walk, Bath, BA2 4QQ
Brian J. Howard, ditto

ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES WORKING PARTY

1. A topographical index to the Victoria Art Gallery's Concise Catalogue of Paintings and Drawings 1991, compiled by Jean Manco, has been added to the files on repositories holding material on Bath history.
2. Ruth Fisher has agreed to represent us on the Bath Local Library Committee. She attended her first meeting in early October and reports as follows:

The Committee exists to promote an exchange of views and information on its Library services between the local population and Library staff. In addition to representatives from other groups, which now include five sixth-formers, it has as members local councillors and interested individuals. A wide range of matters was discussed, including the provision of spoken word cassettes and the question of Local Government reorganization - but despite the latter's potential effects on Library services, insufficient is known of actual plans to make discussion useful at present. Mrs Carey, the Bath Librarian-in-charge, gave us good news of improvements to local staffing levels and to funding. This included the provision of all the money Bath Library requested for conservation purposes, and additional money for reference materials, newspapers and periodicals. Unfortunately, as its uptake of these is governed by popular demand (as reflected in readership surveys) the Library does not feel able to resume subscription to any of the numerous historical journals previously cut from its list. On a more optimistic note, the Committee was informed that the Calendars of State Papers had been transferred back to the Library from Newbridge.
3. The plea in Newsletter 20 for HBRG members to take a look at archival items in towns outside the Bath region was kindly heeded by Owen Ward, who examined the transcript of the "Diaries of William Dillwyn" at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth (which also holds the original). He has provided the following account:

Dating from 1774 to 1790, the Diary is in two volumes and begins with a brave effort to record as much as possible; but the early excitement soon wears off and by the time volume two is reached almost all that we find is a bare schedule of the Quaker meetings he attends as a diligent Friend. The first volume is preceded by six pages of "rough notes of my voyage from Philadelphia to Bristol in the ship Concord, Joseph Volans master". He recounts the delays, the perils and the pleasures - which are but minor of the voyage. He reached Bristol in June 1774 and met many Friends, including the Goldneys whose grotto he viewed. Then on Wednesday 13 July 1774:

. . . about 7 o'clock set off for Bath. . . . About 9 o'clock arrived at Christopher Inn in Bath, bespoke a Dinner and then walked to the great Pump Room, viewed the Baths a Statue of Beau Nash's etc. Thence walked round the Parade and thro' the Circus (a very elegant group of Buildings forming in Front an area of that shape) to the Crescent (another exceeding superb Pile of about 30 elegant Houses). Thence to the great Rooms for Diversion which exceeded anything I had seen. In the Card Room is a fine Portrait of Cap' Wade the present Master of the Ceremonies. We then walked thro' the principal part of the Town over a new elegant Bridge and along the Avon to Prior Park formerly the seat of Ralph Allen Esqr. deceased. Here is a beautifull piece of water and fine walks with a neat Pile in a beautifull situation perfectly natural. We intended to have seen his famous Quay and Convenience to bring stones from the Quarries, but unluckily missed our way and falling in with several smaller Quarries returned to Bath to Dinner . . .

The rest of the first volume concerns William Dillwyn's travels through England as far as Newcastle-on-Tyne, but volume two finds him back in Bristol on 6 May 1782. A day later, at about 10 o'clock, presumably at night, he left in the stage-coach for London. On 8 May he wrote:

Coachman in a drunken fit fell off his box in the night at Melksham. Left him behind. Got with difficulty to Devises. Dined at Slough and reached home about 9 o'clock in the evening. On the whole a disagreeable journey.

The final passing reference to Bath comes on the night of 11-12 May 1785:

At 7 o'clock I set off in the Balloon Coach for Bristol. Supped between 2 and 3 next morning at Newbury and pursuing our course thro' Calne Chippenham and Bath, at the last of which we breakfasted, reached Bristol between 12 and 1 o'clock.

4. Two non-members have also contributed information about relevant documents in provincial archives. Pauline Hanna looked at the index to the Wedgwood papers held at Keele and Ursula Priestley at a microfilm of the Erasmus Farle MSS in Norwich. This is all very valuable help and further contributions would be most welcome.

BATH HISTORY vol. 5

The next volume, once again published by Millstream Books, is due to appear in Spring 1994 at £7.99. The HBRG will have 50 copies for sale at a concessionary price of £6.75 each. These may be ordered from the Secretary in advance at any time and in more than one copy if required. Contents of volume 5:

- Peter Davenport, "Town and Country: Roman Bath and its hinterland"
- Trevor Fawcett & Marta Inskip, "The making of Orange Grove"
- Philippa Bishop, "The sentence of Momus: satirical verse and prints in eighteenth-century Bath"
- Jane Root, "Thomas Baldwin: his public career in Bath, 1775 - 1793"
- Stephen Clews, "Banking in Bath in the reign of George III"
- Marek Lewcun, "The clay tobacco pipe making industry of Bath"
- Robin Whalley, "Royal Victoria Park"
- Lutz Haber, "The first 75 years of the Holburne Museum"

LEEVITES AND OTHERS

Eighteenth-century Bath had a reputation for its boarding and finishing schools for young ladies. Here they learned not only the 3 Rs, needlework and polite behaviour but also the "accomplishments" that Hannah More would later so much criticise in Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799), a book written partly with Bath in mind. One of the earliest schools was launched c.1720 by John Stagg, a fashionable dancing master, and run by his wife in the St. John's Court/Kingsmead Street area. In 1743, after Mrs Stagg's death, her niece and principal teacher Mrs Tomlin set up on her own account, and was succeeded in turn by Mrs Aldworth (1765-73), Mmes Mainwaring and Perks (1774-9), and briefly Mrs Mainwaring alone. A similar establishment, founded by Mrs Ann Emblen (of Bratton, Wilts.), prospered from c.1736 on two successive sites in St. John's Street before moving to Trim Street in 1766. On Mrs Emblen's death in 1760 it was continued by her partner and long-term assistant Mrs Pulleine (1760-86), Miss Wagstaffe (1786-90), and the Mmes Habersham and Second - the later partnership transferring the school first to Queen Square (1791-4) and then to no. 1 Catherine Place. In 1766-7 both those modish boarding schools feature in Rev. John Penrose's Letters from Bath as the decision is taken where to place their daughter Dolly (see pp. 146, 167, etc.).

Prominent among later eighteenth-century schools are those of Anne Roscoe and the Lee sisters. The history of the first began at Bristol, where in 1749 a London embroideress, Anna Barbara Roscoe and her husband opened a school on St. Michael's Hill. Widowed c.1762, Mrs Roscoe was joined by her daughter Anne who gave up a budding stage career to become a schoolmistress. In 1770 they moved to Bath and set up temporarily in Brock Street until their new house was ready in Royal Crescent (the present no.2, but the end house until no. 1 was belatedly completed). Boarding fees were fairly steep at £30 a year (later £35) with a 5-guinea entrance charge, but the cost did at least cover laundry, mending and tea besides the basic curriculum subjects of writing, English, French, accounting and needlework. Extras such as Italian, geography, dancing, drawing and music were, as usual, taught by masters from outside the establishment and paid for separately. The one annual vacation lasted six weeks from 1 August. On her mother's death in 1774 Anne Roscoe left the



Sophia Lee, from a portrait by Thomas Lawrence

Crescent for the centre house in Barton Buildings near Queen Square; in 1779 she also extended into an adjoining house to give more room for parlour (or family) boarders, including orphaned girls. More ambitiously, in 1782, Anne Roscoe removed to a large building in Lansdown Road facing Montpelier (later known as Hartley House), brought in her three nieces (former pupils) as assistants, engaged a resident teacher from Paris, and announced that in future French would be spoken throughout the school even though English elocution had hitherto been a strong point of the syllabus. Alas, demand for the enlarged school cannot have met expectations, for she failed to meet her mounting debts; within six months she had quitted Bath leaving the field to her rivals, and notably the Misses Lee.

The Lees were four daughters of John Lee, an actor-manager well-known in the theatres of London, Edinburgh, Dublin and Bath, but whose fatal illness in 1780-1 at his New King

Street house must have precipitated the sisters' joint venture of launching a school in December 1780 at a house (perhaps nos. 8 or 9) in Vineyards. The two elder sisters provided the means and expertise. The 30-year-old Sophia had just scored a profitable hit at the Haymarket Theatre in London with her comedy The Chapter of Accidents (based on Diderot), while Charlotte - once an assistant teacher at Anne Roscoe's school - had been testing the market with her own small dayschool in Fountain Buildings, at the foot of Lansdown Road. By January 1782 the popularity of Sophia's play, performed at Drury Lane in 1781 and Covent Garden in 1782, funded the move to better premises at 7 Belmont, and their many theatrical and literary contacts perhaps helped to attract custom. Moreover, their fees were competitive (£25 p.a. and two guineas entrance for boarders; 3 guineas p.a. and 1/2-guinea entrance for day pupils), and by August 1782 they had all but one of the full complement of 24 boarders. The curriculum emphasised grammatical English and French, writing, arithmetic, and fine needlework ("particularly Embroidery"), but exposure to Sophia and Harriet Lee's bright conversation must have been an education in itself. In 1787 Mrs Thrale found the sisters "charming" and deserving "their very uncommon success". This success was not simply as teachers but as writers. Sophia produced further plays (though no more money-spinners) and Harriet a couple of novels, a comedy staged at Drury Lane in 1787, and later the bulk of the Canterbury Tales, a sequence of short stories.

Probably early in 1786 the school expanded into new premises higher up Lansdown Road, immediately north of the present entrance to Hedgemoor Park on a site rebuilt in the late 19th century. Seemingly it occupied an extended house (or perhaps adjoining houses) running back from the road, its panoramic view justifying the name "Belvedere House". (The Thomas Baldwin design purporting to be the Lees' school in the Hunt scrapbook in Bath Central Library is quite another building). What it felt like to be a pupil here in the late 1790s we know in some detail from Susan Sibbald's Memoirs. She was one of around 72 girls ranging from 8 to 19 years (2 parlour boarders, 50 standard boarders, and c. 20 day pupils), presided over by the three governesses (Sophia, Harriet and Ann) and three assistant teachers. By this date the rather devout Charlotte Lee had married "a man of mean station" in Bristol, but the others stayed committed to the school - Harriet in 1789 even resisting the advances of the radical philosopher William Godwin who, impressed by her conversational powers, offered his hand. Susan Sibbald tells us about the big school room at the back of the building, the dining room below, and the paved terrace that served as a playground overlooking the garden. Though she shared her bedroom with only two other girls plus the French mistress, at least one other bedroom slept as many as eight girls. The regime was firm but benign. Sanctions ranged from a breakfast of thin gruel to the scandal of expulsion, but corporal punishment had no place. Tutors from the city arrived most days to take lessons: Billy Perks in writing and arithmetic, Monsieur Becker in drawing, Miss Oaks in music (the school had three pianos), and the famous Miss Fleming in dancing training her pupils to perform at special scholars' balls at the Assembly Rooms. There were treats, pocket money, country walks and, after Sunday church, visits to friends. They watched the Sydney Garden's fireworks from their windows and made a pretence at rivalry with Mrs Colbourne's school (before that Ann Wignall's) at 10 Lansdown Crescent - who dubbed them the "Leevites" in return. It seems hardly surprising the Lees had a waiting list for admissions.

The three sisters retired, no doubt comfortably off, in summer 1803 and by 1804/5 had settled in South Lyncombe at newly-built Hatfield Place just off the Wells Road. Sophia at 53 already looked elderly, though she would live to 74 and Harriet to 94. The frail-looking Ann was the real worry. In October 1805 she returned from her Welsh tour (with Harriet) still depressed, and on the 23rd, while her sisters were visiting Bath market, she hanged herself. She was buried in Widcombe cemetery after a coroner's verdict of lunacy, and Sophia and Harriet left Bath for good, first to join their brother, partner in a Manchester cotton-spinning firm, and later to live near Tintern Abbey and then at Clifton.

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

