



NEWSLETTER 56

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G R O U P N E W S

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EDITORIAL

We offer warm congratulations to John Ede on being awarded the MBE in recognition of his long years of service with the Mayor's Guides.

In addition to the usual reports of our meetings held during the spring and early summer this issue of the Newsletter contains a couple of items arising from the publication of 'Bath History' Vol.X last year.

Mary Ede's review does full justice to the range of material it covers and the quality of the research undertaken, while Edward Yescombe's follow-up to his article on his forebear, the Bath attorney, shows how much more information on any particular subject is often there to be revealed.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THE HISTORY OF BATH RESEARCH GROUP

12th April 2006 at the Museum of Bath at Work

1. Apologies were received from several members of the group including Beryl Melville, Mr & Mrs Hopkins Clarke, Godfrey Laurence and Trevor Fawcett. We had a good turnout with 22 members present representing just over one quarter of the membership.
2. The minutes of the meeting of 13th April 2005 were confirmed.
3. A motion to re-elect the committee en block was proposed by Julia Moss and seconded by John Ede. The motion was carried unanimously.
4. Michael Rowe presented the Chairman's report. In a review of meetings he reminded the audience that over 200 subjects have been covered in 20 years (The list has been posted on the website and will be mailed to members shortly) and requested that ideas for forthcoming meetings would be most welcome from members. He noted that there has been a sea change in the use of libraries and museums in Bath and elsewhere. Even the Roman Baths has seen a fall in attendance and the Museum of Costume has seen a 30% fall. Interest in history has focused more on family research and the world wars in recent times no doubt influenced by recent media coverage. Michael discussed the problem of the state of graves in Bath noting that 7 VC holders are buried in cemeteries in the area.
Michael also noted that the government is keen to improve archives provided strict rules on accessibility are met. An area that will be discussed in more detail by the committee.
He went on to mention details of the very generous bequest of £20,000 to the Victoria Art Gallery by Luz Harber which has been used to provide access cabinets for 7000 images on paper from the collection. Bath History cannot any longer be supported by the Bath Archaeological trust and so the Bath Preservation Trust is stepping in to support it. A very welcome action. It was noted that support in the local press for this project is poor and that it would be helpful if this could be improved.
Finally he thanked the committee for all their support over the last year.
5. David Crellin indicated that he is really unable to continue the role of treasurer. As a result no report was presented but he did indicate that the state of finances has improved relative to last year with income still exceeding expenditure. A new Treasurer needs to be appointed urgently and accounts prepared and audited. David proposed that no increase in subscription was necessary.
6. Philippa Bishop raised the issue of meeting reports. It was suggested that in future the speaker should write the report which will eliminate any disagreement there might be between the presenter and the author of the report. This change will be discussed further in committee together with the issue of copyright for reports and their presentation on the website.
7. Notes and Queries
 - a. Alan Kevil discussed the Saxon Widcombe cross. Is it anything to do with Lyncombe cross? Is it too small? Did it come from a Saxon church? It probably dates to after the conquest.
 - b. Bill Hanna would like any information that is available on the Gapper/Gascoine family in the early 19th century and late 19th century
 - c. Concern was expressed about the state of the Bath Chronicle Archive.

TALK FOLLOWING THE AGM

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET ON HISTORICAL RESEARCH

David Crellin

The Future of Historical Research

I believe that Historical research is likely to be transformed by technology. Today the opportunities opening up chart a way ahead which I see as exciting and transforming for information of all kinds including historical research. These changes include the following areas.

The Internet

The internet is enabling a transformation of the way in which people share information. It is creating an informal and ad hoc approach to sharing knowledge which results in a far greater variety of opinions and information being shared. However, the informality also results in a blurring of the distinction between authoritative information and hearsay. Non localised storage of pictures and picture sharing have already become highly successful and

information and picture sharing on sites such as Flickr have become very popular amongst the younger generation. These sites and others that will develop can offer similar opportunities to historical researchers.

Family records such as the Census returns have recently become available on-line giving full international access to records. Although these records have been made available for family history research there are huge opportunities to study social aspects of life throughout the 19th century which have yet to be fully exploited. County archives are beginning to become available a trend that will only grow.

Wikis and Wikipedia in particular represent a new approach to presenting information. Surprisingly perhaps the quality issue has not been the problem that may have been expected except for a few contentious areas of information. The success of these web sites points the way ahead to universal access to web based historical information.

Broadband.

Although closely linked to the Internet Broadband in itself will transform the way in which the Internet is used. The amount of data that can be shared will increase dramatically to include video and large picture databases. Video on demand will become the norm where television programmes will be watched at leisure at ones own convenience, not at set times of day.

Applications.

More and more sophisticated software applications will increasingly enable automated manipulation and management of old records allowing for scanning, optical character recognition, automated cataloguing etc. Presentation of data and information improves all the time with higher resolution screens and novel techniques that have been developed o make information more informative and interesting.

Tools (Hardware).

The performance of relevant hardware continues to increase with image scanners and cameras achieving ever increasing levels of sophistication and performance. Computers themselves continue to increase in capability making it a simple task to analyse and reference archive material. It is now easy to store vast numbers of images of documents at high resolution on a home computer.

MEETING REPORTS

TWO 18TH CENTURY LANDSCAPES IN AVON

Wednesday 11th January 2006

Speaker: Rosemary Harriott

Report by Louise Pavey

Our speaker began by saying that in her talk she would be concentrating mainly on the work of Thomas Wright, a designer of rustic cells, root houses, and hermitages. Wright, born in 1711 in County Durham, was primarily an astronomer, mathematician, and designer of navigational instruments;

but at least part of his life he spent in landscape design. As tutor to several aristocratic families (his first patron was the Earl of Scarborough) he became widely known in these circles, and worked at Shugborough and Raby Castle in early life. There in addition to designing ordinary buildings he began to specialise in rustic structures which would provide places in the landscape for reflection, rest and closeness to nature: the owner would feel in some sense related to the lives of his workers through these links to the countryside. Wright's designs for such 'root' houses were carried out in wood (as the name implies) and then infilled with moss which might be brought from many miles away. At Stoke Park in 1750 Wright built 'Bladud's Cell' for the owner, Norborne Berkeley. Although it still remains to be discovered, a sketch exists showing the cell at the end of a long woodland walk surrounded by grassy openings and new shrubs introduced from North America (Berkeley was Governor of Virginia).

The report of a quotation from Latin, together with mathematical symbols and equations let into the floor, has been mistakenly given to the cell at Stoke Park, whereas they are in fact features in a similar structure designed by Wright in 1747-9 at Badminton for the 4th Duke of Beaufort. Known as 'Urganda's Cell', this is large as root houses go. The name of Urganda seems to have come from a play by Lord Lansdowne called 'The British Enchanters', which showed a grove with fountains, Urganda and her attendant Delia, and featured transformation scenes. The quotation erroneously supposed to have been at Stoke Park is a couplet from Ovid ingeniously adapted to accommodate the name Urganda.

The reason that material to do with Stoke Park can be found among the Badminton archives is due to Elizabeth Berkeley having married the 4th Duke of Beaufort.

These rustic hermitages designed by Wright carried with them all sorts of romantic associations with early British history and the kind of semi-magical practices thought to be carried out then. His work can therefore be related to the interest in the Druids shown by his contemporary John Wood. It may be significant that Wright was commissioned by the Earl of Scarborough to draw and measure stone circles including Stanton Drew. We are indebted to the speaker for a wide-ranging and thought-provoking talk.

PATIENTS, DOCTORS AND DISEASES IN RESTORATION BATH

Wednesday 8th February

Speaker: Dr Roger Rolls

Report by Maria Joyce

Dr Rolls began by describing the general historical background to his subject. During the second half of the 17th century Bath was a walled city with about 2000 inhabitants living in 'narrow, uneven and unpleasant streets' (according to the diarist John Evelyn). The lower parts of the town were subject to serious flooding, causing water infections like typhoid and dysentery. The three principal baths - King's, Hot, and Cross Bath - were rather shabby and unhygienic but attracted many visitors, partly because medical writers such as Dr William Turner, Dr John Jones and Dr Edward Jordan praised the beneficial effect of the waters. Royal visits also acted as a boost. Spring and autumn were the two most popular seasons for bathing, summer being considered too hot.

Around 1630 pumps were installed to replace the more primitive method of 'bucketing': water would be pumped on to the parts of the body needing treatment. It was believed that acrimonious humours could be diluted in this way. Preparation before bathing might include bleeding, having enemas, and being made to vomit. Apart from lodging houses and inns for visitors to Bath, Bellot's Hospital (the original building demolished in 1859) offered accommodation. Twelve male patients of small means could stay here for up to four weeks, receiving a weekly allowance of seven groats.

The best known Bath physician of this time was Dr Robert Peirce of Abbey House, Kingston Parade. Most physicians working in the city had practices elsewhere and did not reside in Bath. They visited patients in their homes, and if a patient's case had to be discussed they would meet with their colleagues in a coffee house. Physicians had university training and were allowed to prescribe internal medicines, while surgeons and apothecaries learnt their trade by apprenticeship. The latter, more often referred to as surgeon-apothecaries, were however medical practitioners in their own right. Locally grown herbs were used as medicaments, though by the second half of the 17th century these were supplemented by imported ones. Culpeper described their usage as plasters for broken bones. It was thought prudent to avoid major surgery because of the danger of infection: the principles of antiseptics were unknown. Operations were carried out in the patient's home or his lodgings, since hospitals as such did not exist until the 18th century. Medical men often had a second income from rents and real estate - for example, owning a lodging house and running it as a nursing home. Infant mortality was high. Dr Peirce's own family provides a poignant instance: only one of his four children reached adulthood, as recorded on the memorial tablet on the wall of the north aisle in Bath Abbey. Many visitors to Bath may have suffered from lead poisoning. Recent research has shown that prolonged immersion up to the neck in water can enhance excretion of lead. Indeed several cases mentioned in Peirce's Memoirs and in Guidott's Register of Bath suggest lead poisoning, although this was not recognised at the time.

In summing up Dr Rolls observed that patients' problems in the 17th century were not so different from those of patients today. In certain ways, however, the practice in Bath then has parallels with conditions in developing countries now, where infection is the rule and early diagnosis the exception. He concluded what had been a fascinating talk by answering questions and shedding further light on some of his well-chosen illustrations

THE HISTORY OF BOATING IN BATH

Wednesday 8th March

Speaker: Terry Hardick

Report by Michael Rowe

Terry Hardick began by recounting the background to the establishment of the boating station on its present site. The construction of Cleveland Bridge in 1827 meant that the original ferry (which up to that time had provided

transportation across the river between Walcot and Bathwick) was now made redundant. Downstream of the bridge can be seen the remains of the ferry steps, and here on the Bathwick side at the boundaries of the Ennix and Friz Moore fields (shown on the 1727 map of the Pulteney estate) have been found the remains of the last ferry boat when it was beached. This is the site of the boating station, where James Aust is recorded as the first tenant (1833). After his death in 1848 the tenancy passed to another of the same name (presumably his son) who held it until 1861. Terry Hardick suggests that James Aust may have been the last ferryman, so that the tenancy continuing in his family could well have been some sort of compensation for losing the ferry franchise. By 1841 it had become known as Aust's Tea and Pleasure Gardens, and a centre for pleasure boating of all kinds. The earliest regattas are recorded in 1855, as well as races in friendly rivalry between teams from the local police force and fire service. From the late Victorian era onwards various rowing clubs - including the Bath Amateurs, the Avon Rowing Club, and later the Bath Ladies Rowing Club - were all based here.

About 1861 the tenancy had passed to Charles Maynard, a master boat builder, so that the site also started to specialise in the construction of punts and skiffs. The Hardick connection began when Terry's maternal grandfather Fred Fisher (born in Lyncombe Union Workhouse) was taken on at Maynard's Boatyard at the age of thirteen to learn the craft. He rose in the business so that after Charles Maynard retired to Windsor it was Fisher who became manager to the incoming Bath Boating Company Ltd. He and his wife Elizabeth lived in a cottage in the grounds, 23 Villa Fields, where they raised a family.

Their son Freddy joined the business after the Great War but then predeceased his father, at which point Dan Hardick (who had married Beatrice Fisher) took his place and was trained in the craft by Fred Fisher. Later Dan's son Terry was also trained in the same way by his grandfather Fred; and today the business has passed from Terry to his daughter who is a skilled boat builder herself.

The boating station has passed through periods of hardship as well as the prosperity it enjoyed during the heyday of late Victorian and Edwardian pleasure boating. In order to rescue the business in the depression of the thirties a lido was established which remained successful for some years. This was illustrated together with a number of photographs of the Civil Defence (based there in wartime). A high spot occurred in 1962, at the time of the Venetian Regatta held at Pulteney Weir, when the boatyard was much involved in repairing the star of the show, a real gondola from Venice. The group was most appreciative of this informative talk, which combined charming personal reminiscences with insights into some of the methods of boat construction. Afterwards several members bought copies of Terry Hardick's illustrated book covering the subject.

WALK ROUND COMBE DOWN

Wednesday 10th May

Guides: Rosemary Simmons, Malcolm Aylett and Phyllis Brown

Report by Michael Rowe

This promised to be a most important walk by virtue of the significant contribution of Ralph Allen and his stone mines to the development of the Georgian city. Sadly, at the very moment we foregathered outside the Hadley Arms, a rumble of thunder heralded a storm which then influenced the conduct and the extent of our tour. Much history and local lore was, however, exchanged within our congenial company. Firstly the route of Pope's walk, a footpath at the side of the western of the two pillars at the top of Ralph Allen Drive, was outlined: after crossing the Ridgeway, the main road along the top of the down, it continues as the Long Drung behind the houses of the The Avenue and then downhill to Tucking Mill and Midford. Our guides explained the system of 'drungs' [from the Old English word for 'squeeze'], the small narrow lanes running between the houses, which were to be one of the main features of the walk. On the opposite side of the The Avenue, the Firs Field (site of much activity in the £153,000,000 stabilisation project) was part of Allen's progressive land acquisition from 1726. Since the best stone was on this side of the ridge the Firs had one of the biggest shafts of the three main entrances to the mines and was served by a crane. From here the famous wooden railway ran down to the Dolemeads.

In all forty acres of mines are known, with multiple smaller shafts and air vents throughout the village. Our walk took in a deep example of one of the surface quarries, the De Montalt, behind The Avenue. There was a former chapel in Williamstow, and several properties here have Biblical texts carved into the walls. The group of shops at the end of The Avenue formerly comprised the Copper Kettle Tea Room, a haberdasher, the Church rooms (1897), and the Carriage Inn which served the quarrymen on one of the penultimate stages of the wooden railway. Opposite is the Co-Op, a simple purpose-designed 1930s building in the Art Deco style. On crossing Church Road the fine former bank building (c1890) marks the corner, opposite which is the curving drungway behind Holy

Trinity Church. The church was built by Goodridge (1835-7) and paid for by Rajah Brooke of Sarawak among other local subscribers. The neo-Jacobean vicarage has a good stable yard connected to the basement of the house by an underground tunnel. The path leads down to Belmont Road, with more fine villas and the lost site of a Roman villa (its artefacts now distributed between the Roman Baths Museum and Taunton). Eight Roman coffins have also been found in the village.

On our way the site of Smith's quarries was pointed out, and then that of the De Montalt paper mill (the subject of a recent HBRG paper by Owen Ward). Returning uphill via Summer Lane we saw more surface quarries and Quarry Vale cottages which clearly demonstrated the steep changes in levels and the rear access by the characteristic drung between the houses. A short walk from the upper end of the drung led to the King William IV public house and welcome shelter from the heavy rain and lightning.

The back of the pub is the boundary between Lyncombe, Widcombe and Monkton Combe parishes. The whole area from the pub to the church was one of the first surface mines which, as mining progressed underground, then became the stone dressing yard. When surface mining ceased, in order to make the land more suitable for agriculture, it was a requirement that all brash and topsoil should be reinstated. On the death of Ralph Allen in 1764 the estate passed to the Earl de Montalt who had little interest in quarrying. Everything therefore was sold off in small lots and - from 1803 onwards - many of Allen's 50,000 Scots pines cut down. Also behind the pub was the entrance to the later Byfield mine (the subject of Richard Irving's recent publication advertised at an HBRG meeting). Most pubs in the village had a mine entrance, and miners were given tallies to exchange for beer at the end of the day.

Sales of stone outside Bath are exemplified in the career of Sir Philip Nowell, a Guelphic Knight. He acted as a salesman providing stone initially for work at Longleat. His contacts with Jeffrey Wyatt then led to Bath stone being transported down Brassknocker Hill to the aqueduct and by canal to a wharfe now the site of Victoria Station in London. There it was used, among other projects, for rebuilding part of Windsor Castle and the garden front of Buckingham Palace, as well as re-casing Apsley House. As a reward for his part in these royal building projects Nowell was invested by King William IV with an order of knighthood personal to the monarchy (known as 'Guelph', from the family name of the ruling houses of Brunswick and Britain). The name of the pub where we sought shelter, as well as nearby Brunswick Place, serve here as a reminder of the king's action. Rockall, the Nowells' house in Combe Down, was left ultimately to Magdalene Chapel as a children's home and is now sheltered accommodation.

On resuming our walk, Davidge's Bottom was pointed out where beer was served on Sunday mornings and drinkers had an entrance to the mine out of sight of the constable. Fine houses extend east along Church Road from Isabella Place to South Parade. During the 19th century the village became a healthy alternative to the putrid air in the city centre and a place for recuperation after spa treatments. Earl de Montalt converted the former quarrymen's cottages into lodgings for this purpose, such as Isabella Place (named for the earl's second wife) built in the 1770s. Despite the unhelpful storms this proved a most instructive tour, and we are indebted to our guides for giving us such a good understanding of the working of Combe Down at its busiest in the 18th and 19th centuries.

EXHIBITION REPORT

BRUNEL IN BATH

Holburne Museum of Art, Great Pulteney Street

9 April to 2 July 2006

Report by Philippa Bishop

As part of the bicentenary birthday celebrations for Isambard Kingdom Brunel the Holburne Museum put on show a small choice exhibition, organised with help from the Heritage Lottery Fund through 'Brunel 200'. Concentrating on the achievements of Brunel in Bath, as its title suggested, the exhibition traced in fascinating detail the progress of the GWR line into the Box Tunnel - a herculean task - and out the other side towards Bathford and Bathampton, and then from Bath towards Twerton and Bristol. Through the use of contemporary prints, drawings and plans, including Brunel's own 'Sketchbook', a vivid picture emerged of his care for the architectural detail of the bridges and the Bath Spa station building, as well as his ideas for the dramatic presentation of the railway as it bisected Sydney Gardens. The two splendid albums recording the work involved in the construction of the London and Birmingham Railway (1838) and the Great Western Railway (1846), illustrated by John Cooke Bourne, helped to sum up the overall achievement of Brunel as engineer and designer, while the display of some of the great man's own instruments - protractor, set square and monogrammed scale rules - provided a poignant personal note.

Professor Angus Buchanan, author of the definitive biography of Brunel, acted as chief adviser to this project, and also wrote the excellent booklet which accompanied it.

BOOK REVIEW

BATH HISTORY VOLUME X

Mary Ede

Bath History Volume X is a worthy volume to follow its nine predecessors in a series recognised not only for its academic quality but also for its readability. The eight articles certainly fulfil the aim of the series “to present these studies in a way which will be attractive to everyone with an interest in the past”. The Editor is to be warmly congratulated on the range of topics covered and their spread from pre-Conquest times to the 19th century. Brenda Buchanan has given sterling service as editor of the last five volumes and we thank her for all her care and attention to the details of editing. The book is a pleasure to handle and owes much for its design to Tim Graham who has published the last five in the series. We must also thank Brenda and Angus for their great generosity in underpinning the volume’s production when the Bath Archaeological Trust was no longer in existence to do so. Our best response is to encourage people to buy it!

Frank Thorn’s contribution to the study of Domesday Book, alongside that of his wife, Caroline, is outstanding and here he turns to its evidence as a starting point to unravel the history of Bath Hundred. After a helpful introduction on the complex process of the Domesday Survey (and his notes are especially useful for non-medievalists), he produces a list of the 17 Somerset estates in the Bath Hundred showing the holders in both 1066 and 1086 and the number of hides in each. He argues convincingly that the total was once 100 hides before the land between Freshford and Moncton Combe was granted to Shaftsbury Abbey and so makes Bath Hundred conform to the pattern of hundreds established in the 10th century as administrative units. He proceeds to show how, despite the fragmentary evidence, this group of independent estates can nevertheless be traced back to a single royal estate of “100 homesteads” granted to the 7th century nunnery of Abbess Bertana. It’s a fascinating piece of scholarly detection.

The title of John Wroughton’s article on the less savoury side of Bath in the 17th century (“At the Gates of Hell”) comes from a French visitor who must have encountered a “sulphurous fog” which makes our car fume pollution mild in comparison. John Wroughton draws on his unrivalled knowledge of 17th century Bath to show how the growing and prosperous health resort was threatened by the problems of beggars, sanitation and disease. Much of the evidence is drawn from the Council Minutes and the Chamberlain’s Accounts which indicate both the extent of the problems and the attempts to deal with them. Successive by-laws for example tried to enforce the householder’s responsibility in keeping the streets clean. The disposal of sewage was an even greater health hazard and, though some progress was made in the collection of the night soil, the stench in the streets continued. It was not until the 1707 Act of Parliament empowered the city authorities to pave and clean the city themselves that significant progress could be made.

Michael Bishop’s article deals with a very different 17th century topic: Bath’s second Guildhall which stood in the middle of the High Street from c1630 to 1776. He set out to make a scale model of it, and describes his search for information on its size and appearance sufficient to translate into 3-D form. He takes us through the visual evidence (from 15 illustrations) and later the documentary. While the Gilmore vignette (1694) and the Eyre watercolour (c1776) are familiar, the copies of originals done in 1750s or 1760s (plausibly James Vertue) will be new to many. It’s fascinating following the process of deducing scale and measurements and their conversion into the model, including using evidence from the Council records to explain the alterations to the building. Michael Bishop concludes that the Stuart Guildhall was a rebuilding of the arcaded Tudor Market House, with a new staircase inserted, and the main front to the north. Windows were sashed in 1718 and Killegrew’s classical extension on the south end built in 1724 (of which no picture exists). Did Inigo Jones make a draft for the Stuart Guildhall? Conclusively rejected.

The editor’s own contribution is an account of the gunpowder mills at Woolley in the 18th century, the investigation of which has led her into wider research in the history of gunpowder. Woolley lies just a mile or two to the north-east of Bath in the Swainswick valley and it is hard today to imagine it was once a busy industrial site. Brenda Buchanan describes the founding of the Powder Mills in 1722 by four Bristol merchants with useful London connections to secure contracts and with their own interests in the slave trade (gunpowder being a crucial barter good). A move to the countryside in a secluded valley offered space, security, water power and charcoal. The maps and illustrations are helpful in following the suggested interpretation of the site’s layout and process of manufacture (though one really needs a magnifying glass!) For most of the 18th century this was a flourishing business, linked to Bristol’s Atlantic trade but by 1802 the mills closed. Was this in anticipation of legislation ending the slave trade (1807) or competition from the United States the more significant cause?

It is refreshing to have a hitherto unknown attorney, William Yescombe, brought to our attention and have his career in Bath between 1760 and 1774 reconstructed by a 20th century Yescombe Whereas family papers can often prove a goldmine, here Edward Yescombe has drawn on newspapers, court cases and property records to show how William Yescombe came to Bath from Bristol and set up as an attorney, riding, as he says, “a wave of speculation on Bath’s prosperity until financial disaster struck” His career touched the lives of a number of notable Bath figures Wood, Gainsborough, Chilcot and Herschel It was his involvement in the housing boom (he built 3 houses in Queen’s Parade for Wood) that probably proved fatal when the financial crisis of 1772 affected the whole country Edward Yescombe’s account brings out the role of attorneys as short-term investors for clients before the country banks were established It’s a real window into the financial aspects of Bath’s expansion.

A very different person is the subject of Holger Th.Graf’s article Sarab Scott (1720-1795) was born into a wealthy family, well educated and always close to her sister, Elizabeth Montagu, the brilliant blue-stocking Sarab’s marriage failed after nine months and she went to live with her friend, Lady Barbara Montagu in Bath from 1752 till 1765 There financial necessity turned her into a writer, firstly of novels and then three historical treatises It is these latter works that the author discusses, noting that Sarab believed “the purpose of history was always to provide edifying and instructive models and examples for the present day” Though not the aim of historians now, Holger Th Graf suggests that Sarab Scott should be regarded as an early “professional” writer on the strength of her History of Mecklenburgh.

A spot of detective work on an untitled ledger found among the account books of a Bristol school led William Evans to identify it as belonging to John Naish who ran a boarding school at I Hatfield Place, Bath for Quaker boys in the early years of the 19th century His article is a valuable addition to our knowledge of educational provision in this period There were numerous small private academies in Bath at this time but they are known only from the brief advertisements in the local paper Here we have interesting information on the curriculum, the teaching staff and other employees and the general running of the establishment in Hatfield Place over the years 1809-18 R William Evans draws also on Quaker records, identifying a number of the fee-payers for example and reproducing the long and informative prospectus as well as information on John Naish himself.

Angus Buchanan’s essay on Brunel in Bath is a refinement of the lecture he gave to the Group in 1998 It is good to have this now available for a wider readership Brunel’s associations with Bath were, as Angus Buchanan writes, “incidental to his major preoccupations” but we are fortunate to have his diary account of one of those incidental occasions the visit he made to William Beckford in 1830 to canvass support for the Clifton Suspension Bridge It was of course the Great Western Railway that gave Bath and Brunel their enduring link In this essay three parts of the project are described the approach to Bath from Bristol, the line from Bath to the Box Tunnel, and the siting and design of Bath Spa Station Angus discusses Brunel’s choice of route, the effects of the viaduct cutting Twerton in half, the theatrical siting in Sydney Gardens, and the dramatic portico of Box Tunnel The illustrations and map add considerably to the interest of the essay, especially the examples from Brunel’s sketchbooks with their meticulous details.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY MEMBERS

“HAZARDOUS AND SCANTY SECURITYS” :THE SEQUEL

“The Instability of All Human Possessions”

Edward Yescombe

When William married his wife Sarah in 1760 she brought with her a £6,000 fortune which transformed his financial position. After his death in 1774 Sarah would have received nothing from his estate, which would have been taken by his creditors, but fortunately her marriage settlement protected her from becoming penniless. In 1771, under the terms of the settlement, £1,000 was invested into a 5% mortgage over the Cardiganshire estates of one James Lloyd - more than fifty small farms and other pieces of land in and around Aberystwyth - and was still held in this investment at the time of William’s death, when it would of course have been protected from his creditors. As William had died and they had no children, under the terms of the marriage settlement the mortgage was transferred back to Sarah by her trustees in January 1775. She sold the mortgage for its full face value to William Anderdon, a Bath apothecary, on 16th September 1775, and received cash in exchange [*National Library of Wales/Eaton Evans & Williams (Haverfordwest) Deeds 403-7*] This was no doubt part of an arrangement she was putting in place for her second marriage, which took place two days later to Thomas Elmes, another Bath apothecary (*Bath Chronicle*, 21 September 1775). Subsequent events suggest that she then allowed her husband to get control of all her money.

The story from here was told by *The Bath Herald & General Advertiser*, of 4 May 1793:

THE VICISSITUDES OF FORTUNE

Last week died Mrs. ELMES, the wife of an Apothecary, and widow of Mr. YESCOMBE, a very eminent Attorney, both of this city. On her first marriage, such were her personal, and mental endowments, that the Journals of the day reported "the smallest appendages which she brought with her, to render that state completely happy was a portion of Six Thousand Pounds!" - She then absolutely rolled in her own carriage, and was in the habit of paying and receiving the visits of all the polite part of the city. Though her second union was not marked with so much splendour, yet it had the prospect of as great a share of domestic comfort, - which proved, however, of short duration. Idleness, extravagance, and mutual disgust, rendered their lives a scene of misery, and reduced them to extreme indigence. The partner of her husband, with that humanity and justice which has ever dignified his character, saved from the wreck of their effects, a weekly allowance for her life, sufficient, with some degree of prudence, for a decent support. But it was not long before she was seen in the streets of this city in a condition bespeaking "a variety of wretchedness" - a wretched spectacle, craving the boon of every passenger. She has often been thoroughly and creditably clothed, by many humane persons "the companions," perhaps, "of her happier days". Yet such was her propensity to rags and strong liquors, that within a few hours, every garment which had been presented to her were at the pawn-brokers, and the produce at the gin shop. Becoming at length a loathsome public nuisance, the Magistrates charitably ordered her to be confined within the walls of the parish workhouse, where she ended her wretched existence; a sad, but not useless example, of the instability of all human possessions and striking instance of the deplorable consequences of such misconduct!

"A Stranger and Pilgrim"

By the time of his death William Yescombe had not only ruined himself but also his elder brother Robert, who had tried to save him. By 1780 Robert was forced to relinquish the Yescombe family estate to his creditors and was left with nothing but the family house in Bristol. Robert's life after 1780 would be shrouded in obscurity save for an extraordinary light thrown on it by the Autobiography of Rev William Jay (1769-1853), a fashionable Congregationalist preacher, popular writer on devotional subjects, and minister of the Argyle Street Chapel in Bath for over sixty years from 1791 until just before his death.

He related the story of " - Yescombe, Esq." [who was clearly Robert], saying "*Of his family I am ignorant, though I think he once mentioned that he had a brother who commanded a government packet to Lisbon*" [actually his nephew], and that at time of writing (perhaps in the 1840s) it was "a considerable time since his death".

Travelling in Wales around the time of the loss of the family fortune, and presumably deeply depressed, Robert met a Roman Catholic priest near Abergavenny. According to Jay (whom it would not be unfair to describe as a bit prejudiced),

He was shortly, by the zeal and art of his new associate, drawn over to Popery, and fell so entirely under the control of this man, that he was prevailed upon to deliver up his Bible (of which, alas! he had made but little use,) and to live a kind of monkish life in a sort of mountain cave; and though he had often witnessed the occasional intemperance of the priest, he went weekly, and regularly and solemnly, to confess before him for penance and pardon.

This story can be confirmed independently. Under the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1778 (the passing of which led to the Gordon Riots in London), Catholics who wished to establish churches and worship openly had to swear an oath of allegiance to George III. Monmouthshire was one of the remaining centres of the 'Old Faith', and a succession of Catholics appeared before local magistrates to take the oath. Robert Yescombe, then living at Mamhilad a small village near Pontypool, is listed in a group that also included Mary and John Jones of Lanarth Court (a leading Catholic family) who came up before magistrates in Usk in August 1791 [*Publications of the Catholic Record Society*, Vol. 9 (1911), p.136].

According to Jay, such was Robert's religious devotion that, sixteen years later (i.e. in the mid 1790s), he decided to become a Trappist monk, and set out to visit the monastery at La Trappe to see it for himself. Passing through Bath, he happened to go into the Lady Huntingdon Chapel, and listened to a sermon which created doubts in his mind about Catholicism. The minister there referred him to Jay, who convinced him of the error of his ways. (In fact he was one of only two people whom Jay converted from Catholicism throughout his career.) Jay related his life thereafter:

Yet he said, as he was single, and had now been so accustomed to solitude, and from habit enjoyed it, he hoped he might still be allowed to live much in retirement; and this he did, occupying two rooms away from all interruption

and intercourse; walking with God, and confessing himself a stranger and pilgrim on the earth.

The next glimpse of Robert comes with his will, which he made in August 1811 [*The National Archives/PROB/11/1570/351*]. He described himself as “*late of Bristol but now of Bath*”, where he was then lodging at the house of one Mr Springfield, to whose wife he left £20. In another legacy - seeming to confirm his reconversion - he left £100 to Sir John Durbin (1734-1814), a former Mayor of Bristol who lived not far from the Yescombe House on College Green. Durbin was linked to the Methodist community in Bristol; his nephew Henry Durbin was a close associate of the Wesleys. A further £10 was left to a John White of Pontypool, token of his continuing connection with Monmouth-

shire; and the residue of his estate went to his great-nephew Edward Bayntun Yescombe. By this time he had outlived both his own and the succeeding generation of the Yescombe family.

Another extraordinary coincidence gives us a final view of Robert a year later. In September 1812, a year after Robert had made his will, the writer and philosopher William Godwin passed through Chepstow, where he wrote to his wife: [*Bodleian Library (Abinger Dep. c.523)*]¹

At the Black-Rock Inn, New Passage, I spent the evening with a very singular character, a Mr. Yescombe, once an attorney at Bristol, but now seventy-five years of age, & scarcely able to hobble with repeated attacks of the gout. He has left off business many years, & has lived, I think they say, the last thirty, among the mountains of Wales, without a friend or associate, & glad of the sight of the first human creature that will talk to him. He has resided, as he told me, the last twelvemonth entirely at this inn, in a little, dark, back room, with an immense fire, for the benefit of the air. He sees no human creature that would give one penny to save him from dying tomorrow. The people of the inn neglect him, & he is always served last & worst. I tried to draw him out with a variety of topics, but I found his information no whit higher in any respect than the waiter or the chambermaid.

Robert died in 1815, at the age of 77. As he had directed in his will, he was buried in the family vault in the chancel of the church of St Mary Port in Bristol (though this is no longer to be seen, as the church was destroyed by enemy action in 1940). I suspect there is still more research to be done on his thirty years in the mountains of Wales.

APOLOGY

We apologise for the fact that in the last issue of the Newsletter the report on the Oldfield Park walk guided by Allan Keevil contained a number of errors. Allan has now produced a corrected version and would be happy to share this with any members who are interested.

¹I am grateful to Professor Pamela Clemit of Durham University who kindly found and transcribed Godwin's letter, and to the Bodleian Library for permission to reproduce it.