

**GROUP NEWS****MEETINGS HELD OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1994**

The new season opened on 12 October with Matthew Woollard describing the Bristol Historical Database Project - launched a year ago at the University of the West of England. The aim is to create datasets of local historical sources that can be accessed by full-text computer searches. As early as the 1960s Lawrence Stone's work on country-house ownership in Hertfordshire and H.J. Dyos's study of Camberwell had employed mainframes to help analyse statistical data, but it took the spread of microcomputers to make electronics a potent tool for historical research and teaching, especially in the study of voting patterns, social groups (through "prosopography" or collective biography), and demographic change - the latter application well exemplified in The Population History of England, 1541-1871 (E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, 1981). The Bristol project touches on these and other uses too. Local commercial directories from 1792 are being made available on floppy disc and the inputting of poll-book data is now under way, starting with the election of 1722. Another venture involves creating a machine-readable record of obituary notices printed in the Western Daily Press in the decades around 1900; the whole text is keyboarded into the computer and can be searched on any word or combination. Matthew Woollard's personal research focuses on a social survey conducted by the University of Bristol in 1937 in which 15,000 working-class Bristolians were interviewed about their economic and social circumstances. The Second World War interrupted the analysis of the raw data, the record cards were destroyed and only a tabulated summary remains - which should, however, be enough to reconstruct the survey via computer, and perhaps eventually compare the findings with those of other reconstructed surveys in London (1931) and Liverpool (1934). The project team is also compiling a computerised bibliography of books and articles published on the history of the Bristol region since 1911, but extensible to include Bath (see news item on page 4), and further possibilities are alluded to in the first Project Newsletter, including the production of historical base maps of Bristol and an enlarged list of probate inventories.

Having once addressed the HBRG on the Great London-Bath Road, Brenda Buchanan switched our attention on 10 November to communications on the opposite side of Bath in her excellent talk on the early Avon Navigation. The river route to and from Bristol was always wide and deep enough for the passage of vessels; what impeded it, and forced traffic on to the ill-maintained highways (not effectively turnpiked near Bristol until the 1740s), was the presence of medieval weirs powering corn and fulling mills, and later metalworks and other industries. While goods could be carried by river, passing the weirs perhaps by cranes or "flash locks" (whereby a section of weir might be temporarily moved), the journey was cumbersome and subject to delays by mill-owners. By the 17th century, however, England's waterborne trade was lagging behind its Continental neighbours, and among various schemes to improve river transport nationally were some that focused on the Avon. In 1641 the "water poet" John Taylor, and in the 1650s Francis Matthew, both had visions of cross-country navigation passing through Bath, and the

and the 17th-century Bath Corporation supported various attempts to obtain legislation for an improved channel to Bristol. Even in the 1690s a campaign on behalf of tradesmen in the region failed, like its predecessors, to win over riverside landowners and millers, and only in 1712 was an Act at last secured. Even then doubts about the wider implications of canalisation on Bath's fashionable character held up progress until the 1720s, when the project was taken up by a consortium of 32 proprietors among whom Ralph Allen and his family stood prominent, and with Allen himself entrusted with the joint funds. Once John Hoare of Newbury had surveyed the route, and residual opposition from landowners (notably the Cresswicks of Hanham Court) had been overcome, a start was made c.1726 on digging the cuts and making the locks to by-pass the weirs. Brenda Buchanan's slides and transparencies illustrated the key features of the route: Hanham, Keynsham, Bitton, Swineford, Saltford (where an informative early-18C painting of the riverscape hung until recently at the Jolly Sailor) and Newbridge (where the present single-span bridge may be a 1780s rebuild of Allen's 3-arched original). The story ended with the lock at "Dutch Island", the quayside developments at Bath itself, and a reminder that until after 1800 there was no horse-towpath along the river; barges and other craft not under sail had to be hauled by human muscle-power.

Stephen Bird's questioning talk on 7 December - "A Museum of Bath History?" - was fittingly given at no. 4 Circus, the nearest Bath has to a hub in the hub-and-spokes concept of a dispersed but integrated museums service. Second-to-none in number of museums per capita population (and with three new ones opened since 1992), Bath plays a full part in the current national boom in museum-visiting - yet still has no museum that properly tells the city's varied history. Once, museums were elitist places, but in the wake of the 1845 Museums Act and the 1851 Exhibition many municipal authorities erected imposing central buildings that offered their citizens a chance of self-betterment through access to the wonders of nature, science, and human creativity. But while the Victorians flocked to museums, the popularity of these increasingly fuddy-duddy institutions declined in the 20C - only to be revived in more recent decades under the impact of new thinking about museums. Because in the 1820s Bath had largely abandoned museum responsibilities to the privately-run BRLSI (itself eventually wound up in 1959), it is not burdened with a large cultural mausoleum as many other cities are. But having begun, with Sam Hunt in charge, to develop a professional museums service in the 1970s, it needed to re-define its objectives. Not only were new styles of museum emerging (like the chronologically organised Museum of London, 1976), so were theme parks, "journeys through time" on the model of the Jorvik Viking Centre at York, and other competitors to traditional museums. Stephen Bird described various examples of museum initiatives, including the City of New York Museum (which has found a new lease of life in displaying the cultural heritage of the city's ethnic communities) and a project at Brighton which has revealed local history through the experiences of representative individuals. At Bath an attempt in the 1980s to create a central museum (and encompassing the BRLSI collections) on an enlarged site at Bridge Street came to nothing, and available funds were devoted instead to overhauling the Victoria Art Gallery. Gradually, though, an overall policy has been formulated that stresses "excellence", "enjoyment" and "enlightenment" for the benefit of Bath's own residents as much as for tourists. Forthcoming local government reorganisation brings with it uncertainties, but also an opportunity for museums to relate the city to its regional context and to co-operate more closely with library and archival services. But any museum that attempts to cover Bath's past must tell the whole tale: the history of begging in Bath, Stephen Bird suggested, might be one place to start.

## **MEMBERS' NEWS**

Most people will know already that Mary Laurence, one of the Group's most loyal supporters, died in October. Our deep sympathy is extended to Godfrey on his sad loss.

New members and late renewals to add to the List of Members dated August 1994:

Mrs. Joan and Mr. Roy Day, 3 Oakfield Road, Keynsham, Bristol, BS18 1JQ

Mr. Steve Doel, 5 St. Athan Close, Bowerhill, Melksham, SN12 6KP

Miss Elizabeth Holland, 16 Prior Park Buildings, Bath, BA2 4NP

Mrs. Pamela Thomas, 61 New Road, Bromham, Chippenham, SN15 2JB

Change of address for Mr. Kerry Birch,

(home) "Avonlea", 6 Brooklime Close, Haydon Wick, Swindon, SN2 2SX

(term time) Bristol Baptist College, Woodland Road, Bristol, BS8 1 UN



VIEW OF CONCERT HALL TERRACE  
ROMAN PROMENADE.

*From Lawrence H. Wilson's Bath as a Health Resort, illustrated  
by Samuel Poole (Bath Corporation, c.1905)*

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL MATTERS

1. On behalf of the HBRG David Crellin attended the Bath Local Library Committee Meeting on 4 July 1994. Any points HBRG members wish to raise about the Library should be made to David directly. No doubt the disappearance of the Avon local authority will prompt concern about the future of Bath's collections and services.
2. Agreement has been reached with the Bristol Historical Database Project, following our meeting on 12 October, that publications dealing with Bath, from 1911 onwards, should be entered on the bibliographical database for the whole Bristol region. Some 800 Bath titles have so far been passed to the Project team and should result in on-line access, and an interim print-out, probably sometime in February. It is hoped HBRG members will then be able to suggest further titles (of books, articles, theses, etc.) for inclusion.
3. Recent publications:
  - (i) Margot Finn, "Debt and Credit in Bath's Court of Requests, 182939", Urban History vol. 21, pt. 2 (October 1994) pp. 211-236.
  - (ii) Kenneth Morgan, Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
  - (iii) David Southern and Heather Noad, The Bath Union Workhouse: Census Transcripts 1841 to 1891 (1994). Records name, sex, age, status, occupation and - from 1851 - place of birth of people staying at the Workhouse on the date of six successive censuses.
  - (iv) Guidelines no. 50 (October 1994). Special 38-page issue of the City of Bath Mayor's Honorary Guides newsletter, edited by John Ede,

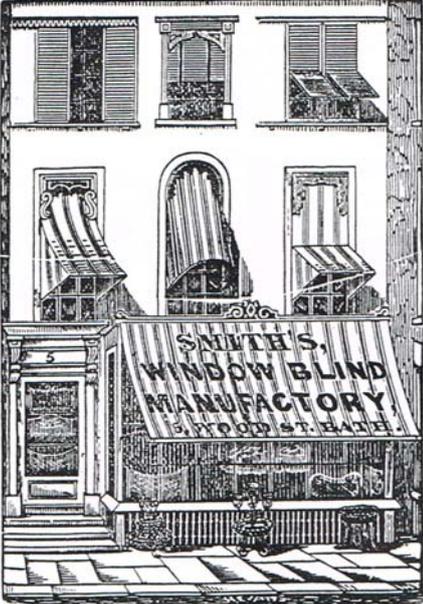
with retrospective articles on rheumatology in Bath, recent research on Bath history, conservation of historic buildings, the Mayor's Guides from the 1930s onwards, and other topics.

- (v) The Bath Survey: Newsletter of the Survey of Old Bath no. 1 (July 1994), ed. Mike Chapman & Elizabeth Holland. Includes the first instalment of Elizabeth Holland's account of the Chapman family of Bath.
- (vi) Peter Borsay, "Image and Counter-Image in Georgian Bath", British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies, Vol. 17, no. 2 (1994) pp. 165-179.

**SMITH'S  
WINDOW-BLIND  
MANUFACTORY,**  
5, WOOD STREET, QUEEN SQUARE, BATH.

Outside Spanish, Florentine, Venetian, and Shutter Blinds.  
Inside Venetian, Dwarf, Spring, Patent, & Common Roller Blinds.

A Large Assortment of TRANSPARENT BLINDS, in Imitation of Stained Glass Windows:



Indian, Picturesque, Landscape, Gothic, &c., or Painted to any Design.

HOLLAND BLINDS CLEANED AND GLAZED.  
OLD BLINDS REPAIRED, PAINTED, &c., to look Equal to New.  
**Lines, Tassels, &c., of every Description.**  
THE TRADE SUPPLIED.

Superior Gauze Wire and Perforated Zinc Blinds.  
Spring Blinds for Shop Fronts and Skylights to any dimension, on Improved Principles.

**From the Bath Directory for 1864-65**

## BATH CORPORATION IN 1680

An article by J.P. Ferris, "Bath: the Corporation in 1680" (Somerset and Dorset Notes & Queries, 30, 1974-79, pp.275-8) provides the context for the following candid assessments sent by a certain "A.R.", a royalist and Anglican, to the new Secretary of State, Sir Leoline Jenkins, in April 1680. The list is taken from the same source.

### ALDERMEN

John Masters, *the present mayor* - "A loyall well principal'd man"  
Robert Chapman - "No fanatic, speaks flattering to all parties"  
Capt. Henry Chapman - "An old honest Cavalier"  
Walter Gibbs - "An huffish Alderman, but a lover of the established government"  
John Bush, *of the shop* - "A sly fanatic"  
Benjamin Baber - "An insolent fanatic"  
William Bush, *of Westgate House* - "A plaine downright man"  
Robert Hayward - "A very honest man"  
Richard Pitcher - "A harmless, peaceable man"  
Edward Bushell - "A loyall hearted man"

### COMMON COUNCILMEN

Richard Carwarden - "An old decrepit cavalier"  
William Wallis - "An ignoramus, the selling of a barrel of ale will make him vote for anything"  
Thomas Atwood - "A chip in porrage" (ie. a trivial, worthless person)  
John Allombridge - "An Atheistical fellow and knight of the post" (i.e. a professional false witness)  
George Collibee - "A man of good principles"  
John Sherston - "A damnable Antimonarchical man, a frequenter of Conventickles"  
John Axford - "His wholly devoted creature, a frequenter of Conventickles"  
Benjamin Beken - "No matter what he is, for he has not a dram of sense"  
John Stibbs - "An honest industrious man"  
Thomas Gibbs - "A furioso yet well affected to the Government"  
William Chapman and Richard Masters - "Both loyall and jolly fellows"  
Francis Pearce - "Well enough but when he is influenced by the country"  
Francis Clift - "Alias old rocke; firme to the King and his friends"  
Walter Jones - "A church of England man"  
Edward Woolmer - "A daper Apothecary, in loyallty equal to the best of them"  
William Shute - "A well meaning man"  
William Sherston - "Quite opposed to the principles of his brother John"  
Matthew Reeve - "A fantastical shaterheaded coxcombe"

## **BALLOONING AT BATH: THE SLOW GEORGIAN TAKE-OFF**

Balloon mania first infected Britain in 1783, soon after Montgolfier's successful flights. That autumn saw the first of many imitation flights, unmanned and manned, across the country, and by Christmas a hydrogen balloon was on show in Bath at the former assembly rooms on the west side of Terrace Walk. Dinwiddie, the entrepreneur involved, used the opportunity to give a course of science lectures and finally launched his gas-filled balloon from the Riding School ground at Montpellier at around two o'clock on 10 January 1784; soft-hearted spectators had dissuaded him from sending aloft a bird in the small basket or carriage slung under the balloon. However Dinwiddie found himself forestalled. Two hours earlier, Dr. C.H. Parry had released his own device from the field below Royal Crescent. Constructed from two light conical frames joined at their base and covered in varnished taffeta and sarsnet, Parry's balloon stood over eight feet tall and measured five feet across. As the lengthy filling process neared completion (the hydrogen being produced from the action of sulphuric acid on 17 lbs. of iron shavings), the balloon assumed the shape of an elongated egg. A crowd watched it ascend westwards on what proved to be over an hour's flight to a landing somewhere beyond Wells, 19 miles away. Dinwiddie's balloon managed only 10 miles before coming down along the Bristol road. Not to be outdone he advertised another attempt for ten days later.

Bath's first sight of a balloon large enough to carry a man seems to have been in March 1785, when a 25-foot-diameter balloon went on display at Gyde's Rooms "composed of entirely new, peculiar, and striking materials, gilt all over, and richly ornamented". It was covered with a net from which the passenger gondola hung. Bath was not, in the event, prepared to subscribe to an ascent which was to be made from rival Bristol and the balloon was soon removed. This gave an opening for a local man, James West, to propose constructing a still larger balloon, over thirty feet across and capable of carrying both himself and a second voyager - together with ballast, oars, anchor and every other aerial necessity. For some reason the concept was scaled down. Two much smaller balloons were produced instead, one c.5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> feet and the other nearly 13 feet in diameter, neither enough to carry a man. These were probably launched towards the end of May. And with that, aerostatic interest at Bath faded until September 1802 when the experienced French balloonist Garnerin made his well-known ascent, with a companion, from Sydney Gardens.

### **BATH RECORD OFFICE**

Experimental late opening on Mondays (until 20.00 hours) continues in the New Year.

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