



NEWSLETTER 55

January 2006

GROUP NEWS

A Word from the Editor :-

Welcome to the first issue of the Newsletter for 2006 and (as your new editor) I should like to express my thanks to all the contributors. There must also be among the membership a number of others who would be willing to write either reports of meetings or book reviews. If so, please get in touch to let me know your name and any special interests, and I shall be only too happy to call on your services. Our telephone number is Bath 313064, and the email address: vescovo@freeuk.com.

We are grateful to our secretary who has found time to build a group web site. He invites us to look at it at www.historyofbath.org.uk and welcomes any comments or suggestions. He also draws our attention to the new logo he has devised, based on the original. A copy is available on request by emailing him at david@auc.co.uk

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MEETING REPORTS

WALK ROUND BATHEASTON

Wednesday 16th May 2005

Guides: Ron and Sheila Russell

Report by Michael Rowe

This is a linear village, and no clear central point has ever been identified. Most of the numerous early houses are heavily disguised by subsequent alteration and refronting. The first notable building at the east end is the Poor House, established in 1801, though the present construction is thought to be of 1840 with the addition of a later storey and some partial refacing. There is no evidence of it being a workhouse, and with the advent of the Poor Law its function was replaced by St Martin's. From 1840 it was used as an Episcopal Mission hall, then later turned to business purposes, and more recently converted into flats. The adjacent cottages to the

west (1750-52, one the residence of a clockmaker named Melhuish) were built on waste parish land.

At the junction of Fosse Lane and Coalpit Road there was some discussion of the original route of the Fosse Way. The name Coalpit Road records an abortive attempt to establish a mine which failed in 1812 without producing any coal. The then owner of Batheaston House lost his investment of £20,000, and as a result was forced to demolish the wings of the house to help settle his debt. Further east, in the rank of houses, the George and Dragon public house was the last in the locality to give up brewing its own ale. The equipment is said still to be there, and the lantern outside still advertises its wares. Next stop was Lonsdale House, the home of William Lonsdale the geologist. The group then crossed the road to Batheaston House (built 1715), where the owner kindly took us round the interior and the garden. A photograph of an oil painting of 1750 shows that apart from the loss of the wings there has been remarkably little change to the garden facade and layout of the garden, terraces and orangery. The basement is Tudor and preserves several large chimney arches, stone stoves and fine lintels. There have been several rearrangements of the entrance, but the fine oak staircase with its columnar newel post and balusters in the shape of barley sugar twists still survives. The dado is panelled, with classical applied pilasters at each turn.

On our return to the uphill side of the road the farmhouse was pointed out; next to it a long low building, said to be partitioned into four small box-like rooms each with fireplace (function unknown). On the south side are some early houses dating from the 17th century, and down a lane the old malthouse whose original use is uncertain. Photographs were produced of fine early buildings demolished for the now redundant garage, followed by a call at Poplar House which was refaced in the 18th and 19th centuries on a 17th century foundation. Next came the Batch with cottages of 1729 and a pair of houses forming a single dwelling (ground plans and elevations showed its original form). Onward to the 13th century church with its tower of 1460, though rather dismissed by our guide because of serious Victorian intervention.

We were then directed to a series of fine clothiers houses mainly built for the Fisher family. The owner of Greensleeves (which appeared to be a cottage appended to Pine House) allowed us in through a door and down a steep cobbled path towards the stream to see a fascinating survival: the only wool drying room left in the area. Above a central hole in the stone floor was originally a stove. The joists of the floor over that were covered not with boards but with lathes half an inch apart. The wet wool was spread thinly upon these and dried by the rising hot air from the stove. Sadly all is ravaged by woodworm, and there is a planning application for conversion. By the stream is a platform from which baskets of wool were dipped in the water for washing. The mill buildings, later used for silk weaving, are on another property on the other bank.

Returning to the road we reached Eagle House, built by John Wood the Elder and much later a refuge to suffragettes who had been imprisoned; sadly it has recently been spoiled by insensitive development of the front garden. Finally two farmhouses, one of which has a cheese run to roll out the cheeses to a waiting cart. The last was Eagle Farm which although of 17th century origin has been prettily altered to Regency designs. We are grateful to the Russells for guiding us on this tour; they and the people of the village have clearly done a good deal of work in recording the buildings and were most kind in allowing us access.

WALK ROUND OLDFIELD PARK

Wednesday 15th June 2005

Guide: Alan Keevil

Report by Michael Rowe

Our guide began by sketching the origins of Oldfield Park which had initially consisted of two main pieces of ground: the Hayes, a very large winter feeding ground for the Combe Down flock of ewes; and the Moor Lands, the higher and more westerly ground. The earliest major development was of Moorlands farm where in 1898 Sam Griffin gained permission for a gas and oil engine works (still extant in Oldfield Lane). St Kilda's Road and Beckhampton Road were amongst the earlier streets laid out, though in stages and so with a diversity of architectural styles. Eastwards from Moorlands Inn (built in 1902 to designs by Silcock and Rae) is Oldfield Lane, which was formerly Moorlands Lane leading from the Bear at Bear Flat to Twerton. This gave access to a number of fattening pens for stock bought by the city butchers.

The most striking building in the lane is the Roman Catholic church of St Alphege, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, and connected to the presbytery by a charming arch over the brook. The terraces opposite were completed between 1902 and 1929 to varying designs by William Davis the builder. One remaining ribbed

pennant stone gate post marks the east end of the lane and the boundary of the 'Old field'. Four acres to the north were nursery gardens, while to the south a dairyman held the fields running up towards Englishcombe. A narrow path from the post leads towards the Linear Park (originally the route of the Somerset and Dorset Railway), where we were conducted through the railway arch beneath to the Moorfields Estate, constructed after the Second World War. Moorfields House, built by Dr Ashmoor, was later the home of the Sewells (the family of the famous authoress of 'Black Beauty'), and subsequently owned by the Jolly family. After being taken over by Bath City Council in the 1940s it first became a residential home, and has more recently been converted into apartments.

Walking westward to the end of Hillhouse Road we came first to the playpark (formerly the site of a farmhouse), and then were taken west along the Linear Park past the old Co-op bakery and dairy to the top of St Kilda's Road. The right side going downhill is the earliest (1890), comprising houses with attractive bay windows and stoops over, built it is believed to accommodate service staff for the railway and the city. At this point several closed-off rights of way behind St Kilda's Road were pointed out, thought to be the route of the Fosse Way pursuing its course to the river crossing; they are in a good line towards Royal Crescent and Julian Road. On returning down the street and crossing Moorlands Road we reached Shaftesbury Mews which includes the old fattening pens for the farmhouse. Bearing right on the street, we next came to the old cinema, originally called the Victory, then the Oldfield Park, and finally the Scala, before it was taken over by the Co-op (everyone remembered its wartime association with the direct hit on the air-raid shelter, now marked by the memorial garden).

A short way along Moorland Road marked the division between Oldfield Park West where the nonconformists established themselves at the west end, and South Twerton where the C of E appeared at the east end though only after the war. Next came Canterbury and Winchester Roads built in 1892 on the 'Garlic Ground'; the house with the large green door marked the dwelling and the stable of Harry Payne, the last man to run horse-drawn cabs from the front of the Abbey. Looking back from Arlington Road (built in 1892 on the site of the Moorfield Tile factory) a boundary wall can be seen behind the Scala running to Livingston Row and on down the middle of Brougham Hayes: this again was suggested as possibly the route of the Fosse Way, and gave rise to a further lively discussion on the subject. Beyond the Brougham Hayes bridge over the GWR is Hayesfield Lower School, originally the headquarters of the 2nd Somerset Regiment before becoming first a reformatory and boys home, and then a domestic science college and boys technical college.

Next to Upper Oldfield Park itself and to Hayesfield Senior School, centred on the grand house of Oldfield Park built for the Duck family of Duck, Son and Pinker, now much altered and extended in various styles (not all of which can be said to be sympathetic). The boundary wall, nicely detailed in brick and stone, encloses the still substantial grounds. The City of Bath Girls School was transferred to this site from the Guildhall in 1923. Reaching the Wellsway, Englishcombe House was pointed out as the former home of Herbert Clark who undertook the development of the Oldfield Park estate; and downhill the terrace of houses designed by William Davis (son of the famous Major Davis) built on Magdalen Hospital ground. On the east side of Wellsway are some fine villas; and on the left, walking west, we come to the site of Oldfield Lodge, Mr Mullin's summer house, now cut off from the Old Cottages which were within its curtilage by the road for the Bloomfield development. Beyond the Old Cottages is the much altered former home of Thomas Jolly; and on the righthand side of Oldfield Road at the Wellsway end is Claremont, the former home of Mr Massingham who established the electricity supply for Bath.

The tour ended with our return to the starting point via Myrtle Grove. We are indebted to Alan Keevil for his extensive and thorough overview of the whole area, revealing its hilly contours, fine houses and the remains of old farm buildings. Famous residents were recalled, Giles Gilbert Scott's distinguished church revisited, and the grandeur of the Great Western Railway bridges and embankments admired as always. The speculation about the route of the Fosse Way raised the prospect of exciting new investigation if the archaeologists can be persuaded.

THE HORSE ECONOMY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BATH

Wednesday 12th October 2005

Speaker and report by: Trevor Fawcett

Horse transportation was as central to the economic and cultural life of Georgian Bath as mechanised transportation is to the modern city. Visitors - the spa's very lifeblood - were almost all brought by horses, and

horse-power alone supplied most of the commodities and services that they and Bath residents depended on. Horses and vehicles abounded at Bath, not least along the north-south corridor that passed through the Marketplace and the dangerous zigzag of Cheap Street. Despite the Corporation's efforts to reduce congestion and noise disturbance, problems persisted - such as the frustrating blockage of the passage between Stall and Milsom Streets by the *Bear* inn, or the constant wear of the streets by iron-shod wheels. Nasty accidents too were common, not only in the centre but on the hilly roads around and at the Avon Street watering place. Yet the street scene was also enlivened by horses and vehicles, in all their variety, as many descriptions reveal. Though horses were sometimes ill treated (the colliers' pack animals for instance), in general they were liked, even admired, and well cared for. They were expensive to keep, however, what with the costs of fodder, stabling, taxes, shoeing, and horse medicines prescribed by Bath's farriers. In summer they were often pastured in fields and paddocks, but stables were safer. The provision of private stables, coach-houses and mews is a neglected aspect of the building of Bath. More is known about commercial livery stables and the extensive stabling at Bath inns, where the *Lamb*, *Pelican*, *White Lion* and *Three Tuns Lodging* alone could accommodate nearly 500 horses.

Equine uses were many - horses turned mill wheels, pulled hay wains and brewers' drays, carried riders for gallops on the downs and pulled carriages on daily airings. They were at the heart of Bath race weeks, circus diversions, hunting (a Bath hunt existed in the late 1760s), and of course the regular stage-coach and haulage services that linked Bath with other places, and the new posting services that grew up after 1740. Posting, while much dearer than travelling by stage-coach, offered a more flexible, private style of transport to any destination in the land. It also added the new occupation of coachmaster to all the other horse-related trades at Bath - stable-keepers, carriers, drivers and postillions, grooms, riding instructors, horse dealers, stud assistants, farriers and shoemiths, saddlers and harness makers, wheelwrights and coachbuilders (significant at Bath from the 1750s onwards); and then, ramifying through the whole local economy, tailors making riding coats, toyshops selling whips and spurs, farmers providing fodder, scavengers collecting horse droppings, and all the lodging-house keepers, doctors, spa staff, shopkeepers, and entertainers, who ministered to the visitors, long-stay or transient, whom horses had delivered here in the first place.

BATH LIBRARY "HIDDEN LOCAL TREASURES"

Tuesday 8th November 2005

Speakers: Stephanie Round and Margaret Bailey

Report by Bill and Pauline Hanna

Our hosts, who job share as Local Studies Librarians, gave an instructive description of the renovated Library, its layout, purposes, general holdings and special reserve collections.

We were shown round the new colour coded sections of the Library, which it was hoped would give a wider appeal to a greater range of users and which had resulted in more young people visiting, with a footfall now of around 1500 per day to use the books, the audio-visual section and the computers.

The children's section is also more heavily used, with activities for different age groups. The Library staff are involved in outreach work as well, particularly in the areas of family and house history, and in local studies.

As we went round we were enabled to look at the reserve stock and the collections which are not on the open shelves. It was an eye-opener for many members to see the range and depth of material which the Library holds, and which can be made available to researchers; because of its rarity and value, much of it requires the user to show identification and to use the chosen item under the eyes of a member of staff. Most of the local studies material which was included on the old card catalogue is now on the new computerised catalogue, though we were advised that it is as well to check both. Staff are happy to help those who feel they are not adept at using the computer or who might be uncertain about how to consult the catalogue.

After the tour Stephanie gave a presentation describing the resources available to researchers (including those who cannot visit the Library), often backed up with help offered by the Librarian. The impressive list of material comprises newspapers (back to 1744); about 10,000 indexed photographs, also slides and glass negatives; obituaries; maps (indexed) from the seventeenth century on, together with building plans; clippings; posters; prints; trade cards; magazines and journals (including, for example, a ten year run of 'The Bath and County Graphic'); pamphlets (now catalogued on computer); estate papers and wills; a Theatre Royal archive; parish register transcripts; electoral rolls; Army, Navy and Air Force Lists. Catalogues for B&NES, North

Somerset, Somerset, and South Gloucestershire can be found on www.foursite.somerset.gov.uk. This will become 'fivesite' when Bristol's catalogue joins the site next year.

After the presentation members spent a fascinating time looking at some special items which had been set out for us: maps, election pamphlets, poll books, a theatre log book showing Sarah Siddons in various roles, and Marshall's Library list of subscribers which included Governor Phillip, Rauzzini and HRH the Prince of Wales. Our warm thanks to Stephanie and Margaret for the trouble they took to prepare and present an excellent meeting for the group.

CORRECTION

In order to set the record straight Owen Ward has asked that the following amendments to the report of his talk on the Mill at Combe Down in Newsletter 54 should be noted:-

- 1) The tunnel (flue) supposedly linked to the isolated chimney has not yet been found.
- 2) The mill owned by Bally, Ellen and Steart was possibly a dye-wood [*not* 'dry wood'] manufactory.
- 3) In 1854 the gutta-percha manufacturer interested in taking over the mill did not in fact manage to do so.

BOOK REVIEW

Tony Scrase, *Somerset Towns: Changing Fortunes, 800-1800* (Stroud, Tempus, 2005), £17. 99, ISBN 0-7524-3423-3

As Bath historians we often focus so hard on our chosen city that we neglect the regional and national comparisons that would put the parochial into wider context. Tony Scrase's latest book is a refreshing corrective, for it looks at urban development in the whole of Somerset, with glances at adjacent counties, across a long perspective of time. In essence it is a study of the pecking order of towns at different periods. Until the 18C this means quite small towns of under 3000 inhabitants - and indeed usually far fewer. Pre-Georgian Somerset had no large towns at all and completely lacked any dominant centre to match Bristol, Gloucester, Salisbury or Exeter. The very smallest towns in this account are hard to distinguish from villages that had acquired certain urban functions such as regular markets. But on balance, to take examples from near Bath, Pensford and Norton St Philip just qualify as 'micro-towns' whereas Mellis and Chew Magna do not.

The mediaeval story begins with the Anglo-Saxon townships of Bath, Axbridge and Langport. By the time of the Domesday survey these three had been joined by another eight or more royal foundations that included Ilchester, Taunton, Milborne Port, Bruton and Frome. The fact that many of them minted their own coins should not mislead. They were all small, even Ilchester with its seven churches and Bath with its five, and none had a post-Conquest castle. In the centuries that followed, the remaining gaps in the scatter of little towns across the county began to fill, though still constrained by geographical barriers like the Mendip hills, Quantocks, and Somerset Levels. Wells and Bridgwater - together with Shepton Mallet and Yeovil - were now among the rising towns, some of which enjoyed ecclesiastical patronage. Not every new foundation succeeded, however, and Keynsham, for example, long struggled in the shadow of Bristol. By the late 14C, after the ravages of the Black Death, Wells and Bridgwater led the field in terms of population and wealth, with Bath and Taunton next, but once-important Ilchester was already in decay. Cloth remained the sustaining industry, using alum (as a mordant) and madder and woad (for dyes) imported through Exeter and perhaps Southampton. Several towns benefited from religious communities in their midst (Wells, Glastonbury, Bruton, Bath), while Bridgwater's port facilities even encouraged a Florentine merchant house, the Bardi, to establish a depot there - before, that is, trade contracted and Bridgwater experienced a period of decline. In the 15C, despite economic depression, the evidence of fine Perpendicular architecture and stately church towers suggests that many other places still prospered well enough.

The Tudor years, on the whole, proved more difficult. The clothing industry needed to adjust to changing tastes and the Dissolution of the Monasteries had a severe impact, especially on Glastonbury, though the same event enabled Bath Corporation to acquire Abbey property. Wells now ranked highest in the county hierarchy: John Leland, visiting in 1543, considered it quite large, and there were signs of landed gentry taking up residence, a trend that would continue. It was also an assize town with plenty of inn accommodation. By contrast the main cloth-making centres all suffered from the dislocation of foreign markets in the early 17C and then from the Civil War. When recovery came, the conditions for success had somewhat changed. Frome emerged as the leading cloth town based on the production of colourful 'medley' fabrics, while Bath made its

gradual transition from cloth town to full-blown spa resort. Taunton apart, these were the only Somerset towns to grow substantially during the Georgian period, even if the turnpiking of approach roads and some urban renewal brought limited improvement elsewhere. By the 1811 census Bath had forged well ahead. With over 30,000 residents it boasted three times the population of Frome, which ranked in second place, and ten times that of its old rival, Wells.

Altogether this is a sweeping survey. Tony Scrase has made especially full, yet cautious, use of data from national tax records (lay subsidies, poll tax returns, etc.) but has filled out the picture from other documents, visitors' descriptions, and the evidence of town forms, buildings, and such evident urban symbols as gates and market crosses. His text comes interspersed with statistical tables, bar graphs, maps, plans and photographs, and raises various intriguing questions. Why above all did Somerset remain wholly a county of small towns for so long? Answers might include the pre-existing pattern of Roman communications, the dispersed Anglo-Saxon system of administration, the lack of great landowning families, and the powerful influence of Bristol and, later on, Exeter.

Trevor Fawcett

NEW PUBLICATIONS

John Eglin, *The Imaginary Autocrat: Beau Nash and the Invention of Bath* (Profile, 2005), £20, ISBN 1 86197 302 0.

A well-written, well researched addition to the literature covering this favourite period of local history. The author, who is working on the general subject of the commercialisation of gambling in the 18C, pays particular attention to the ways in which Nash was able to work the system for profit.

ed. Brenda J. Buchanan, *Bath History X* (Millstream Books, 2005), £10, ISBN 0 948975 74 1.

This, the tenth volume in the series, was officially launched at the Guildhall on Tuesday 29th November, and contains, as in the past, a number of articles on widely varied aspects of the city's history. A full review will appear in the next Newsletter; at this juncture it must suffice to note its publication and to congratulate both Brenda Buchanan, editor of this and the previous four issues, and Tim Graham, its publisher, not only for maintaining the high standard of its predecessors but also for ensuring - against considerable odds - that the book has appeared at all. Bath Archaeological Trust's generous and invaluable financial underpinning of earlier volumes being no longer available, it was only (as Dr Buchanan puts it in her Foreword) by digging deep into their own pockets to provide the necessary funding that those behind the project and anxious for it to continue could ensure the publication of what might otherwise have gone by default. Such dedication and generosity deserves the warm gratitude and appreciation of those of us who, since its inception in 1986, have come to value greatly the biennial appearance of Bath History and the consistently high quality of its articles. It is very much to be hoped that in future years backing will be found to enable the series to continue.

Elizabeth White, *St John the Baptist, Keynsham: a History of the Church* (The Bridge Society, 2005), ISBN 0 953440214

Andrew Swift and Kirsten Elliott, *The Lost Pubs of Bath* (Akeman Press, 2005), ISBN 0 954613848.

Derek Hurst, *Sheep in the Cotswolds: the Medieval Wool Trade* (Stroud, Tempus, 2005), ISBN 0752428985.

INFORMATION REQUEST

Tony Simmonds (of Beverley, East Yorkshire) writes:

I am advised that you may be able to help me with a small point of interest. On a house at the corner of North Parade and Duke St in Bath is a plaque with the following written on it. "The Chapel of St John of Beverley for the Deaf and Dumb". Nobody I have contacted in Bath seems to know why it is there. I will be very grateful if you could help me. If not, at least with a contact or two who may have some knowledge of it. many thanks. Email Tony direct at agsimmonds39@hotmail.com if you have any information.