



NEWSLETTER 27

MAY 1995

GROUP NEWS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 13 April 1995

1. In the Chairman's absence through indisposition, Michael Rowe took the chair. Apologies came from the Chairman, and from Mary Ede, Jennifer Beazley, Amanda Berry, Michael and Philippa Bishop, Kirsten Elliott, Andrew Ellis, Brian Howard, Brigitte Mitchell, Judith Samuel and Susan Sloman. The minutes of the AGM of 13 April 1994 were accepted and the AGM's best wishes were sent to the Chairman for a speedy recovery.
2. The Secretary briefly reported on the year in lieu of the Chairman's retrospect. The total membership hovers comfortably around 80, though attendances at meetings were somewhat down. Members' comments on the programme, venues, and times of meeting are always welcome. Besides the usual three Newsletters an updated list of members was sent out and Judith Samuel deserves thanks for her considerable typing effort.
3. The Working Party on Archives and Libraries had not met, but David Crellin represented the Group on the Bath Local Library Committee and the Secretary had culled more Bath references from the National Register of Archives. A letter to the Mayor (and a reminder) on the risk of dispersal of property deeds and the need to register city properties had still not brought a satisfactory answer; after a broad discussion the AGM left this matter for the HBRG Committee to follow up. Otherwise the most significant initiative had been the Group's involvement in extending the Bristol bibliography, begun by the Bristol Historical Databases Project, to include publications on Bath from 1911 onwards: some 700-800 titles have so far been keyboarded into the computerised database and HBRG members' help is invited in adding further titles.
4. In presenting his annual report the Treasurer pointed out that all invoices for room hire were still not in. Subscription income had dropped mainly because of prompter payment. Sales of Bath History vol. 5 now covered the outlay on 50 copies. The meeting accepted the Treasurer's recommendation that subscription rates for 1995-96 remain at the present level.
5. The AGM agreed that 50 copies of Bath History vol. 6 be ordered in advance of publication. The new editor, Brenda Buchanan, announced that copies of the whole backrun are currently available.
6. The members and officers of the 1994-95 Committee were then voted en bloc to continue serving in 1995-96, with the thanks of the meeting for their work during the past year.
7. Under Other Business the Secretary mentioned a recent instance of useful co-operation among individual HBRG members - in collating information on the De Montalt paper-mill following an outside inquiry.

Once the AGM was concluded and drinks served, the meeting enjoyed a slide presentation by Peter Carey on historic street lettering, which at Bath began to be controlled with the Act of 1766. Evidence of early street-name lettering appears in prints as well as in many surviving examples incised in the stone, incised and painted, or simply painted. 'English Vernacular' letter forms were squarer than their 'Roman' ancestors and often delightfully varied according to location and craftsman, with interesting uses of abbreviations, majuscules, italics, serifs, hyphens and full-stops. In the 19th century less subtle 'Clarendon', 'Grotesque' and 'Egyptian' forms appear, paralleling changes in typography. In our **century** the revived Classical manner resulted in elegant if rather dull lettering, but since 1950 individual craftsmen have created more spirited examples, especially Peter McLellan with his return to the vernacular idiom. Peter Carey's illustrations showed many in situ examples of all these, and of backgrounds, borders, bronze letters, slate tablets, good and bad painting, commercial lettering in old painted advertisements, and much more to heighten our awareness of the rich diversity of lettering to be found in Bath streets if we only have the eyes to notice and enjoy it.

MEETINGS HELD JANUARY - MARCH 1995

Richard Warner was a 'typical scholarly clergyman' of his time (1763-1857), thought Mary Ede as she deftly sketched in his portrait on 12 January - classically educated, a staunch Protestant, a voluminous writer of printed sermons and tracts, but in addition a historian of note and a traveller in search of the Picturesque. His family had risen from shopkeeping in London to genteel status at Lymington, Hants., where the youthful Warner's bent for antiquities was nurtured, though his intended progress to Oxford was thwarted until he was in his twenties. Even then he left degree-less and was ordained only after a crash course under the Archbishop of York. By 1790 he was back in the Lymington area (of which he had already produced a topographical account) as curate to the Rev. William Gilpin, the influential populariser of the Picturesque; and at Boldre and Fawley he worked on an ambitious history of Hampshire. In 1794, almost out of the blue, he was invited to the new All Saints' proprietary chapel at Bath, and a year later became curate of St. James's on a stipend of 100 guineas topped up by a 20-guinea gratuity. Here he quickly proved himself an effective preacher and promoter of good causes - such as the non-sectarian Bathforum School and the Walcot Street Penitentiary (for reforming prostitutes). The antiquary in Warner was inevitably excited by the recent Roman discoveries in and around Stall Street, and in 1797 he published descriptions of the finds. Extending his researches into later periods, he went on to write his History of Bath. This remains of value even in 1995 for its printing of source documents and its contemporary comment, but at the time it earned him at least one savage review which even accused him of Jacobin leanings. Warner was no Radical, though he did court criticism in 1804 by preaching against the Napoleonic war. Nor was he afraid of poking fun at fellow citizens in his Bath Characters (1807), issued under the pen-name of Peter Paul Pallet. As an author he was perhaps best known for his various narratives of walking tours in the Southwest, Wales and North, accomplished in the summers around 1800. Travelling light, he covered some unfamiliar terrain, especially in Wales, and in the Gilpin manner offered Picturesque judgements on mediaeval ruins, waterfalls, industrial features, or whatever he met with. He continued at St. James's until 1817 (having also acquired the impoverished rectorship of Great Chalfield in 1809), and from 1827 the living of Chelwood - though he still retained his cottage in Widcombe and watched the gathering influence of the Evangelical party at Bath with increasing alarm. At Chelwood he started a school in memory of his daughter (d. 1833) and himself survived as a country parson, still active with his pen, into his 90s. Contemporary editions of some of Warner's works from Godfrey Laurence's collection were on show at the meeting, nicely complementing Mary Ede's lively paper.

But for the investigations of Kate Clarke, our speaker on 8 February, the Bath War Hospital would be virtually unknown. When war broke out in 1914 people were unprepared for the slaughter that would ensue. Provision for the wounded centred on church halls, loans of materials by parishioners, the services of local doctors and barely-trained voluntary nurses (VADs), and on community spirit in general. By mid-1915 this was patently not enough and the War Office sanctioned the building of a 500-bed hospital at Combe Park beside the cricket ground. It opened in early 1916 and rapidly filled - especially when convoys of casualties began arriving from the killing fields of the Somme. They came exhausted by the gruelling journey, still caked in trench mud, covered in lice, some with wounds already gangrenous, to find white sheets, quiet and medical care. The ten wards, each now crammed with 56 beds, had to be supplemented by large tents. By 1918 there were 1300 beds on the site, about double what the RUH has there today. Counting the extra 500 beds scattered about Bath also under its administration, this ranked among the largest hospitals in the country. Both the qualified nurses and the assistant VADs (who often came from middle-class homes well staffed with servants) worked long hours, helped often by the more mobile patients. Morale was kept up by the cheerful atmosphere, the gramophone records, the pets (canaries, a puppy dog, the celebrated hen Griselda), and all the comforts supplied in turn by 30 or so local churches. Even so, the tight finances depended vitally on the fund-raising efforts of Walter Mallett (of the local antiques firm), while Mallett's wife organised all the catering and volunteer kitchen staff. Cedric Chivers had earlier donated a special whirlpool bath to the Hospital and the city's own treatment facilities were also extended to the patients. The Hospital's work did not cease with the Armistice. Convoys kept coming until June 1919 and the Spanish 'flu epidemic spelled further trouble. The Ministry of Pensions Hospital, renamed in 1920, survived up to 1929 when the last crippled patients were transferred to Chepstow. Kate Clarke's moving account was made still more vivid by the photographs, letters and other items she brought along. All these documents are now housed at Bath Record Office.

We focused once more on 20th-century Bath at the 15 March meeting, when Stuart Burroughs convinced his audience that spoken testimony is indeed a too-often-overlooked source of information about the recent past. He reminded us that history was once a wholly oral tradition. Only gradually did written documentation supersede the oral record, yet the same issues of authenticity, selectivity, subjectivity and bias apply to both sorts of evidence. Stuart instanced three wildly conflicting accounts of the same incident in October 1831 — the 'siege' of the White Hart Inn and the role (effective or ignominious, according to the witness) played by Charles Wilkins, the Twerton wool magnate who captained the local yeomanry. The Bath Industrial Heritage Centre's project to tape-record local people began in 1979 - initially to document the history of the Bowler firm but then going on to record train-drivers, nurses at the Mineral Water Hospital and others. In time the project began to concentrate on specific topics - Green Park Station, for example, or the firms of Stothert & Pitt and the Horstmann company - often chosen in connection with exhibitions. Some of the most recent interviews have been designed to supplement knowledge of the Twerton woollen industry, the subject of a forthcoming display at the museum (opened April). One tape contained the reminiscences of a man brought up in one of the seven cottages on Weston (or 'Dutch') island, a life idyllic in summer but brutish in winter with almost annual flooding. Next came the voice of a 93-year-old woman, once a spinner at the mills, telling how she came to be appointed in 1919 and learned the quite complex job under her mother; she believed that working conditions and the textile product deteriorated once Carr's business was taken over by a Frome company in the early 1930s. An invoice clerk in the firm described the export market for cashmeres, etc., manufactured at Twerton as being especially in North and South America; she related how noisy the

weaving sheds were (with their metal-framed looms and clattering belt drives) and how the spinning shop floor became encrusted with hardened grease and fluff. These were all fluent vernacular speakers offering their own detail and emphasis and sometimes usefully corroborating the statements of other witnesses. Interviewers always try to be neutral and avoid leading questions. Though speakers' memories can play false, these tapes constitute an invaluable archive on industries and trades, working and living conditions, attitudes and speech forms, that are now obsolescent or already things of the past. Transcripts are made of all tapes and copies of tapes may be borrowed or used in educational packs for schools. It is a pity Bath still lacks a film archive to complement this splendid oral resource.

MEMBERS' NEWS

We have a new member in Maria Wilson, 16 Green Park Flats, Green Park, Bath, BA1 1XF, who is a cataloguer at Bath Industrial Heritage Centre and interested in both industrial and Quaker history.

With much sadness we have to record the death on 4 January of another member, Miss Rosalie Wood; although ill health prevented her attending many meetings, she was always a keen and appreciative HBRG supporter.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. Susan L. Sloman, "The immaculate Capt. Wade: 'Arbiter Elegantiae'" Gainsborough's House Review (1993-94), pp. 43-62.
2. Christopher Woodward, 'H.E. Goodridge and the Picturesque in Bath: the end of the terrace and the rise of the villa' in The Picturesque in Late Georgian England, ed. D. Arnold (London, Georgian Group, 1995).
3. Christopher Anstey, The New Bath Guide, ed. and introduced by Gavin Turner (Bristol, Broadcast Books, 1994). An upmarket new edition.
4. Louise Cochrane, Adelard of Bath, the First English Scientist (London, British Museum, 1994).
5. M.Q. Smith, St. Mary Redcliffe: an Architectural History (Bristol, Redcliffe Press, 1995).
6. Bath Chronicle, Images of Bath (Derby, Breedon Books, 1994). A pity this helpful compilation of photographs from the press's own archive has so confusingly usurped the title of J. Lees-Milne and D. Ford's major work on Bath prints.
7. Paul De'Ath, Bath (Stroud, Chalford Pub. Co., 1995). Another collection of 'images' of Bath and neighbourhood reproducing old postcards and early photographic prints.

COLLINSON'S HISTORY OF SOMERSET, 1791

(contributed by Godfrey Laurence)

In 1781 the Reverend John Collinson (1757-93) announced his intention of publishing a history of Somerset. His patron was Sir John Hugh Smyth (1734-1802) of Ashton Court who presented Collinson to the living of Long Ashton parish in 1787. The parish was served by a curate while Collinson devoted himself to completing the History of Somerset, published in three volumes in 1791. He had an important collaborator in Edmund Rack (1735? -87). His name does not appear on the title page but Collinson, honourably, devotes pages 77 to 82 in vol. 1 to a biographical note which includes "The last of Mr. Racks's literary engagements was a joint share in THE HISTORY OF THE COUNTY OF SOMERSET in which his particular department was the topographical parochial survey. This, notwithstanding his ill state of health, he indefatigably pursued during the successive years of 1782, 1783, 1784, 1785 and 1786 . . . ". Edmund Rack's topographical parochial survey has survived in manuscript in the Ashton Court papers lodged in the Bristol Record Office (Ashton Court Unlisted Papers, boxes 32a, 1 and 2; boxes 32b and c in location 2N/60). A copy of the original manuscript is held at the Somerset Record Office (A/AQP).

Collinson did not print all the information that Rack's survey provided. For example, the following has not been found relating to the city of Bath:

. . . during 8 months of the year here are a pleasing variety of public amusements for every day of the week all which are elegant in their kind and under very judicious regulations. These consist of Dress and Cotillion Balls, Concerts, Plays 3 times a week, Tennis Court, 2 Riding Schools, 8 Public Libraries and 3 Coffee Houses ... There are two seasons, the first from the latter end of September to the end of January, the second from the beginning of March to June. But of late years a great deal of Company continue here during the interregnum month of February ... 15,000 having been here at one time in the month of December. . . . Near 1200 new & Elegant houses have been erected since the year 1760.

Collinson's printed text describing the rural parishes appears to be, for the most part, dependent on Rack's manuscript. For example, Collinson's chapter on the parish of Bathford is almost entirely from Rack. Collinson, however, introduces an error, stating that Bathford is "westwards from the city" whereas Rack correctly wrote "eastwards from the city". Almost the only omissions by Collinson are Rack's "On Farley Down Hill are some large quarries where excellent stone for building is raised" and his record of the remarkable memorial inscription of John Thresher in 1753, probably because Thresher was not gentry. All this shows that it might well be worthwhile, when consulting Collinson's History of Somerset, to augment it with an examination of Edmund Rack's manuscript of his survey.

BALLOONING AT BATH: A Postscript

Supplementing the piece in Newsletter 26 Ruth Hayden proves that the balloonist exhibiting at Gyde's Rooms in early 1785 was the famous aeronaut Vincenzo Lunardi, citing Mrs. Delany's 14-year-old niece, Georgiana Port, who wrote on 12 February 1785: "I have been to see Lunard's beautiful balloon, the gallery is white and pink satin, with gold fringe. He has a table and four stools in it." She clearly believed the propaganda about safety: "if it should burst it descends so gradually it is impossible to be hurt." (The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany, series 2, vol. 3.)

HISTORIC FOOTPATH PRESERVATION

We have ample evidence that 18th-century Bath residents and visitors alike enjoyed walking and riding in the neighbouring countryside, but by 1800 enclosure of properties and the city's physical growth were already beginning to threaten the existing network of footpaths and bridleways. A 'Humble Pedestrian' complained in 1791, for example, that the relentless urban expansion was obliterating natural landscapes and turning flowery paths into flinty tracks. Another correspondent to the press in 1797 regretted the loss of the High Common to walkers and the posting of no-trespassing signs on the surrounding fence.

By 1820 the poor condition of paths in neighbouring parishes, despite 'slovenly' attempts at repair, was being commented on, and indictments were served on those concerned. This resulted in some action:

The prospect of improvements in the many bad footpaths in the neighbourhood of this city is very flattering. The parish of Batheaston, setting the example, has already repaired a portion of its footways, and tolerably well for a country job. Swainswick too is cobbling up its dangerous holes, - doing a little bit, as the phrase is. An eminent Surveyor will, however, soon inspect their skilful operation. Weston parish means to do something upon the occasion. Great bodies move slowly; therefore Lyncombe and Widcombe intend to deliberate maturely. - What delicious paths we shall have next Winter!

Bath Chronicle 15 June 1820

Indeed the Swainswick 'waywardens' were reported to have expended 2s 4³/₄d. on a mile-and-a-quarter of footpath running along the Gloucester carnage-way, but half the parishioners were still unable to attend church in wet weather because of the state of the lane. In Batheaston loose stones made the track dangerous even to 'scramble on', while at Weston pedestrians tramped through glutinous mud, donkey droppings, oyster shells, peapods, crushed rats and 'the sticky & stinking syrup of cats'.

Another twenty years on, the concern seemed to be less the physical condition of footways than their loss to the public through deliberate obstruction, especially after the frequent sales of land in the area. It was enough to bring a new organisation into being, the Society for Preserving to the Public the Right of Ancient Footpaths, formed at a meeting called by the Mayor, John Edridge, on 16 June 1843. Rambling was then a popular pursuit. A.B. Granville, for instance, speaks in his Invalid's and Visitor's Handbook . . . to Bath (1841) of cheerful parties of walkers enjoying the right of way, across dozens of stone sties, on Claverton Down. The Society's committee included several prominent Corporation members, leading tradesmen, medical men and resident gentry, and over the next few years it worked to open up blocked paths and to prevent further encroachments. Newspaper reports give some idea of the problems. A path from the Dolphin at Weston, running through 'Rudmore field' (Mr. Dowding's property) to the Upper Bristol Road near Partis College, had been stopped up despite a long uninterrupted right of way. Another — in public use for at least twenty years — between Meredith's farm on Greenway Lane and the top of Beechen Cliff had been barred by posts, rails and bushes on the second gate from the Lane. A third, which crossed two large fields from Foxhill Grove to Entry Hill on Combe Down, had similarly been impeded by a thorn-covered gate. The Committee surveyed the obstructions and made representations, stopped some abuses but failed to prevent others. Another regular walker signing himself 'Perambulator' complained in 1851 that a path near the top of North Road on Bathwick Hill, already diverted round the edge of the field, had since been further obstructed by a sheepfold. In 1852 the new tenant on Bathampton Down, wanting to create a rabbit warren, tried to warn off the redoubtable Dr. James Tunstall himself for supposed trespass on the path between Sham Castle and Hampton Rocks. Tunstall was naturally incensed. He was on the Footpath Society's committee; he had walked that once-signposted route for fourteen years; he had even included it in his Rambles round Bath - first printed in the Bath Journal, published as a book in 1847 and needing a second edition within a year. Believing as he did that Bath was a place unrivalled in Europe "for the variety and beauty of its suburban walks", Tunstall was not the man to sacrifice this particularly fine one. Nevertheless the case seems to have been delicate, for the poster announcing the Society's public meeting some weeks later cautioned walkers in the meantime "not to annoy the Tenant on Hampton Down, where one of the disputed Footpaths exists". How the dispute was resolved is unknown, though the right of way happily still remains in 1995. The above-mentioned poster shows that the Society was still going strong in October 1852, but its subsequent history is obscure. Similar footpath societies existed in other Victorian cities but it would be nice to know more about the Bath example. Information anyone?

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