



NEWSLETTER 24

MAY 1994

GROUP NEWS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 13 April 1994

1. The meeting was well supported, but apologies came from Jennifer Beazley, Stuart Burroughs, Kirsten Elliott, Stella Greenslade, Maria Joyce, Godfrey and Mary Laurence and Connie Smith. The minutes of the AGM of April 1993 were accepted.
2. In his report the Chairman recalled the past year's programme which had been varied and generally well-attended. He also referred to the Newsletter and thanked those who produce it. There was concern however that some members never came to meetings, not even very occasionally, since one of the Group's main purposes is to encourage debate and the exchange of ideas and information and to offer members mutual support in their research.
3. The Working Party on Archives and Libraries had experienced a quiet year, though the HBRG's programmed visit to Bath Central Library had been very worthwhile. David Crellin has replaced Ruth Fisher as the Group's representative on the Bath Local Library Committee. The Library has completed the transfer of the HMC's Reports series and Calendar of State Papers from Newbridge to the Podium site. Bath Record Office has reminded the Council's legal staff that no pre-1870 property deeds or other documents may be released without agreement of the City Archivist; in most recent sales of city property only the leasehold has been sold and deeds have therefore been retained. Many city properties are still not registered, however, and the freehold title cannot always be proved (even after 400 years!).
4. The Treasurer presented a healthy balance sheet. Funds at 31 March 1994 stood at £669.56. After two years of deficit the account for 1993-4 showed a surplus of £33.29 on the year - thanks to an increase in subscriptions and a reduction in the cost of room hire and other expenses. He therefore recommended that subscription rates stay unchanged in 1994-5. The meeting accepted the statement and thanked the Treasurer for all his work.
5. Bath History V was now out and available to HBRG members at a concessionary £6.75. Two copies of volume IV remained out of the original fifty purchased; these were available at £5 a copy. Having edited the last three volumes of the journal, Trevor Fawcett would be handing over to a new editor.
6. The Chairman aired the possibility of the HBRG undertaking some joint research project. Examples might be research on the former residences of Bath people and visitors, or on the evolution of particular streets and neighbourhoods, or on notable local families and their interconnections (e.g. the Corporation). Another useful project might be the compilation of a list of recommended reading on Bath history. The Committee would not initiate any project, though, unless there seemed to be enough enthusiasm and willingness to participate from members.

7. Lutz Haber and Jean Manco, now leaving the Committee, were warmly thanked for their services and Alex Kolaczowski and John Wroughton proposed in their place. Other officers and committee members were willing to continue, and the AGM unanimously elected these and the two proposed new members for 1994-5.
8. Also referred to were the gift made to the HBRG by Bernard Stace and the intention to issue a revised list of members in September.

Following the business of the AGM, members had a chance to talk informally over drinks and to examine an interesting collection of documents laid out on tables, including a number from Bath Record Office, the Bernard Stace items mentioned above, and other exhibits brought in by members. Around the Bath Industrial Heritage Centre room stood the display panels of its current exhibition on the cordial drink VIMTO, which seemed somehow appropriate to the occasion.

MEETINGS HELD DECEMBER 1993 - MARCH 1994

On 15th December Stephen Clews began his review of banking in Bath under George III with a reminder of its context in the expanding economy of the early Industrial Revolution. While there were signs of incipient banking activity at Bath much earlier, the advertisement of the wine merchant Isaac de Vic in 1753 marks the start of a regular remittance service between Bath and London. By 1760 the Clement brothers, linen merchants, were offering other financial services, including the purchase of "light gold" (damaged guineas, etc.) and dealing in bonds and securities, and out of this emerged the High Street Bank established by Robert Clement in 1787 and still surviving on the site under the aegis of the National Westminster. The largely unregulated environment of monetary institutions had meanwhile encouraged other partnerships into existence the Bath Bank in 1768, the Bath & Somersetshire Bank in 1775, and the Bath City Bank in 1776. The rapid growth of the spa provided lucrative openings for investment but risked leaving undercapitalised banks dangerously exposed if the credit-machine faltered. The first to fall was the small-scale enterprise of George Davis in 1792, but war with France in 1793 brought two more - substantial partnerships crashing. The Bath City Bank, which had another branch at Wells, had ventured too trustingly (on the security of freehold land), lending not only to local developers like the architect John Eveleigh but also investing large sums in the war-vulnerable Liverpool cotton industry. The Bath & Somersetshire suffered from a lack of liquid assets and it too went bankrupt; its partners bore unlimited liability and lost all their property and possessions in a humiliating effort to meet creditors' demands. These were the more dramatic moments in a story of booming activity in banking, broking and financial clearing. Only three out of eleven known banks went bankrupt between 1760 and 1820. None appears to have been robbed or to have lost cash in the hazardous transmission of specie to and from their London agents (usually by mailcoach), though forgery of notes and coins remained a problem. What is clear is the web of financial connections extending through the adjacent counties at this period. After the 1825 Act the arrival of joint-stock banking began the long process by which provincial banks were slowly absorbed into national institutions leaving only such mementoes as engraved notes and bills in the Sydenham collection (Bath Central Library) and Roman Baths Museum. Some of these, with examples of trade tokens, Stephen Clews brought along for us to see at the end of his talk.



Later Victorian Bath was strenuously promoted, abroad as at home. The illustration shows the 3-colour cover of a brochure published at Corporation expense in two editions, English and French, for distribution at the great Paris international exhibition of 1900. Readers would find inside the brochure portraits of Nash and other worthies, and pictures of Bladud discovering the hot springs, Edgar being crowned King, and Queen Elizabeth making her state entry into the city.

Arguably the re-arranged meeting at 4 Circus on 13 January proved more valuable than the original intention of viewing the new Abbey Visitors Centre itself. Rob Bell's excellently illustrated talk on the recent Abbey excavations was indeed an ideal preliminary to any future visit to the Centre. The dig, only recently completed, was confined to a broad strip along the southern flank of the Abbey church; further south still, where the main part of the cloister lay, no post-Roman evidence has survived mid-18th-century construction on the Kingston estate or late-Victorian stripping. During the latest excavation several Roman foundation walls were located, on the usual Roman alignment, fairly close to, or running under, the present church but as much as 17 feet below modern pavement level. Evidence of pewter working suggests an atelier may have been producing metal objects for visitors to the sacred spring. The Anglo-Saxon discoveries were more tantalising - no clear pointers, for example, to the siting of the earlier Abbey church (e.g. under the Norman nave on the Glastonbury model, or alongside it as at Wells). On the other hand the late Anglo-Saxon cemetery yielded many male and female burials, nine of them on the mysterious charcoal surfaces also met with elsewhere. Their regular lay-out was interestingly no longer on the Roman

alignment, showing that, by the tenth century at least, surviving Roman structures had little influence. The best find of undoubted Anglo-Saxon masonry was a carved fragment from a coffin cover. Norman work was naturally more in evidence, including stone blocks (some with chevron ornament) recycled in the present building and the re-used base of a pier. A stretch of Norman wall turned up behind cassock racks in the (Jacobean) rector's vestry. Much further down, well below the present vestry floor, ran the Elizabethan walk that appears on the Speed/Savile maps, and below that the Norman walk. The excavation area was complicated by Tudor and Jacobean rebuild, Georgian conduits, the deposits of Ralph Allen's garden, Victorian alterations (including the insertion of the Pitman Press boiler), and the 1920s vestry. Two passages of unknown purpose were also discovered, provoking further questions about the site.

The William Blathwayts need to be clearly distinguished, as Brigitte Mitchell showed in her lucid talk on 9 February about the squires of Dyrham. William Blathwayt I (c.1649-1717) was brought up by his uncle Thomas Povey, the influential courtier and civil servant (and friend of Samuel Pepys), who set him on his impressive diplomatic and official career culminating in the post of Secretary of War of 1683. Now seeking a good match, he was alerted by Sir Robert Southwell of Kings Weston to the prospects of Mary Wynter, heiress of Dyrham, whom he duly married at Christmas 1686. Before her death in November 1691 she bore him five children. From 1692 the work of rebuilding the gabled Tudor manor house at Dyrham got under way despite the owner's absences in the Netherlands serving King William: first the west front by a Huguenot architect, then the stable block, and finally the grand east front by William Talman, the designer of Chatsworth, with its decorative stone carving by John Harvey of Bath. Inside it was finely furnished and adorned with works of art (some from Povey's collection). Outside it nestled within the spectacular garden depicted in J. Kip's famous engraving of 1712. Though Queen Anne turned down an invitation to stay at Dyrham in 1702/1703 (preferring Badminton), various V.I.P.s from court did enjoy its hospitality. Moreover the house, gardens and waterworks were a draw for well-to-do spa visitors coming from Bath - where Blathwayt was an M.P. Meanwhile his sons, the gauche William II and the musical John, had spent four years on a Continental Grand Tour, and in 1717 William II succeeded to the property. Neither he nor William III (succeeded 1742) had the distinction or drive of William I, but at least they perpetuated the dynasty. Indeed William III married three times, producing William IV and Penelope by his first wife, and George William by his second. The childless William IV, however, fixed his hopes on his nephew William Crane, offspring of Penelope - who had earlier eloped to Scotland with a bankrupt Bristol banker, J.P. Crane. The nephew grew up at Dyrham at a time when William IV was re-landscaping the park and also acquiring no. 30 Royal Crescent, and eventually he became the new squire in 1815 on changing his surname to Blathwayt. When however he died in 1839 without issue, the whole estate reverted to his aunt who late in life had remarried (an admiral). Having no children herself, she tried to bypass the rightful heir, Col. George Blathwayt, son of George William, who had installed himself at Langridge where he was rector. The redoubtable colonel, a veteran of Waterloo, nevertheless by c. 1844 had taken Dyrham over and soon set to work transforming the neglected house and estate, and trying to develop the harbour at Porlock, where the Blathwayts also held land. In the 1850s a third of his income from the Dyrham estate went on servicing the £50,000 debt he had incurred in building and improvements. Military hero, J.P., Tory grandee, he left a reputation none of his descendants could match, though Brigitte Mitchell, in this revealing story of a local family, traced the line down to 1956 when Dyrham Park was sold to the nation.

In her engaging paper on 10 March, Sylvia Joyce highlighted Bath's humbler citizens, and the mundane detail of everyday life, when she focused on coroners' inquests - of which four volumes of reports survive in Bath Record Office for 1776 to 1835. During the period the Mayor or his deputy acted as coroner, aided by a jury of 13 to 20 male, but not always literate, residents. The reports display a sharp contrast between the colloquial language of the witnesses and the legalese of the verdicts which might reach comic levels of convoluted wordiness. Sometimes the investigation seems perfunctory; medical evidence was only intermittently given; and manslaughter never appears as a verdict. Except when the issue was possible suicide, almost all the cases concern working- or lower-middle-class victims, the vast majority of them male. Clearly other instances of accidental and unexpected death never came before the coroner's court. From 1777 to 1798 there were only 103 inquests, and from 1827 to 1835 only 101, compared with an average today of around 80 annually. In these cases suicide, accidents, and infanticide bulk largest. People took their own lives especially by drowning or hanging (four-poster beds were handy for this), though others cut their throats, used guns, jumped from windows, or poisoned themselves with oxalic acid. They died accidentally in many ways. Some fell into the river, perhaps when watering a horse or filling a kettle, or stumbled - sometimes drunk - into the unrailed "areas" of new houses on dark nights. Children drowned and were knocked down by horse traffic. Workmen fell off scaffolds, got crushed by beer barrels or in quarries, or nearly cut in two by steam saws. Fire was another hazard: a child was killed when its pinafore caught alight, a servant when roasting meat, an old woman when the flame from a rushlight spread. A soldier stationed in Bath in 1794 died after suffering only part of a savage punishment of 800 lashes. Three drunken dragoons fractured a man's skull when he enquired after his lost asses. Another man was fatally struck by a gun butt as he attempted to rob an orchard at South Stoke. At least one murder was a clear crime of passion. Great issues from the wider world rarely impinge on these cases (though the fatality during the Gordon Riots in Bath is one exception). Nevertheless no other documents perhaps so well illuminate the lives of poorer citizens of the time, and their personal tragedies and hardships.

MEMBERS' NEWS

We welcome three new members:

Mrs. Margaret A. Burrows, 6 Church Street, Widcombe, Bath, BA2 6AZ

Mr. George Harries, 9 Oak Close, Yate, Bristol, BS17 5TN

Mrs. Jean M. Seymour, 6 Stambridge Cottages, Batheaston, Bath, BA1 7NN

Change of Address:

Mr. Bruce Crofts, 4 Abbey Court, Edward Street, Bath, BA2 4DX

BERNARD STACE GIFT

Various items donated by Bernard Stace for the use of HBRG members were on show at the AGM. They mostly concern the history of the Abbey Church, plus documentation on Bath floods and the Francis Frith catalogue of old Bath photographs. Contact the Secretary if these items may assist your own research or take your interest.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

1. Bath History vol. 5 came out in March (contents listed in Newsletter no. 23). Copies are available to HBRG members at the reduced price of £6.75. Vol. 6, tentatively scheduled for spring 1996, will be in the hands of a new editor, Brenda Buchanan, so happily keeping it in the HBRG family.
2. Bridget Hill, The Republican Virago; the Life and Times of Catherine Macaulay, Historian (Clarendon Press, 1992), chapter 4, pp. 78-104, "The Bath period".
3. Jean Manco, "Henry Savile's map of Bath", Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeol. and Natural History Society for 1992, vol. 136 (1993), pp. 127-39. Includes fold-out reproduction of the map, transcript of its text, and comparative illustrations. Since the article appeared, Jean Manco has sent in two afterthoughts: (1) the circular building by the South Gate she had thought might be an oast-house represents in fact the dovecot of the dissolved priory; (2) her 19C lithograph of St. Michael's Without is actually based on an inset view from Gilmore's map of 1694.
4. Harold Chasey, "The diary of a young lady in Bath, 1842", Notes & Queries for Somerset & Dorset vol. 33 (Sept. 1992) pp. 151-3. The lady in question is Anne Farmar and the diary is now in Bath Record Office.
5. Trevor Fawcett and Stephen Bird, Bath: History and Guide (Allan Sutton, 1994). Just published, a concise new account of Bath from pre-history to the present-day, with descriptions of two historical walks. This is the latest in a publisher's series on British cities and towns, Salisbury and Devizes (among others) having already appeared in the same format.

MEMBER'S QUERY

David Crellin wants to track down the whereabouts of the original plans of St. Saviour's church, Larkhall (built by John Pinch in 1832). He is also interested in an earlier classical plan for the church (mentioned by Pevsner). Please contact him directly if you have any information.

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