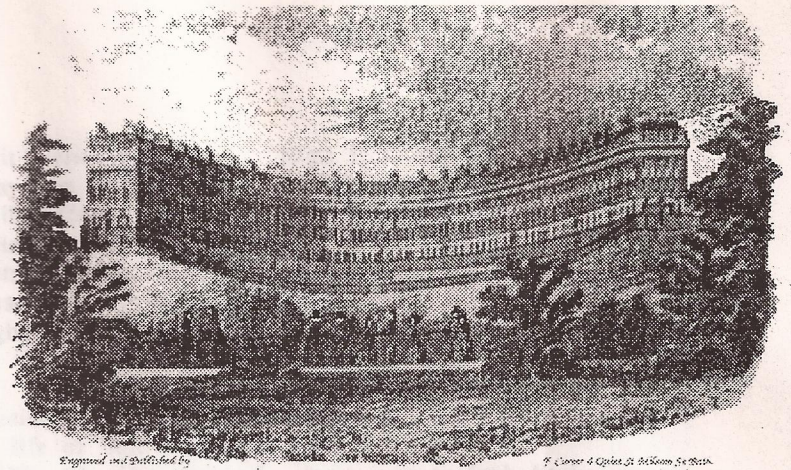


# The Royal Crescent Society Newsletter



Issue 9

September 1988

## A Message From Our Chairman

by Air Chief Marshal  
Sir John Barraclough

**A**t our Annual General Meeting in April the election of committee members was a key item on the agenda and following Commander Roy Titchen's resignation through pressure of business I found myself voted in as Chairman of the committee in his place.

I am not exactly short of commitments myself but I am grateful for your confidence and, with the experienced assistance of our Vice-Chairman Mr Michael Daw, I will do my best to carry forward the excellent work of previous chairmen and committees in the interests of all residents of the Crescent.

Those who could not attend the AGM will wish to know that we passed a hearty vote of thanks to Roy Titchen and this was reiterated at our next committee meeting when we made a small presentation to him.

To those thanks I must add, on behalf of us all, our appreciation to the outgoing committee members and our welcome to the new members elected in their place. You will find a

list of the current committee members set out on page 3.

Special thanks are also due to Captain Francis Burne and those who served with him on the Traffic Committee for their success in achieving the coach ban and thus the protection of our listed buildings from vibration, the unknown effects of exhaust pollution and the heavy wear and tear on the setts together with the associated stress on the footings of the lawn railings.

Although the City retains the right to send its own sightseeing buses through the Crescent, the worst of the nuisance has been mitigated. In spite of the fact that there are some formalities to be completed by the County Council before the prohibitions become permanent, we are optimistic that the ban can be chalked up as a major success for the Society which we hope all residents will appreciate.

Your committee realises that the newsletter must be our main medium of communication with members. In the committee changes we unfortunately lost our Editor and in consequence we have fallen short of three issues a year. Happily Dr Monica Baly, who was for long our Secretary, has been voted back on the committee and has valiantly agreed to take on the Editorship, with Bill Wallis acting as Deputy Editor.

We hope to include articles of historical interest in addition to matters of current concern (of which there is never a shortage) as well as practical aspects on the maintenance of the Crescent houses, local regulations,

improvement grants and the like.

It is crucially important that we keep up a high level of membership (details on page 4), not only because of the financial aspects of maintaining the lawn, railings and other charges that may be levied on us, but also because officers of the committee can only speak with authority in the interests of the Society if we have the backing of a substantial proportion of our residents.

This letter will therefore go to all residents whether they be members or not, and, in the next few weeks, members of the committee will canvass non-members and hope to persuade them to join. Irrespective of individual responses I hope residents will see a need for this membership drive and accord our emissaries a courteous hearing without feeling that it is an intrusion.

The committee is determined to pursue vigorously any matters with threaten the amenity of the Crescent and, on behalf of us all, to discharge the trust which must go with living in the (to borrow the Editor's quote elsewhere) 'finest sweep of domestic architecture in Europe'.

As your chairman I hope I can look forward to your support.

### LATE NEWS

The Society intends to oppose the application for change of use from residence to a hotel for Nos 21 and 22 Royal Crescent, which you may have seen advertised. If you disagree with this intent would you please notify the Secretary, Mrs A. Trechmann.



# The World We Have Lost

*The Royal Crescent*  
*Thirty Years Ago*  
by Monica Baly

If there were a dozen cars parked we thought it was excessive and wondered what was on. There were no yellow lines, no wardens, no fines, hardly any traffic and the grass grew between the setts. The war had changed the Crescent, two houses had been bombed and had by now been rebuilt, but other houses were slightly damaged and scarred and a number were empty.

This house - No 19 - and No 20 had just been returned to the market, having been a hostel for the College of Domestic Science. Nevertheless, there was still an air of faded distinction about the Crescent, it was a pleasant, peaceful and quiet place in which to live, and with Cater, Stoffel and Fortt and other shops in Margaret's Passage making deliveries and even taking goods up the stairs, it was very convenient.

The Dowager Lady Celia Noble, the great-granddaughter of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, doyenne of the arts in Bath, benefactor of the Abbey and hostess to Queen Mary, lived in an elegant house at No 22. In a severe winter I remember offering to sweep her snow but she said firmly that she could do it herself. At that time she must have been about 90 years old.

Next door, at No 21, Mrs Thornhill, herself an accomplished pianist, kept house for the brother-in-law of Harriet Cohen and had five grand pianos. Here, in the early days of the Festival, Yehudi Menuhin used to stay. One of my most treasured early memories is of talking to Mr Menuhin early one morning as I got into my car and we looked over the pleasant expanse of the lawn towards Bath and

pronounced it 'a civilised city'.

In those days the Festival was almost a family affair. People with space and pianos acted as hosts to visiting artists and in the morning it was not unusual to hear the strains of the night's concert floating through the open windows in the Crescent.

Another resident associated with the musical life of Bath was Mrs Tizzard at No 15. Her musical soirees were in the tradition of the nineteenth century salon, and an early memory is of seeing people in evening dress and fur wraps converging in a manner worthy of the pen of Jane Austen. Mrs Beth Green, who lives in this house, remembers those evenings and acting as an accompanist.

At that time No 16 was a Guest House run by a Mr and Mrs Newman and catered for long term, and often distinguished, guests who were themselves part of the life of the Crescent and whom we occasionally met in Caters - that hub of Crescent life and gossip - or as they took a daily constitutional.

I first got to know the houses of the Crescent by selling poppies for the British Legion. Then almost all doors were open and you could take your tray into the house and up the stairs. We did not lock our front doors any more than we locked our cars.

But I learned as I went round that all was not elegance. No 1 was blackened, decayed and almost derelict, with old ladies in bed-sitting rooms who longed to talk to someone. Basements were often empty, or if inhabited, then they probably should not have been. Some houses, particularly those with only one family, were lovely and well cared for, but a number of early flat conversions left much to be desired and today would not pass the planning authorities.

The lawn, that heritage from John Wood to the residents of the Crescent - the green cushion on which the architectural jewel is set - was kept in order by the generosity of a few residents. We all received no-

tices from the solicitors who administered the fund, but, as we did not understand that the lawn was part of the Crescent, for the most part we did nothing about it. The lawn railings were broken and the gates did not close; as more people came to live in the Crescent and Marlborough Buildings a footpath was being worn from the west end to the ha-ha wall.

It is easy to look back through rose-coloured spectacles, when it seems that summers were always hot and sunny, but in thirty years there have been gains as well as losses. No 1 has been restored to its pristine glory and a number of houses have been restored with a sensitivity for the eighteenth century heritage.

Planning permission for alterations is now more stringent. Thanks to Mr Forrester, your previous committee and a fortuitous film, the railings and the gates have been restored and the lawn has remained comparatively unspoilt. Through gentle persuasion, that ghastly forest of television aerials that ruined the skyline and the wires that defaced the facade have largely disappeared, though we need eternal vigilance.

But above all we have a Royal Crescent Society through which every resident, new or old, whether living in the basement, top floor, or whole house, can make his or her voice heard and contribute to the life of the Crescent as a whole. Thirty years ago we may have had our patrons of the arts and our salons, but there was no cohesion of purpose or forum through which policy could be made, and, above all, no means of protest as the tendency grew to use the Royal Crescent for commercial exploitation.

In the mid-eighteenth century Bath was a great tourist attraction, a byword for gambling and scandal, then it declined into quiet gentility. Now it is a boom tourist attraction again, though less colourfully.

We should be pleased that more people see and enjoy 'the finest



sweep of domestic architecture in Europe', but we must ensure that they do not destroy the thing they come to see. One reason, among many, as to why Bath's popularity declined towards the end of the eighteenth century was that it became overcrowded. Six hundred and eighty people arriving each week could no longer be received individually by the Master of Ceremonies, and fashionable society began to take itself to the more select waters of Cheltenham and Malvern, or to follow the Prince Regent to Brighton.

The Editor acknowledges that recollections were helped by having tea with Mrs Beilta Cotter, formerly of No 27 and 28, while in Canada.

## Report of The Annual General Meeting

**A**pproximately 40 members of the Society attended the AGM on 22 April at the Bath and County Club and heard the chairman's review of the year, which included discussions with the City Council about activities involving the use of the lower lawn and their effect on residents, the new parking scheme, the success story of the ban on coaches and the control of behaviour on the lawn.

The members were sorry to hear of the resignation as Chairman of Commander Titchen, who had served the Society diligently through a difficult period. There were two nominations for Chairman, Air Chief Marshal Sir John Barraclough and Mr Fabrice Le Roux. In a ballot, Sir John was elected. Eight names were put forward for the committee, an indication of the interest in the Society. The following were elected on a paper ballot:

Dulcie Morrell (No 19)  
Barbara Walker (No 10)

Robert Weston (No 5)  
Monica Baly (No 19)  
Gillian Eschele (No 29)  
Bill Wallis (No 28)

Annabel Trechmann (No 5) was re-elected as Secretary and Michael Daw (No 10) was re-elected as Treasurer.

Following the AGM, it was agreed that the Society needed a Vice-Chairman and Mr Daw, who has had much experience with the Society, has accepted the position. Mr Weston is now the Treasurer. Mr Brian Richards remains the honorary auditor.

Following the official business David Maclaughlin, Conservation Architect for Bath City Council and British Heritage, talked on the grants system in Bath and how householders could apply for aid. This proved of great interest to the members of the Society who, during the buffet supper, besieged Mr Maclaughlin for more information.

The meeting was a happy occasion and enjoyed by residents for whom the Royal Crescent is not just somewhere to live, but a real community with communal interests and a sense of neighbourhood.

### Restoration Grants

There are £300,000 worth of grants available each year for repairs to existing buildings, which cover 40 per cent of the costs. The grants are given so that buildings can be repaired in natural and indigenous materials under proper supervision by practicing architects. The grants cover the conservation of the landscape, replanting and arboriculture as well as architectural features such as the restoration of glazing bars. Applications should be made to the Bath City Planning Department.

Members of the Bath Preservation Trust will have noticed that the Trust also gives grants for the restoration of architectural features. The Trust's May newsletter included a list of 24 houses, one in the Crescent and many in the area,

that have received grants towards restoration, replacement or restoration work. Any interested resident should get in touch with the Bath Preservation Trust.

## *Royal Crescent News*



### OBITUARIES

We are sad to report the tragic death of Barry Douglas, aged 76 years, in a swimming pool at his new home in Bruton, on 15 June. Mr and Mrs Douglas lived at No 12 Royal Crescent for 12 years and Barry was well known for his indefatigable opposition to the coaches. Our heartfelt sympathy goes to his widow, Mrs Gladys Douglas.

Also in June came the death of a well loved resident, Mrs Iris Stoffel, aged 96 years. Mrs Stoffel had lived at No 17 since 1950. Her husband, who was 'Stoffel' of Cater, Stoffel and Fortt, the well known grocers of Bath before the days of supermarkets, died at No 17 in 1961. Mrs Stoffel was an early supporter of the Royal Crescent Society and of the Theatre Royal. She was also known for her interest in the YWCA.

**MARRIAGE.** We are happy to congratulate Wendy Laughlin on her marriage on 24 June to Dr Leonard Fisher, a research scientist from Australia. Wendy is taking a year's leave from the Bath Health Authority and taking up a post as Senior Lecturer in a College of Further Education in Sydney, Australia. Eventually Dr and Mrs Fisher hope to settle in this country. Wendy was a valued member of the committee for four years.

**DEPARTURE.** We are sorry that Dr Graham Wakefield and Mrs Wakefield (Dr Brigitte Matthews) have left No 6. Both were supporters of the Society. We are, however, glad to know that Dr Matthews is to continue practicing.



## No 1 Royal Crescent

Although tourism is slightly down this year, No 1 Royal Crescent, which was first opened to the public in 1970, continues to attract large numbers of visitors, who appreciate being able to see a Georgian house as it might have been when the Crescent was first built. Anyone interested in becoming a guide should write to Mr Oliver Learmont, The Administrator, No 1 Royal Crescent.

## Christmas Dinner - Book Early!

The Society is proposing to hold a Christmas dinner for members at the Bath and County Club during the week before Christmas. Members who are interested should let the editor or the secretary know as soon as possible as a booking will have to be made fairly early. The cost of a festive dinner is likely to be £13.80 including VAT.

Members wishing to know more about the Bath and County Club should contact the Secretary, Mrs Gwen Jones (Bath 23732).

## Our Public Servants

### POLICEMAN

Members of the Society may like to know that the City police officer assigned to the Royal Crescent as our community policeman is Police Constable No 500 Jefferies. PC Jefferies has been to see our chairman and in our next newsletter we hope, with his help and advice, to include an article on local policing and sensible modern security precautions for our flats and houses.

### POSTMAN

Another of our public servants, on whom we all depend, is Mr Michael Book, the postman. We hope that the Manvers Street head post office will leave him on his present round long enough for us to get to know him, and for him to get to know the quirks of our upstairs and downstairs flat numbers.

# The Royal Crescent Society

The Royal Crescent Society was formed in 1973 as a residents' association 'to preserve and enhance the amenities of the Crescent'. Something of its history will appear in a later newsletter, but its 'successes' include the restoration of the railings and gates, without which the lawn would have become a public area, the clearing of unsightly television aerials and wires from the facade, inaugurating the basement garden competition, supporting the restoration of the Theatre Royal (our name is on the Roll of Honour) and recently, and against all odds, getting all but City coaches banned from the Crescent. Apart from that the Society represents the views of residents to the City and other organisations and acts as a watchdog when changes in use are contemplated.

The subscription to the Society is £3 a year, which includes the issue of three newsletters a year. Cheques for the Lawn Fund and the Society can be composite. For example, the resident in a single flat wishing to join the Society and pay the Lawn Fund subscription should make a cheque payable to The Royal Crescent Society and the Lawn Fund for £10 and send it to the Treasurer. Please include your address and tell the Treasurer if you need a key.

## How The Lawn Fund Works

The Royal Crescent Lawn was planned by John Wood as an integral part of the Crescent and in former times householders grazed their horses on the lawn. When the houses were all privately owned maintenance was simple and a firm of solicitors collected subscriptions.

In 1973, when the Royal Crescent Society was formed, the Lawn Fund was in serious default and it was decided that the Society should become the agent for collecting and administering the fund.

The subscription rates are calculated to cover the cost of cutting the lawn (roughly £300 a year), insurance, maintenance of gates and railings and the ha-ha wall.

In 1975 the cost of repairing and painting the railing was £3,500; next time it will be much higher.

If you have not done so we hope that you will send your subscription to the Treasurer, Mr Robert Weston, 5 Royal Crescent.

The annual subscription rate is:

A whole house.....£20  
Double flat/Maisonette.....£15  
Single flat.....£7

Those who pay the Lawn Fund are given a key to the gates, and we hope that subscribers will avail themselves of the use of the lawn.

## STOP PRESS

Residents may have seen Avon County Council's public announcement of Traffic Order 198 which, if accepted, will make permanent the currently experimental coach ban that expires on 18 November 1988. While the Council have had no objections to the proposed order, it has received sufficient 'letters of comment' for the matter to be referred again to the Avon Highways and Transport Committee for the final decision. The Society's Traffic Committee has written a strong letter of support for the Order. The Committee's decision will be announced in a future Newsletter.

### Contributions Wanted

The Editor welcomes letters from residents, articles on aspects of life in the Royal Crescent, its pleasures and inconveniences and any information about original leases or past ownership of houses. In the autumn the editor hopes to start researching the City archives and the Reference Library for historical evidence about the Crescent. All help would be gratefully received. Articles on aspects of restoration would also be welcomed, as would maintenance advice, draughtproofing (the winter is coming on) and any other facet of living in the Royal Crescent. We hope to make the newsletter an important means of communication to residents.

By its very nature the Crescent attracts many problems, these can only be tackled if we know the wishes of residents, but of course, we can only speak for members. All contributions to, or comments on, the newsletter should be addressed to: The Editor, Dr Monica E Baly, 19 Royal Crescent (Telephone: Bath 24736).