



NEWSLETTER 63

SPRING/SUMMER 2011

## GROUP NEWS

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### EDITORIAL

The adjacent picture of the **Canal Bridge, Sydney Gardens c. 1927 by John Northcote Nash** nicely links together much of what the HBRG has been doing over the last few months and helps us all celebrate the K&A's bicentenary.

The painting is from the collection in the Victoria Art Gallery that we visited in January and is reviewed on Page 2. Following on from this our talk by Stuart Burroughs on the K&A in Bath is reported on Page 6 and finally we had Mike Chapman's walk along the Somerset Coal Canal in June, reviewed on Page 8.

We also have of course, back in Sydney Gardens, the newly opened Holburne Museum, with the hoped for re-creation of its Pleasure Gardens backing onto the canal.



Copyright: Victoria Art Gallery, Bath and North East Somerset Council

Finally, my thanks to Louise Pavey who spotted the wonderful carriage "Made in Bath" that resides in the heart of Champagne in "Home Thoughts from Abroad" on page 11.

# MEETING REPORTS

## VISIT : THE VICTORIA ART GALLERY

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2011

Hosts Jon Bennington, Katharine Wall  
and Michael Rowe



Abstract Nigel Pollard

Members were greeted by our own Chairman Michael Rowe, wearing another of his many hats as Chairman of the Friends of the Victoria Art Gallery, who introduced us to the Gallery Director - Jon Bennington and the Keeper of the Collections - Katharine Wall.

Jon welcomed us all and gave a short introduction to the Gallery's history:

Bath was a relatively late starter in building an Art Gallery of which a start was made in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee 1897. Designed by John McKean Brydon it was completed in 1900.

The main gallery was, and still is, on the first floor while on the ground floor, a lending library was opened in 1912. This however was moved into the new Podium site in 1990 and replaced by the current exhibition gallery. It was in this lower gallery that we were met and equally fitting for the HBRG was the then current exhibition of "Life in Victorian Bath".

The party was then split into two groups, one under Michael to be shown around the Upper Gallery and the second by Katharine to be shown the behind the scenes print and paintings stores in the basement. The parties then changed around. Unfortunately, time ran out on us, but Katharine did invite all to return on any of the public tour days when there would be more time to explore in the underground storehouse.



Upper Gallery



Lower Gallery



Michael introducing us to the wonderful collection of historic Bath images kept in the draws behind him - permanently available for view whenever the Gallery is open.



Exhibition: "Life in Victorian Bath"  
26 November 2010 - 02 February 2011

## THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF BATH: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2011      St Luke's Church Centre, Wellsway

Speaker                                      Professor Angus Buchanan OBE

Notes / Reporter                          Nigel Pollard

We could not have had a more knowledgeable person to talk on the subject of industrial archaeology in Bath as Professor Buchanan.

As many of us interested in the subject can remember, even those of us not based in Bath at the time, the 1960's was an awakening time for savings of the country's industrial monuments that up to then not many had cared about.

In 1967 the Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society (BIAS) was formed and in 1969 the *Bath University Press* published "The Industrial Archaeology of Bath" an important early work by the Speaker.

Derelict canals, closed railways, redundant factories, all were looked at under a new light which Prof. Buchanan suggested could be split into three categories: (i) Those that were simply closed down (ii) Those that we given a new life and (iii) Those that still work today as they were designed to do.

In the first category we have the Bath Stone Industry at Combe Down and the Coalfield at Newton St Loe. To be added to these would be Twerton Mill and only recently the extensive works of Stothert and Pitt.



In the second category we have two major transport arteries, the Kennet & Avon Canal, brought back from near dereliction to become a successful tourist amenity and the Green Park Station complex that has become a Bath Meeting Place, Farmer's Market and car park ...and its railway tracks into a cycle way and linear park.

In the third category, apart from the current railway, built as the Great Western Railway, nationalised to become British Railways and now privatised to become First Great Western, the most widely spread industrial monuments still fulfilling their original function are Bath's many bridges. For a full account of these the Speaker referred us to his article in BATH HISTORY Vol. III "The Bridges of Bath", but more importantly to the urgent matter of the preservation of the Victoria Chain Bridge which is currently closed and in critical danger.



**Image of IK Brunel's Skew Bridge**  
From Bath History Vol. III



**Victoria Bridge 1836 by R.A. Dredge**

## BATH AND THE ROYAL BATH AND WEST

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Manvers St Baptist Church Centre

Speaker

Colin Johnston

Reporter

Nigel Pollard (with help from R,B.&W. website)



The history of the “Royal Bath and West Society” has been well documented by Kenneth Hudson in his book “The Bath & West: a bicentenary history”, which was published in 1976 by the Moonraker Press.

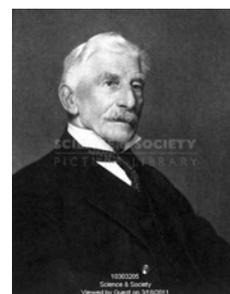
This introduction to our proceedings by Colin Johnston gave him the opportunity to concentrate more on some individuals and their links to Bath than just a potted history and which was also enhanced by a variety of material from the Society’s Archive which since 1974, following the move to their permanent site at Shepton Mallet, has been held by the Bath Record Office.

In 1777, several gentlemen met in Bath, and formed a Society for the encouragement of Agriculture, Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. in the Counties of Somerset, Wilts, Gloucester, and Dorset, and in the City and County of Bristol. The meeting, at York House (now the Royal York Hotel), was attended by twenty-two people. Among them were Edmund Rack, its first Secretary and whose brain-child the Society was and who was Colin’s first individual to be singled out.

**Edmund Rack (1735-1787)** was the son of a Norfolk labouring weaver but while a draper by trade, had also cultivated a taste for literature. During his earlier life in Norfolk he had become very interested in agriculture and, in particular, in the application of modern methods and when, in 1775, he “retired” to Bath, his attention was immediately drawn to the poor standard of agricultural practice in the West Country. He was responsible for a series of letters to the *Farming Magazine* and the *Bath Chronicle*, pointing out that it was in the interest of the farmer, the landowner and the nation in general that the agricultural resources of the country should be increased and by August 1777 he must have felt that the time was ripe for more specific proposals, hence the suggestion to form a Society. He was very conscientious and made good use of these literary contacts with the local gentry and served the office of secretary until his death in 1781.



Colin’s second notable individual was **Dr. Augustus Voelcker FRS (1822-1884)** who was apptd as its consultant chemist in 1855. Voelcker had been educated in Germany and in 1849 was appointed the first Professor of Chemistry at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. He appears to have been popular with English farmers and with his emphasis on checking fertilisers by analysis during a time when much quackery was around, within a few years the Society noted a marked improvement in the quality of fertilisers offered for sale. In 1863 he resigned his post at Cirencester and set up in private practice in London but he still maintained his association with the Bath Agricultural Society. Another side of agriculture which interested Voelcker was cheese making. Here too, he stressed the scientific approach - "All that is mysterious about it is purely accidental". Improvement in the quality of cheese and butter was a matter which concerned the Society increasingly in the latter part of the 19th century.



The retirement of Josiah Goodwin from the Secretaryship in 1882, because of ill health, led the Society to advertise for a successor. They had, as a result, 1,073 applications, of which they eventually examined the testimonials of 340, and from the 340 they chose Thomas Plowman, who had been Secretary of the Oxford Society for the past fifteen years and was Colin’s third notable individual.

**Thomas Plowman (1844-1919)** took a very active part in the life of Bath. He was a member of the Council for many years, graduating eventually to Alderman and Mayor. He was a magistrate, and a member of the Bath School Board as well as a hardworking and popular member of the Bath Literary and Philosophical Society. He saw clearly that the old concept of the Show, as something primarily intended for country people, would have to go. The number of people earning a living from the land was getting smaller each year, and, as a result, shows had to be attractive to townspeople if they were to pay their way. Plowman understood very well that the best way to get the general public interested in agricultural matters was to provide an opportunity to see farming operations in action. One of the Society’s most successful developments of this kind was the Working Dairy. This had been pioneered in 1880 by the



Royal Agricultural Society at their Carlisle Show and in the following year, at their Show in Tunbridge Wells, the Bath and West Society embarked on a similar but larger venture, using the most up-to-date equipment then on the market.

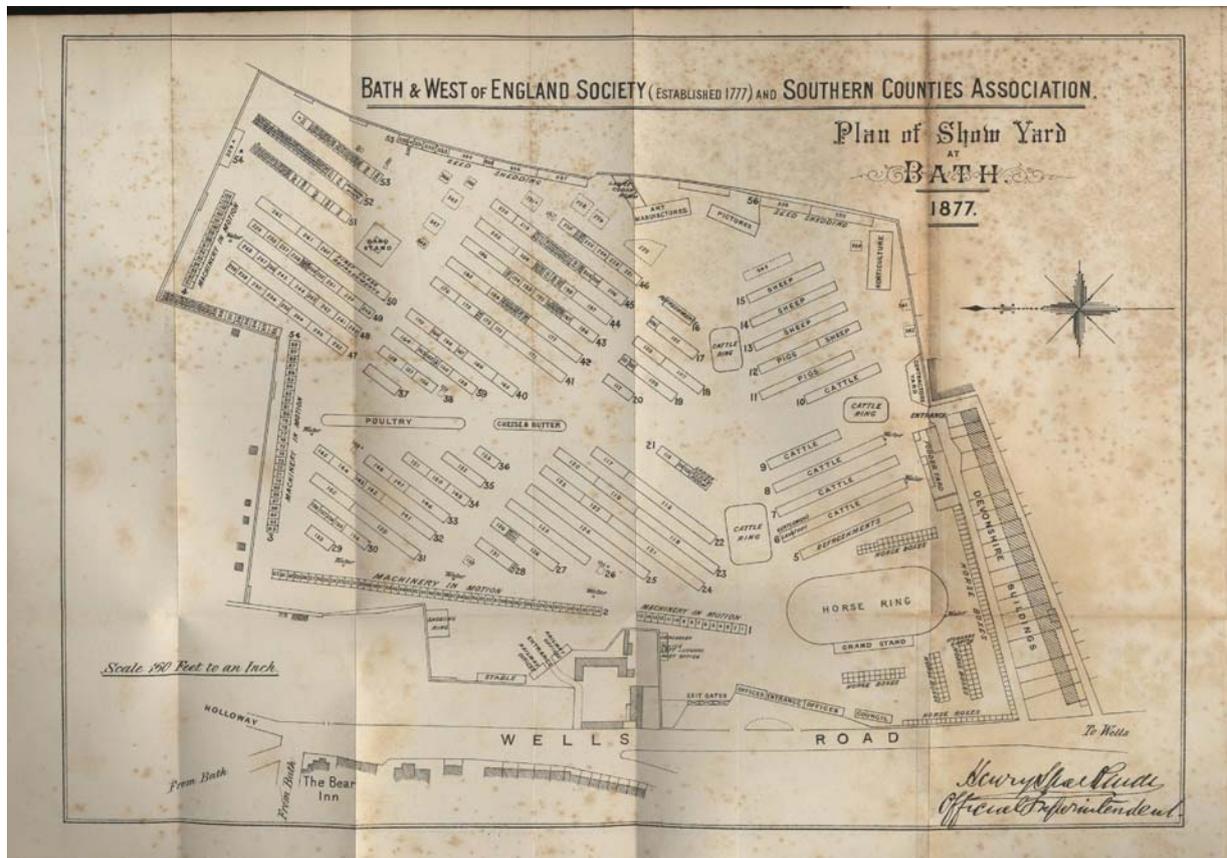
Colin's fourth and final individual was **Dr. Caleb Hillier Parry (1755-1822)** who had grown up in Cirencester, the son of a non-conformist Minister. Moving to Bath he became a very successful physician and served as honorary physician to the Bath City Infirmary and Dispensary and later the Bath General Hospital. He was a remarkable physician for his time making careful observations, carrying out many experiments and keeping meticulous notes of all that he did. His interests were wide, and in the interests of the Royal Bath and West, he was mainly remembered for his successes in cross-breeding Merino sheep, initially on his own farm on Sion Hill but later from the 1780's at the Society's own experimental farm at Weston.



Having discussed the above personalities our evening moved on to look at the Centenary Show of 1877. This Show was of course the one marred by the Halfpenny Bridge tragedy, but as this was already well known about, the emphasis was given to the Show itself, up on what we now know as Bear Flats, together with the festivities and decorations erected down and around the City.

The Archives include a large plan of the site from which it could be seen that apart from the show of animals, there were large displays of agricultural and domestic goods, much made by Bath companies, and it was this "Implements" section in particular that brought much praise at the time from the great Joseph Darby.

He commented that "The growth of the Implements Department can only be attributed to two causes - namely the increasing dependence of modern farming on labour saving machinery, and the studious endeavours of our mechanical and agricultural engineers to keep alive the spirit of invention, and bring to perfection every device calculated to relieve husbandmen of toil." ... and this remember was 1877.



# THE KENNET AND AVON CANAL: ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR BATH

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011 Museum of Bath at Work

Speaker **Stuart Burrows**

Abstract **Nigel Pollard**

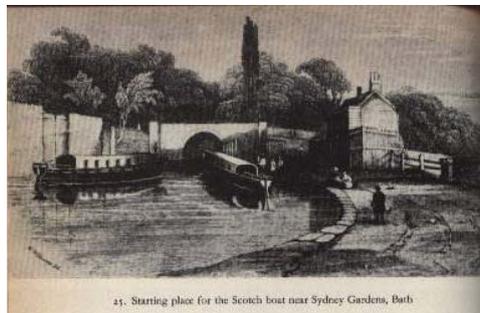
Stuart's talk was, as to be expected from such an accomplished local historian, full of interest and concentrated very much on the K&A's Bath environs.

Bath was already an inland port due to the works undertaken between 1712 and 1796 on and around the River Avon between Bristol and Bath that formed the "Avon Navigation" - A story well told elsewhere<sup>1</sup>.

The K&A was built between 1794-1810 and while 1810 is well accepted as the date it arrived in Bath, it was in fact only the final date when it joined the River Avon, having been servicing Widcombe since 1801.

It appears that the original plan was to finish the canal at Bathampton and join the River Avon at that point but the complexities of then negotiating the Pulteney Weir and the resurrection of an idea from a Bath-Bristol canal via Widcombe, won the day. The seemingly lost years between 1801 and 1810 were also not lost as much trade, particularly from the Somerset Coal Canal (SCC) came to Bath via this route and in 1802 the K&A even set up one of their barges as a pleasure boat to attract passenger traffic - which prospered very well.

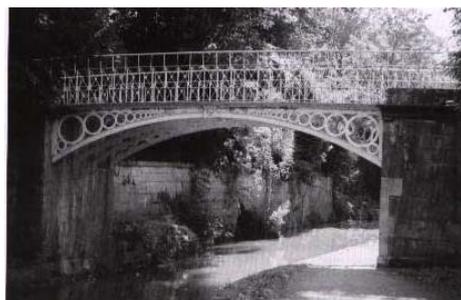
As curator of the "Museum of Bath at Work" Stuart was also able to link a number of the Bath industries and their owners to this new transport infrastructure development. As we all know the Canal cuts through the Sydney Gardens and it appears that two of its Directors, Messrs Stothert and Pickwick were also Directors of the K&A and the SCC. George Stothert, himself from Shropshire, was also the sole outlet of ironworks from the Coalbrookdale Company that made the beautiful cast iron bridges that span the canal through the Gardens. His own Bath Company later manufactured and supplied the smaller bridges over the locks at Widcombe.



21. Starting place for the Scotch boat near Sydney Gardens, Bath



The Two Chinese Bridges. 1792. A view of the Canal looking north. George Wise of Torrbridges. c. 1810



"Coalbrookdale" Bridge



"Stothert" Bridge

Illustrations from "STOTHERT & PITT - Cranemakers to the World by Ken Andrews and Stuart Burroughs

<sup>1</sup> "The Avon Navigation and the Inland Port of Bath" by Brenda J. Buchanan. Originally published in Bath History - Vol:VI 1996 and now also available from BIAS 2011 as a re-print at £4.

Further illustrations from : "The Kennet & Avon Canal" by Kenneth R. Clew and  
"The Last Promenade" by Brenda Snaddon

## WALK: BAILBROOK VILLAGE

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2011

Leader Dave Pearce

Abstract Bill Hanna

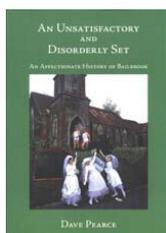
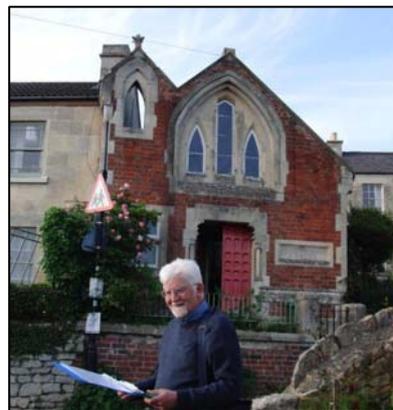
A walk through Bailbrook....

Or was it Pigacre? Sixteen of our members were met by the bridge on the parish boundary with Swainswick by Dave Pearce, author of 'An Unsatisfactory and Disorderly Set -An Affectionate History of Bailbrook' and Richard Clist, a contributor to the History who, as a long time resident was happy to offer personal recollections of people and events as we moved through the village - or hamlet. Dave explained that the area, a large triangular field, in which the village was built, within Batheaston parish, was originally known as Pigacre, suggested by some to have been where Bladud led his herd to their healing wallow. The hamlet stood in a landscape of nurseries and orchards, home to the Beauty of Bath apple. Most inhabitants worked in these fields, while many women of the village worked as laundresses, drawing water largely from wells and drying in their long gardens the washing brought into the village from the houses and hotels of Bath. Other men worked as platelayers on the Great Western Railway, as stonemasons and masons labourers; it was a hardworking village with a population of around two hundred and thirty at the beginning of the twentieth century. There were two pubs, two shops, school and church.

The school was raised by subscription in 1836, a single roomed building of red brick, (possibly from a small nearby brick works owned by St John's Hospital in Bath) organised on the monitorial system, which took in, at a charge of a penny a week, more than fifty children by the 1850s. The school has become a residence, still bearing the school plaque - now anonymous as the designation 'Bailbrook' was erased for security in WW2 lest paratroopers should use it for guidance.

The church - a 'tin tabernacle' - was delivered in kit form to become 'the mission church' for the village, which may suggest how the Rev T.P.Rogers, Vicar of Batheaston saw the needs of his charges: it was he who referred to them as 'unsatisfactory and disorderly'. Richard recalled how, as a boy, he had pumped the organ - hard work, as the bellows were leaky, and the lady organist exigent.

The church is near the eastern end of the village where the Bail Brook - now culverted- runs down from Bailbrook Farm past 'the big house' to the Avon. Here our walk ended with thanks to our guides for bringing to life a small hamlet previously unknown to and unvisited by many of our party.



An Unsatisfactory and Disorderly Set

An Affectionate History of Bailbrook

by Dave Pearce 2009

Publisher: The Batheaston Society & Millstream Books

## WALK: THE SOMERSET COAL CANAL. MIDFORD TO COMBE HAY

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2011

**Leader** Mike Chapman

**Abstract** Nigel Pollard



A group of nine intrepid explorers met in the car park of the *Hope and Anchor* at Midford to walk part of the long disused “Somerset Coal Canal”. We couldn’t have had a better guide than Mike Chapman whose knowledge on the SCC must be unsurpassed.

Despite the trials and tribulations of its construction, of which Mike showed us a number, the SCC was connected to a large number of collieries along its routes, and quickly established itself as one of the most prosperous undertakings of its time. Opened in 1802 trade reached a peak of 166,000 tons in 1858, but declined thereafter owing to increased competition from the railways, all of which themselves are now disused and remnants of which were also viewed during our most absorbing two hour walk. It was finally abandoned in 1904.



The first major structure of interest was a recently renovated aqueduct across the Cam Brook. Originally intended as a branch to Radstock, it became just a short arm to a tramway interchange basin and is now guarded over by a group of horses and ponies who showed great interest in Mike’s dissertation.



While the whole walk was full of interest and surprising artefacts, probably the finest were the flight of locks we came to around Combe Hay. Originally to be a single “Caisson Lock”, following a trial in 1799 this was abandoned and the series of conventional locks finished in 1805.



As can be seen from this last photograph, vegetation over the years has done much damage to these structures of which Mike assures us there are even more treasures still to be uncovered.

Close to here within a darkening wood where the canal does an amazing U-turn, our historical walk ended. Then, following a short walk back along the lanes to Midford a small number of us gathered in the *Hope and Anchor* for what was felt a well earned drink!

For more information the SCC, the “Somerset Coal Canal Society” has a most informative web site at [www.coalcanal.org](http://www.coalcanal.org) which is well worth a look.

Additional material for this article was taken from:

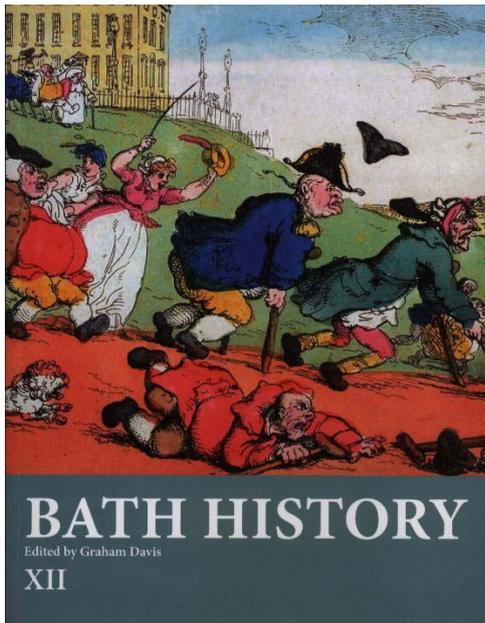
“The Somerset Coal Canal – A Pictorial Journey”

by Roger Halse & Simon Castens published by Millstream Books

## BOOK REVIEWS & RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The long awaited twelfth edition of **BATH HISTORY**. Edited by Graham Davis, was launched on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011, at Bayntun's Bookshop.

The book should need no review other than to register the Contributors and their subjects, which are listed below:



- **The Church of St Mary Northgate, Bath**  
- Peter Davenport
- **For True Friends: Jerry Peirce's Patriot Whig Garden at Lilliput Castle**  
- Cathryn Spencer
- **But who was the Queen of Bath?**  
- Barbara White
- **Private Schooling in Eighteen-century Bath**  
- Trevor Fawcett
- **A Literary Entrepreneur: William Meyler of Bath**  
- Kevin Grieves
- **An Exhibition of Cartoons in Bath**  
- Cathryn Spencer and Dan Brown
  
- **John Curry, Overseer for the Poor in the Parish of Walcot, Bath**  
- Jan Chivers
- **A Bishop's Palace in Bath: Baines, Goodridge and Prior Park**  
- Amy Frost
- **Ten Pound Poms: The Emigration of Pauper Children to Australia in 1852**  
- Graham Davies
- **Edwin Long, R.A. 1829-91**  
- Pat Hase
- **Collective dreams: A History of Bath's Cinemas**  
- Aaron Evans
- **Trevor Fawcett** - interviewed by Stephen Bird

176 pages; including many illustrations.

Published by: The Bath Preservation Trust and available in all good bookshops

**"Rita"**  
*The Forgotten Author.*



*By Paul Jones L.R.P.S.*

**Rita - The Forgotten Author**

*Author's note:* A biography of **Mrs W. Desmond Humphreys**, 1850-1938; known to her public as "**Rita**". She was a prolific author; writing over one hundred novels; all of which are beautifully written. This book covers Rita's life story in detail; from her birth in Scotland, to the last twenty years of her life spent in Bath. Included are full listings of her prose, plays, and music.

I conducted a lengthy search for Rita's final resting place at Bath Abbey Cemetery but sadly my search was in vain until I purchased the *Bath Abbey Cemetery Memorial Inscriptions* CD from the Widcombe Association, with which I soon located her memorial and was then able to take photographs of it for my book.

Rita's final resting place can be found near to the top of the hill in Bath Abbey Cemetery. Wildlife is abundant in the cemetery grounds, which also boasts magnificent views of the city of Bath.

172 pages; including many illustrations.

Purchase from: [www.blurb.com](http://www.blurb.com)

## HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD: NO: 3

Epernay

- in the heart of Champagne, France

“Les Attelages de Verzenay”

Carriage Museum

Carriage built in Bath



IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO HELP ENSURE THE CONTINUING PUBLICATION  
OF “BATH HISTORY” PLEASE HELP WITH A DONATION

- Please contact the Chairman Michael Rowe (01225 461902) for ways you can help-

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HBRG Web Site: [www.historyofbath.org.uk](http://www.historyofbath.org.uk)