



NEWSLETTER 25

SEPTEMBER 1994

GROUP NEWS

MEETINGS HELD MAY - JUNE 1994

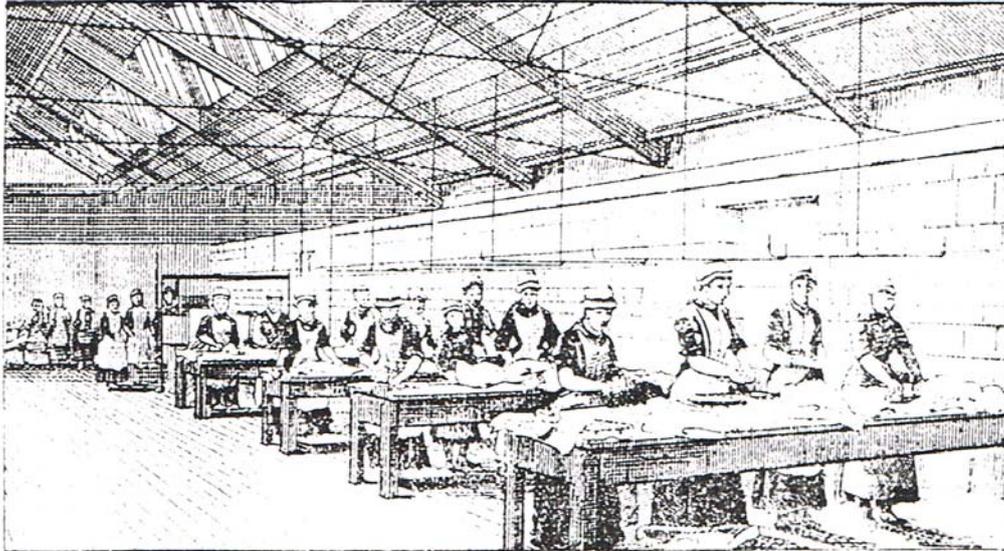
Speaking on 12 May about St. John's Hospital, Jean Manco first explained that most mediaeval hospitals were religious foundations for lepers or the poor and infirm, and only a minority for wayfarers or the chronic sick. Bath's leper hospital (founded c.1100 and certainly for lepers by 1212) was St. Mary Magdalen's in Holloway, well out of town. It had some land attached, raised sheep, and in 1256 was offered royal protection; otherwise little is known about this hospital which by 1486, with the decline of leprosy, was ruinous, indebted, the home of only a few poor, and ripe to be united with the Priory and turned into an asylum for the mentally ill. By contrast St. John's was for the needy infirm. Almost certainly it arose c.1180 through Bishop Reginald Fitzjocelyn who founded similar houses at Bristol, Wells and Bridgwater. Those admitted (some at the nomination of the Prior) wore blue gowns, led semi-monastic lives, and prayed daily in the chapel for their benefactors - whose gifts of land meant St. John's had much scattered property to administer. After 1527 it was rebuilt, seemingly all in stone, by Prior Holloway who was obliged to install John Symons, kinsman of the unpopular but powerful William Crouch of Englishcombe, as the new Master. Symons survived the Dissolution still in charge. The national fund-raising of the 1570s for the Priory Church included St. John's which was then rebuilt in the form in which it appears on Gilmore's map, with an Elizabethan frontispiece and lodgings for visitors above the Hospital proper. All this disappeared (but for one central wall) when chapel, almshouses and lodgings alike were transformed in the early eighteenth century, first by William Killigrew and then by John Wood working for the Duke of Chandos on a frustrating scheme to improve accommodation for visitors. The main frontage was then moved to the inner court instead of facing the Cross Bath. Equally great changes have affected Abbey Church House, once the Master of St. John's residence. Jean Manco traced these too, illustrating the earliest mediaeval remains in the cellar, the reconstruction c.1590 by Dr. Robert Baker (as witness the extant fireplace and panelling), and the bomb damage of the last war. In further comparisons with St. John's she also described St. Catherine's and Bellot's hospitals, the latter catering for poor spa visitors from outside Bath. This wide-ranging talk, well illustrated with slides, corrected a number of myths on the subject.

On 8 June, Mike Chapman, himself a Twertonian, was on home ground as he piloted us round this too-often-marginalised Bath "village". So much altered by nineteenth-century routeways, enemy bombing and modern development, Twerton needs an expert interpreter. Its earlier name-form, Twiverton, hints at its origin in two manors and two fords or weirs, though united in a single parish. Evidence on the ground of early Twerton can be found in the line of boundary walls, in the converted buildings of the east manor farm (with half its great mediaeval barn surviving), in the raised level of Shophouse - originally Sheepphouse - Road, in former inns like the White Horse and the George, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century frontages, and in the rebuilt church which preserves a twice-shifted Norman doorway and a late-Gothic tower. Along the road to Bath's old bridge only Fielding's Lodge (where the novelist wrote part of Tom Jones), and the 1790s Charlton Buildings, once interrupted the fields and hedgerows. Big changes came with the nineteenth

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From the Bath Directory 1888/89

century. Realignment of roads near the church around 1827 was followed by the brutal bisection of the village in 1839 by Brunel's GWR which not only sliced through weavers' cottages, manor farm, gardens and other properties, but severed the main village from its river and forced some compensatory rebuilding and re-siting (e.g. of the vicarage and the mill-owner's house). Nevertheless the railway and the thriving mills brought an expanding Victorian population, and Twerton's old core was full of pubs, slaughterhouses and Nonconformist chapels. The walk ended by the industrialised riverside. Here by the 1550s two medieval cornmills were used for fulling cloth. The downstream site successively became a grist-, paper-, leathersdressing-, and cloth and carpet mill. Charles Wilkins, the owner from 1824, absorbed the other mill too, producing high-quality textiles as well as winning Bath & West prizes. Later the Carr family took over and other manufacturers also moved into the area, notably the Bath Cabinet Makers c.1900, famous for fitting out ocean liners and building light aircraft in two world wars. A brief summary can hardly do justice to all the detail Mike Chapman plied us with. He must surely write soon the topographical study of Twerton he is so well equipped to do.

HBRG Committee Meeting 5 May 1994

Besides discussing the programme for 1994-5 and other matters, the Committee agreed (1) that since the HBRG has no permanent headquarters it would not normally wish to accept donations of books, papers and similar items (notwithstanding the recent gift from Mr. Bernard Stace), (2) that the HBRG should respond favourably to the invitation to be represented on the Bath History Editorial Committee and that its representative pro tern. should be Trevor Fawcett, and (3) that the HBRG would write to the Lord Mayor asking the City Council to register properties it has a mind to sell in order to prevent any risk of future dispersal of deeds. (This has now been done and the response is awaited).

BATH LOCAL LIBRARY COMMITTEE

David Crellin attended the meeting of 4 July 1994 and raised several points on behalf of the HBRG, viz. the policy of the Library closing on the Tuesday following a Bank Holiday (the position after local government reorganization will be clarified with UNISON, the union concerned); violation of the no-drinking/no-eating rule (the porters will be more vigilant); the suggestion that staff with special expertise should be so identified (said to be impracticable; staff training and updating of catalogue should help in time); the provision of a quiet study area (not possible because of layout of the premises).

STUDY WEEKEND

The Chapels Society will be holding a Study Weekend on 23-25 September 1994. Those attending will visit a number of non-Anglican places of worship in Bath and will discuss problems of alterations to and re-use of buildings under the guidance of Kerry Birch, David McLaughlin and Mary Ede (all HBRG members, who can give further details to anyone interested in taking part).

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. R.B. and B.K. Harvey, "Bradford-on-Avon in the 14th Century", Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine vol. 86 (1993) pp. 118-29.
2. Stewart Harding and David Lambert, Parks and Gardens of Avon (Avon Gardens Trust, 1994).
3. Kirsten Elliott, A Window on Bath: Eight Walks in Bath (Bath, Millstream Books, 1994), £4.95. The author (an HBRG member) is an old hand at leading enterprising walks round Bath; but more than that, she is committed to winking out the historical facts instead of trusting to received wisdom. Some of her walks are built round a theme - windows and other building details, transport in the city, Jane Austen. Others cover interesting terrain in and about Walcot Street, Lansdown, Lyncombe & Widcombe, and the old centre. And one relates the evidence of old maps to modern reality on the ground. All this is accomplished with an easy command of detailed information, a willingness to express judgments (especially at the expense of architectural purists), and not infrequently a wry aside. This book is not intended to be a systematic account of particular topics or districts of Bath. While many buildings, personalities and subjects are illuminatingly referred to, others are passed over without comment. So much miscellaneous knowledge is imparted that there are bound to be occasional errors or statements one might question. Nevertheless, such has been Kirsten Elliott's enthusiastic research and keen-eyed scrutiny of buildings and early maps that no-one can fail to learn a good deal from this attractive and very reasonably-priced volume.

4. Trevor Fawcett and Stephen Bird, Bath: History and Guide (Alan Sutton, 1994) £7.99. [Reviewed by Mary Ede] This new book aims to provide "a concise and up-to-date view" of the history of Bath and does so in only a hundred pages of text, followed by two detailed descriptions for walking tours. The volume will be one of a series and length and format are thus set by the publishers. The authors have succeeded in writing a tightly-packed account which is both informative and readable. Moreover the reader is not conscious of the division of text between the writers. Since Cunliffe's City of Bath (1986) and certainly since Haddon's Bath (1973) research has thrown up new information and fresh assessment on many periods of Bath's history and the fruits of this new knowledge have been incorporated in this slim volume. The swing away from an unbalanced stress on the Roman and Georgian periods can be traced through R.A.L. Smith's attention to medixval and the Tudor and Stuart centuries (1944) and to Haddon's high-lighting of the nineteenth century (1973). The balance achieved by this new book is not only between centuries but also between the physical development of the city and the economic, social and cultural activities of its inhabitants. And where the authors are treading familiar ground, they do it with a fresh look and with nuggets of new information, such as the German wholesaler's reference in 1606 to the slow turnover of cloth from Bath, or the national reputation of Pooley's polony sausage in the late 19th century, or the Bristol Aeroplane Company building wings in the Assembly Rooms during World War 1.

The book is well illustrated, and sensible use is made of the wide margins for small scale illustrations (these margins also making the text easy to read). The book is "History and Guide" and the latter is represented by walking tours of the City centre and the slopes of Lansdown with maps and detailed information on what can be seen en route (and where wheelchairs can be taken). While these are well described and should be easy to follow, will visitors want to carry round a book that won't go into a pocket? The "Next Steps" for readers' investigations however are helpful suggestions on museums, buildings, archives, etc. The authors have given us a concise history that is a worthy addition to the corpus of scholarly works on Bath and it will become the obvious First Step for those interested in Bath's history. And even the most knowledgeable HBRG members will find fresh insights and maybe stimulus for further research themselves.

HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPT COMMISSION PUBLICATIONS

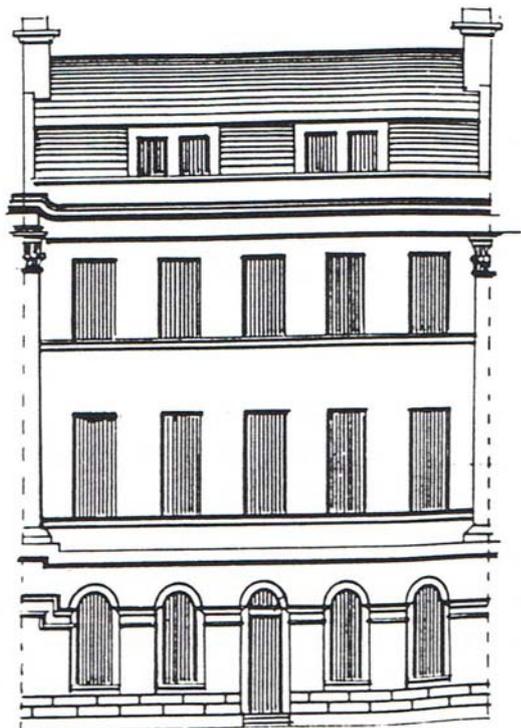
Bath Central Library has now transferred the Report series and the Calendar of State Papers (Domestic) from its Newbridge store to the main Podium site. Now they are conveniently available it is hoped they will be used, for they contain much scattered Bath material (traceable through the indexes to individual volumes). For example Report 9 Salisbury 21 (pp.362-3) has the Earl of Salisbury saying in 1612 that whenever the wind blows it "drives all men from all the baths in the town". CSPD 1634-5, 1635 and 1637-8 reveals a short-lived attempt during those years to manufacture saltpetre at Bath. Report 29 Portland 4 (pp.221-3, 244-5, 269-72) shows Daniel Defoe operating as a government spy in the Bath area in 1705, while Report 30 Fortescue 1 (pp.156-7) tells us what David Garrick was prescribed for his hoarseness and his bowel weakness in 1766. Why not try your own soundings?

NOTES ON A RECENT ACCESSION TO THE CITY ARCHIVES

(contributed by Edward Bradby)

In 1992 the City Archivist entrusted me with the task of sorting out and cataloguing 32 bundles of documents, mostly from the mid-18th to the late-19th century, which has been passed to the Record Office by the Bath solicitors, Stone King & Wardle. This task, which has occupied me for many enjoyable hours at irregular intervals, is now complete, and the documents are available in the Record Office, numbered and calendared, together with a card index of the properties referred to and the names of the persons involved. There were occasional surprises, such as a probate copy of the will (1895) of Sir Jerom Murch (seven times Mayor of Bath, pillar of the Literary and Scientific Institution, the Unitarian Church and many other good causes) (2/21). Another was the Minute Book of the Widcombe Bridge Company (1862-1885), concerning the building of the "Halfpenny Bridge" and its rebuilding after its accidental destruction (2/19). But for the most part the deeds refer to house properties in or near Bath, and their value to the historian is in providing little bits of evidence about individual buildings and their owners and occupiers. I hope that the jottings which follow will give some idea of the interest to be found in such a collection of everyday records.

"This Elevation forms part of the West side of Henrietta Street to which the within Lease refers."



1)

Builders' Names: The 18th-century deeds provide useful evidence of the men who were engaged in building the expanding Georgian city. Some are wealthy entrepreneurs like John Wood senior in the 1740s (11/1), Sir Peter Rivers Gay, Lord of the Manor of Walcot, in the 1790s (21/1 f, 3²/18), and the Pulteney family at the end of the century (27/9 f). Others are comparatively humble artisans, e.g. Giles Tanner, "tyler and plaisterer" (1/3), Edward Bussell, joiner (11/1), John Chapman, carpenter (21/1), Charles Viner, mason (21/2). A consortium which features more than once in the 1790s is that of John Fielder (originally a tiler-plasterer), Thomas King (who earns a paragraph in the Dictionary of British Sculptors), Richard Hewlett and James Broome, all designated "builders" (21/1 f, 28/1 f, 32/18 f).

Design by John Pinch from the margin of a deed of 1797 (no. 27/9)

- 2) Materials. etc.: The deeds often lay down precise requirements for the materials and methods of building: a common requirement in terraces is that the surface of the ashlar shall be "toombled" (smoothed with a "toome" or scraper, such as you may see in the Building of Bath Museum), in order to conceal the divisions between the houses (11/1, 13/7); the prominent

front slopes of the roofs are to be of "blue Cornish or Welsh slate", and the backs of the less prestigious stone tiles (13/2); leaden gutters are to contain "at least 6 pounds of lead to every superficial square foot". One condition relevant to a present-day controversy is in a deed about 10 Pierrepont Street, which states that all the woodwork is to be painted "quite White", except for the doors, which are to be dark brown (11/1).

- 3) Owners and Occupants: At first these are mainly individuals; later it is common for a house to be owned by a long list of investors, including in one instance a "tontine" (where the subscribers each receive an annuity, and the last survivor enjoys the whole income) (29/10). Sometimes the record of successive owners gives a glimpse of the proliferation of a rising family, e.g. the Shums, who came from Germany in the 1770s and became staunch and active Methodists (see "A Documentary Study of Victorian Bath", B.R.O. Acc 79). In 1796 we find two of the brothers Shum working as confectioners in Avon Street (24/2). But a document of 1843 (24/6) shows John Michael as a woollen draper, with a residence in Norfolk Crescent, Henry as a druggist, William as an ironmonger in New South Wales, Sarah married to a Southwark ironmonger, and Mary Ann, spinster (possibly the Miss Shum listed in the 1841 Directory as keeping a "ladies' establishment"). A similar proliferation can be traced among the Taylors of Walcot (17/1 f).
- 4) From Country to City: A deed will often reveal how a bit of the medixval countryside is being absorbed into the growing city. For instance, deeds of land in Lyncombe Vale constantly quote old field-names including one called "Vinyards" (19/2 f, 20/1, 32/3 f) (cf. the "Vines of Lyncumb" tithed by the monastery in 1150 AD - see Peach, Street Lore of Bath, p.143). Several deeds of 1780-1820 help to fix the location of Gibbs's Mill, with its adjacent mill-ponds, Poor House, and Burying Ground: it was near the junction of Lyncombe Hill and Claverton Street, not to be confused with another "Gibbs's Mill " shown on Thorpe's map of 1742 (7/7, 7/8, 10/2 1).
- 5) The Scribes: Finally, a thought about the copyists who produced these deeds. We have to think back to an era before typewriters and carbon paper (let alone photocopiers), when title-deeds were essential for proving one's right to a property. The deeds had to be resistant to wear and tear - hence the almost invariable use of large sheets of parchment. To avoid snags in possible litigation they had to be both accurate and comprehensive. It is therefore common to find a deed running to four or more sheets of parchment, perhaps prepared in two identical copies. The labour involved, especially since the wording was often full of long extracts from earlier indentures, with much verbal repetition, almost staggers belief. Extreme examples can be found at 8/5 (1804), and 9/17 (1817), both of 11 sheets; the latter contains 21 "whereas" clauses before it reaches the operative "now this indenture witnesseth..". Omissions and errors are rare, and the handwriting is almost always firm and clear. Yet I suppose the writers must have been humble solicitors' clerks, probably on quite low wages. Whoever they were, local historians owe a great debt of gratitude to this industrious and anonymous company.

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