



**NEWSLETTER 41**

**JANUARY 2000**

## **GROUP NEWS**

### MEETINGS in OCTOBER and NOVEMBER 1999

'THE MYSTERY OF THE ODD DOWN WINDMILL', Stuart Burroughs, 6 October 1999, chaired by Philippa Bishop: The speaker, Curator of the Bath Industrial Heritage Centre in Julian Road, began by acknowledging that the assembly of the material which he was about to present was the result of a collaborative effort by many people. The pursuit of evidence was stimulated mainly as a result of Stuart's publication of several articles and short papers in the local general and specialised press, as a result of which a number of documents, artefacts and memories have reached him. Much information is still lacking, despite a continuing search in archives and libraries, and further detail is always welcome.

From the few pictures we have, it seems that the windmill, an up-to-the-minute piece of engineering from a premier producer for the American Plains, was an integral part of the works set up by the newly-created Fuller's Earth Union (what we would now categorise as a consortium) of local fuller's earth producers, in the 1890s. Their works were situated alongside the old Roman Road into Bath from Radstock, near several sources of fullers's earth and exposed to the most regular winds to be found on the hills of Bath just south of Odd Down.

The purpose of the mill was almost certainly to drive modern grinding machinery which reduced the raw mined earth to a slurry with water and later on in the process to reduce the cakes of refined earth to a marketable form. After a few years the windmill was superseded by a steam engine, presumably because output was so much increased that it was no longer practical to wait for the wind to blow, while at the same time the cost of steam power was now justified.

The windmill did not long survive in idleness; in 1904 (not 1908 as has been widely stated) it burnt down in a spectacular night-time blaze, fuelled by the wooden tower on which it had been constructed. The account of the fire refers to the presence of a reservoir which, it is surmised, was filled by a pump originally operated by the windmill.

The site has now been abandoned by the owners; but it is hoped that any future development would require a prior survey of the buildings and equipment which survive. OWEN WARD

THE INSTITUTIONAL CARE OF "IDIOTS" IN BATH, 1600-1900: Dr Peter Carpenter, 3 November 1999, chaired by John Ede. Peter Carpenter, a psychiatrist working in Bristol, gave an interesting account of his research on the development of two institutions: St Mary Magdalen Hospital and Bath Idiot and Imbecile Institution. He also addressed the more difficult questions of who the hospitals cared for and how the care of idiots changed over the centuries.

Early evidence shows that the Magdalen chapel, the house and its farm on Holloway was donated by Hosat to the Priory of Bath circa 1090. The chapel's dedication suggests an existing

association with lepers but there is no evidence of a leper house in 1090. It is possible that the priory used Magdalen House as its leper hospital — and not as a hostel for pilgrims or travellers — but no foundation setting out the hospital's formal foundation or structure survives. The Black Death brought a general decay in the leper hospital system due to the increase in tuberculosis and the resistance it confers for leprosy. In 1486, Pope Innocent VIII formally granted the hospital to the Prior of Bath and the grant changed the purpose of the hospital from the care of the leper to the care of the poor. A plaque from this period in the entrance porch of the chapel celebrates the rebuilding. In 1536 Henry VIII granted mastership to Simon Sheppard and the hospital afterwards received annual grants from the City Chamberlain. A quote from *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood*, c.1678, said that the Magdalen was an 'old decrepit hospital built originally for lunaticks' and that two were housed there now, kept by an old man who is a cobbler and the keeper thereof.

It was not uncommon for old leper hospitals to be used for idiots. In some ex-leper hospitals the master was paid a lump sum on the entry of a person to the institution and was expected to keep the person for the rest of his life. Evidence from the Bath City Chamberlain's Accounts in 1334 shows the Master received a payment of 30 guineas and the nurse of the Magdalen one guinea at admission of inmates and states that inmates are not any trouble to the town. John Wood's *Description of the City of Bath* (1743) describes St Mary's Hospital as 'a poor cottage ..... built for the reception of idiots'. A plaque of 1761 denoting the rebuilding of the hospital by Dual Taylor, Rector of Widcome and Bath, uses the term *morotrophium*, meaning a slow person. In 1803 there were three inmates and it would appear that the £30 charged on entry was a deterrent. The death of an idiot 'in Holloway, aged 92' was referred to in Bath Chronicle in 1806; thereafter no references to inmates have been found though it is probable that the master took in idiot children, an arrangement formalised in 1856 when the Magdalene Hospital was taken over by the Bath Municipal Charity Trustees — to be re-opened as a school for idiot children.

This move reflected a change in perception of idiocy — a shift in thinking to the view that the idiot could be instructed and cured. The Bath Idiot and Imbecile Institution was founded in 1846 by a Miss Charlotte White of Bath. She was the daughter of an East India family who was influenced by William Twining's interest in cretins. The institution was originally set up in two rented rooms at 5 Walcot Parade where the first matron was a teacher of the blind. Its doctor was Dr Falconer. In contrast to other medical institutions, most of its invited sponsors and subscribers were female, as were its administrators. However, there were no subscribers' rights of recommendation, only visiting rights. The institution expanded and moved to 35 Belvedere in 1851 where it changed in time to become a private institution, run by a Miss Heritage. Two of the matrons left to set up their own idiot homes at Downside Cottage, near Downside Abbey (now demolished) and Ivy Cottage at Cromhall, reflecting a shift to treating idiot children in a domestic environment. The 1854 accounts of 35 Belvedere, published to advertise for funds, refer to the institution's Matron, its school and its two classrooms. They carry a case description of a girl "G.C", aged 9, who could read, use a needle and pray. Over the next 30 years the institution was operated by Miss Heritage and her nieces while its trustees withdrew. Inmates from a wide area were taken in and charged 50 guineas a year, a price similar to other asylums at the time.

In 1880 the Commissioners in Lunacy decreed that the Bath Idiot and Imbecile Institution at 35 Belvedere was required to be licensed under the Lunacy Act of 1845. As a result, it was merged in 1887 with the Magdalen Hospital and became a formal charity, established by Act of Parliament. The Trustees of Municipal Charities' plan to raise funds to build a new idiot hospital failed and the idiots of Bath were housed in Rockhall House, on Combe Down from 1887 to 1980.

AMANDA BERRY

## MEMBERS' NEWS

We welcome the following members, one or two of whom may not have not been mentioned in earlier Newsletters:

Ms Claire Nodder of the Roman Baths Museum Stall Street Bath BA1 1LZ,  
Ms Samantha Baber of the Building of Bath Museum The Vineyards Bath BA1 5NA and  
Ms Jan Chivers of the Coach House Clapton Midsummer Norton Bath BA3 4EB

## NEW WEB-SITE

Jean Manco launched a new web-site 'Bath Past' on 29 September. It is described as 'aimed at the general reader, but drawing on recent research' and as 'a gateway into Bath's past for the Internet community world-wide'. She would welcome information about relevant new books and web-sites, or even short well-researched pieces on Georgian buildings in Bath. Contact her by telephone or consult her web-site at [www.jams.swinternet.co.uk](http://www.jams.swinternet.co.uk).

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Peter Quinn, *Holy Wells of the Bristol and Bath region* (Logaston Press, 1999) 1-873827-90-3, £9.95. The 33-page Bath section is largely devoted to the hot springs and cold conduits, but various wells in and around Bath are listed.

A.J. Scrase, *Streets and Market Places in Towns of Southwest England. • Encroachments and Improvements* (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) 0-7734-7953-8, £39.95, includes detailed case studies of Bath and Wells.

Trevor Fawcett and Francis Kelly, *Northampton Street: an Outline of its Historical Development* £2.50, 22p in slide binder, available from T.F.

A plan of the city walls, mostly Roman but partly rebuilt during the medieval period, showed that the use and detail of the northern half of the Roman town remains almost entirely unknown, with only a few 19C discoveries indicating that the north-west quadrant, at least, contained some fine buildings. More recent work, however, in the southern half of the town, has shown that in the first two centuries this area, at least, stayed a largely open cobbled area with the only structures appearing to support the temple and bathing establishment, suggesting that Bath began life as a pilgrimage centre sitting on its own in the countryside. This theory was first hinted at in 1986 when part of a pipeclay figurine of a dog was found during excavations west of the Temple. Not long after, during excavations in advance of the first attempt to revitalise the spa in 1989, a near complete dog figurine was recovered from the bottom of an early Roman ditch crossing the Beau Street site. Dogs were important in Celtic religion and were associated with medicine, healing and the goddess Diana.

The most recent excavations on the spa site have revealed that an early Roman road had existed parallel with the ditch, running from north west to south east, and that these were later built upon by structures, including one 150 feet long, on a new north-south line. The buildings do not appear to be domestic, and a public use seems most likely. Floor levels relating to the later Roman period were largely truncated by the 18C and 19C work by John Wood the younger and Decimus Burton respectively, but these themselves merit interest in their own right, with Burton's design including a floor supported hypocaust-style over a large spa water storage tank, which would have provided natural heating to the rooms above and around it.

Concurrent with work at the spa, less publicised excavations in the nearby cellars of Bellott's Hospital were revealing similar results. Bellott's also produced a Roman road, this time on the later north-south alignment and standing proud from a gravelled open area to its west. A large structure to its east was later downgraded in the 4C to receive a blacksmith's workshop. This was found very much as it had been subsequently abandoned 1,600 years ago, leaving behind a large block of limestone on which an anvil had once stood and waste slag, awaiting either recycling or disposal, banked up against the walls. The discoveries at Bellott's Hospital bore a remarkable resemblance to those at the Abbey Heritage Centre in 1993, where a road was also found raised above a gravelled area surrounding it and where later Roman activity included pewter working, almost certainly serving the temple and bathing complex. The overall results from the spa and Bellott's Hospital sites, together with the 19C archaeological records made by James Irvine when the original Royal United Hospital was built between them, have added substantially to the known layout and understanding of this quadrant of the walled Roman area. Combined with the presence of later buildings erected on the temple precinct, there is now evidence to indicate a change in attitude to the religious centre. There are similar thoughts elsewhere in Roman Britain, and in London, for example, there is evidence that the walled area was largely empty in the 4C.

Outside the walls in Bath, it has long been realised that, with all the Roman roads heading towards a confluence at the far end of Walcot Street and the long history of discoveries in the area, that it was here that the actual living town was located. Excavations between 1989 and 1992 at Nelson Place and Hat and Feather Yard enabled the first scientific examination of the structures here. Narrow strip buildings were fronted by a colonnade alongside what was probably the road from London reaching the confluence of routes into Bath. In the very earliest period a road had branched off towards Bathwick via a river crossing, before being built over to include a blacksmith's workshop. Not far to the south, on-going excavations and observations at the former Aldridges' auctioneers site have yielded similar results, with strip buildings terraced into the hillside and late Roman industrial activity including a potter's kiln and associated by-products. One wall here survived to a height of 24 courses, and while most of it remained buried, it would appear that its top was still exposed in the 17C. An unexpected discovery was that of a small group of isolated burials adjacent to the wall, one of which was in a lead coffin and attracted the interest of the producers of BBC's Meet the Ancestors.

governors' political allegiances and attendance records demonstrates only that party politics counted for little in the Hospital's affairs and that a handful of local governors did the bulk of the administration. But many other discoveries are genuinely illuminating, for example that the admission of patients (for reasons of reducing poor relief) was skewed towards younger male family breadwinners, that 70% of all patients suffered from rheumatic, paralytic, musculoskeletal and neurological disorders, and that under half of them came from the adjacent counties.

A short notice can do scant justice to Anne Borsay's subtle, clearly-argued interpretation across a huge array of topics: from hospital discipline to the publicity value of *Annual Reports*; from the professional tensions between physicians and surgeons to questions of hygiene and disease; from personalities like Beau Nash and Ralph Allen to the interface with other spa institutions and the Corporation itself. And threading through the whole is another key narrative — the way in which organisations such as the MWH aided the rise of the Georgian middle class. This book is worth reading on many counts, and even members of the HBRG not primarily interested in the Hospital as an institution can benefit from its broad-ranging approach. TREVOR FAWCETT

### PROJECT FOR THE BATH STREET GAZETTEER

Following the meeting on 6 October of HBRG members, a further session was held on 1 December at the Bath Industrial Heritage Centre for members of local associations and others interested in the possibility of participating in this plan. The project was outlined and the meeting discussed the practicalities, including the formation of a Project Committee and the need to create proper procedures for data handling, especially the use of computers. The next stage will be to make a concrete proposition with a view to starting the Gazetteer in the new year. Besides members of the HBRG (represented by Philippa Bishop, Amanda Berry, David Crellin and Trevor Fawcett) those attending included Stuart Burroughs, David McLaughlin, Marta Inskip, David Moger (for Bath Central Library, Mike Chapman, (for Survey of Old Bath), Angela Marks and others (for Oldfield Park and East Twerton, Chris Dodge (for Bathwick), Doreen Collyer (for Widcombe and Lyncombe), and Tony Bray (for Weston). There were apologies from Samantha Baber (for Building of Bath Museum) and Peter Davenport (from Bath Archaeological Trust). Others have expressed interest in the project.

## From BATH CENTRAL LIBRARY RECORDS

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contains a useful mix of later Victorian material under the title 'Newspaper cuttings .. relating to Bath, c.1877-1882'. The following samples may whet the appetite: p.25 Oct.1877: - improvements intended in Holloway - Strange's Court will be cleared of its dilapidated cottages.

p.45 Nov.1877: - election of the Mayor of Dolemeads (dinner of sprats and tripe and onions) and a dinner given to the mayor of Combe Down.

p.46 Nov.1878?: - Tramcar service mooted from the GWR station to Bathford railway bridge.

p.46 Nov.1878: - effects of the Hedgemoad slip - buildings shored up.

p.47 June1879: - building operations in Wells Road and Oldfield Park - a new road being cut in front of St. Matthew's.

p.49 Oct.1879: - Nos. 1-2 Old Bond Street: to be pulled down for street improvements.

p.25 Oct.1877: - improvements intended in Holloway - Strange's Court will be cleared of its dilapidated cottages.

p.51 Oct.1879: - the Board School in Kingsmead Street will soon be finished - handsome Gothic front.

p.53 Sep.1879: - changing of street gradients in upper Marketplace to prevent accidents and wooden pavements to reduce noise.

1).54 Oct.1879: - Jolly's fine new shop front on Milsom Street.

p.54 Oct.1879: - St. Andrew's spire nearly finished.

p.56 Dec.1879: - efforts to publicise Bath for health and residence - 613 advertisements placed in London, provincial and foreign press in recent years.

p.56 Apr.1880: - Lawn Tennis Club leases an acre at corner of Park Lane and Audley Road for 4 grass and 2 asphalt courts.

p.57 Feb.1880: - Cater begins aerating Bath waters in vaults below Pump Room - 2 sizes of bottle, each labelled 'Sufis Water' - more palatable when aerated.

p.58 Mar.1880: - Davis and the excavations at the baths.

p.25 Oct.1877: - improvements intended in Holloway - Strange's Court will be cleared of its dilapidated cottages.

pp.59 & 67 Apr., Nov. & Dec.1880: - the elegant Corridor where the Rhine String Band will play every afternoon.

p.59 Apr.1880: - fountain being erected in Laura Place.

p.60 Apr.1880: - renovation of Sham Castle.

p.69 Jan.1881: - verses on Sion Hill - what a trudge up to it!

pp.64, 67 & 94 Oct. 1880 & July1881: - laying of wooden pavements in Southgate Street, Marketplace, Union Street, Cheap Street and Milsom Street.

pp.88-89 1882: - more discoveries at the Roman Baths.

p.93 & 155 June 1881: - more on the Hedgemoad landslip.

D.96 Summary of the 1881 Census.

p.135 Oct.1882: - new premises of Evans and Owen in Bartlett Street now being lit by electricity.

p.140 Aug.1878: - sale of the Corridor.

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