

THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY *Newsletter*



Issue No. 13

Winter 1989

Paying the price

Our Chairman Sir John Barraclough
on the costs of Crescent living

WE HAVE received an estimate for weed-killing, scarifying and fertilising the lawn for next season. This will cost about £600 and the Committee has authorised it. We are hoping to obtain a grant for part of the cost. Although the lawn looks deceptively green now that the rains have come, it is in fact very impoverished. Rehabilitation should not be deferred any longer if we are to continue to enjoy the sight of our beautiful green carpet.

A DEFINITIVE word is still awaited from the City Council on wear

and tear on the road and railings. They have promised to let us know as soon as they hear from the County Council. Meanwhile the Vice-Chairman and Committee members have conducted a 'layman's survey' of the railings which has given us a much better view of what is clearly going to be a major renovation task.

A MODEST increase in Membership and Lawn fees is, I fear, inescapable. The Lawn Fund must be kept at least in balance and our Treasurer is calculating what adjustments are needed to achieve that. If members

will reflect for a moment on the benefits the Society has gained over the years and notably, the prohibition of the long distance coaches, the contesting of the hotel application and the development of the Newsletter, we hope that they will view the likely need to increase the membership subscription to £5 as reasonable. More anon when the Treasurer has done his sums.

THERE have been no objections to the proposal, canvassed in our last issue, for the establishment of the Friends of The Royal Crescent. The Committee has therefore decided to go ahead so that we may maintain external goodwill towards the Society's aims and help our annual revenue. The Friends will not be Members, but they will get the Newsletter and be able to join in any of our social, educational and 'lobbying' activities.

THE AGM is scheduled for 22nd March 1990. The venue, and details of committee elections, will be notified in due course. New candidates for election to the Committee are always welcome. While eager to hear members' views we hope to despatch our business expeditiously enough to make time for a specialist speaker on a pertinent Crescent or Bath topic.

OUR talk and discussion with our County Engineer was well supported and proved a successful and informative event. An account is included elsewhere. We are grateful to those who supported this initiative and to our Vice-Chairman for organising it. Whatever our misgivings about our City under modern traffic stress we much enjoyed meeting Mr Lee and

appreciated his readiness to share his thinking with us and to answer our questions so frankly.

ONCE again we are indebted to Mr John Walker; this time for the new format and lay-out of our Newsletter. We hope you will share your Committee's unanimous approval and our appreciation of John Walker's expert help. For connoisseurs: the title-heading is based on the earliest known water-colour of the Crescent by Thomas Malton. The titles and heading are set in the classical Palatino typeface to match the familiar Georgian lettering we see so prevalently in Bath. The main text is set in Times Roman. The Committee feels that the development of the Newsletter now justifies circulating a few complimentary copies to other associations and to people in public positions so as to raise the profile of the Society and encourage interest in our endeavours.

A'FLYER' has gone the rounds to see if there is sufficient support for a Society Christmas Dinner. If the decision is to go ahead then we will be trying to make good some of last year's shortcomings. A different venue is likely. (See the back page for the latest news on the dinner.)

IT HAS been a busy and not unsuccessful year for your Committee, who join with me in wishing all our Members a Happy Christmas.

Help Wanted

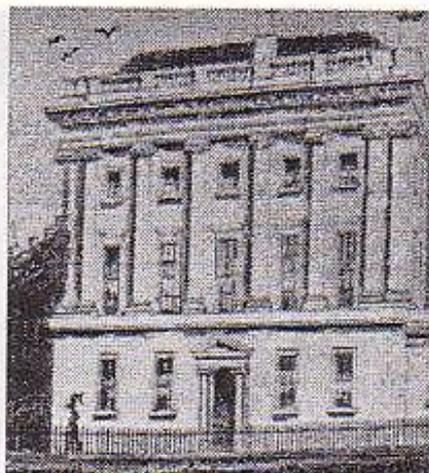
The editor very much welcomes articles, letters, criticisms, suggestions and items of news. We would like to have your views and opinions about life in The Royal Crescent.

To restore - or not to restore?

Dr Peter Woodward
asks whether we
ought to raise our
window-sill levels

AN INTERESTING dialogue has arisen among conservationists as a result of the short article which I contributed to the Annual Report of the Bath Preservation Trust in 1988. My contention, in a nutshell, was that the architectural work of the Woods, father and son, has been seriously mutilated by subsequent generations and that we ought now to restore the most distinguished of their buildings (externally at least) to their original condition. For The Royal Crescent this would primarily involve raising the stone sills of the first floor windows and replacing the glazing bars to all windows to match those at No. 1.

The article brought an immediate response from the City's conservation officers, and at a meeting of joint representatives from the City and the Trust it was resolved that both bodies would grant aid-restoration to the extent of 65 per cent of the total eligible cost (40 per cent from the City, 25 per cent from the Trust) leaving the owner to find 35 per cent. Further, and more controversially, it was agreed to with-



A detail from a Victorian print shows No 1, The Royal Crescent before the first floor window-sills were raised to match John Wood's design.

hold grants for glazing bars unless window-sills are restored to their original levels; this rule to apply to Queen Square and The Royal Crescent only.

But is this policy right? And when were the windows altered? Should alterations be regarded as a valuable part of the history of the house? If so, what are we doing putting glazing bars back? We need more information and more understanding, and this is where members of The Royal Crescent Society can help.

If your property includes a first-floor room on the front of the Crescent and you would be willing to allow an architectural historian (sponsored by the Trust) to visit you and inspect alterations which may have been made to sashes, shutters, window frames, dado rails etc., or if you have strong views on this issue, please communicate with me, preferably by letter, at No 1 The Royal Crescent. Fi

nally, if the idea of ultimate restoration of the Crescent to its original external condition is encouraged by the residents, obviously the best time to implement any changes would be when houses change ownership and are temporarily vacant. ♦

Editor's Note:

Dr Peter Woodward, a trustee of the Bath Preservation Trust, has been co-opted on to the Committee of the Royal Crescent Society. We would welcome a response from readers, either direct to Dr Woodward or to the Editor.

The whole subject of restoration is immensely complicated and rather like the playing of baroque music on original instruments. John Wood used glazing bars and panes of the size he did because that was the convenient size for cutting a rectangle of eighteenth century thick glass. Had plate glass been available he probably would have used it.

Whether he would have changed the size of the windows is a matter for conjecture as is the date and the reason for lowering the sills on the *piano nobile*. Plate glass became generally available in the late 1830s and the tax by weight was abolished in 1845. The new glass was hailed as a great improvement because it allowed more light into rooms and afforded a better view of the scene outside.

Trafficking with Avon

Michael Daw reports on the Society's public meeting with County Engineer William Lee

MR WILLIAM LEE, Director of Highways, Transportation and Engineering, controls Bath's traffic and is responsible for major maintenance of our road surfaces and pavements; he also gives the County Council's view on planning applications which might generate or affect traffic. He is therefore a major power figure in the County and City infrastructure.

It was a considerable coup for the Society to succeed in its invitation to Mr Lee to speak to us. Traffic matters have featured heavily in the Society's business in recent years and, to quote our former chairman Cdr Roy Titchen, 'without Mr Lee's help and co-operation it is most unlikely that the beneficial coach ban would have been instituted'.

The event took place in the comfortable meeting room of The Bath Society at Green Park Station on November 24. Every Society member was invited, as were members of the Residents' Associations in the Georgian area of Bath, the Bath Preservation Trust and The Bath Society itself. The Royal Crescent Society members were almost outnumbered by those from outside the Crescent.

Our Chairman opened the meeting, outlining the special interest we have

*Portrait of
the writer as
an old man:
George
Saintsbury
during his
years in
the Crescent.*



Bath's No. 1 sage

John Walker celebrates the critic who retired
to write of a life devoted to books and wine

DURING THE 1920s and early '30s many tourists visited the Crescent not only to see its renowned architecture but in the hope of glimpsing another attraction with an 18th century appeal: the bent, somewhat shuffling figure of George Saintsbury who, with his white beard and black skull-cup, looked more worn and venerable than the surrounding buildings.

His home in what was then part of 1, Royal Crescent, and is now 1a, was a familiar address not only to gawking

passers-by but to the many writers, including Rudyard Kipling, who came to pay court and seek his advice. Saintsbury was the most influential literary critic of his time, perhaps of any time, and the best-read man of his age and, perhaps, of any age.

His influence is still apparent, although not so much in literature. He was the godfather of today's colour supplement and Sunday newspaper wine writers, thanks to his much read and copied *Notes on a Cellar-Book*, which was written at No 1a, and is 'a



Battling with

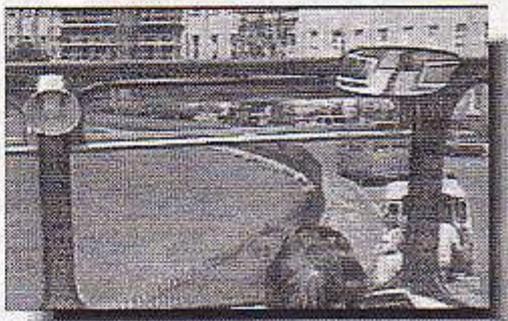


The story so far:

Society member and author Sheila McCullagh began the protest with a letter to the *Bath Evening Chronicle*. HTV spotlighted residents' anger on its news program (above). More letters of protest appeared in the *Evening Chronicle* (above right), followed by TV, radio and national newspaper reports.

The latest coverage (right) came in the *Bristol Evening Post* in November. But the brochures still tempt the tourists (far right); loudspeakers still blare, and the guides shout their way around The Crescent (right).

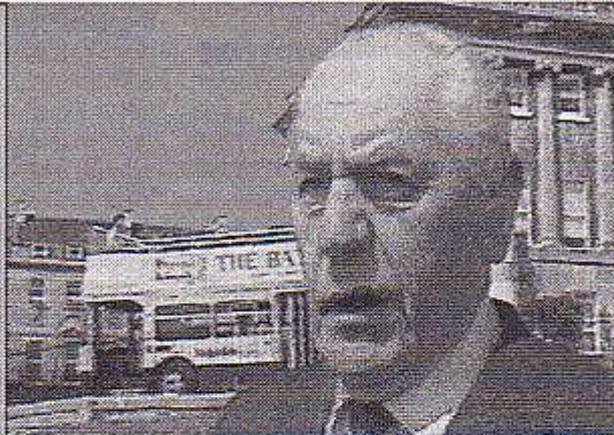
And Badgerline's manager told the *Chronicle*: "We are allowed to operate this service by virtue of our service licence and we shall continue until we are stopped".



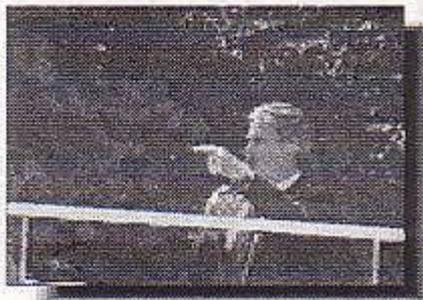
...e talking buses



Sir John Barraclough, seen here telling HTV viewers 'It drives you nearly mad', reports on the Society's action to curb a noisy intrusion



THE CHIEF preoccupation in recent months has been the topless talking buses. We have sustained our reaction in every way we could and the press and TV publicity has given us a good platform from which to continue the offensive. We have been in correspondence with the City and County Councils and the Traffic Commission as

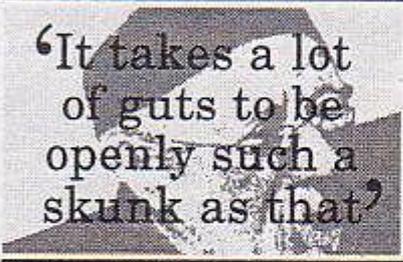


well as our MP. It is a complex problem stemming from the de-regulation of buses under the 1985 Act. Maddening as the commentaries are, the sheer weight and diesel pollution that these vehicles are bringing to bear on the Crescent is an even greater concern. Regrettably, the law is not helpful, but we are continuing to explore the possibilities and our Local Authorities are not unsympathetic. This is not the place for detail and I ask our members to accept that the Committee has been, is, and will continue to be, active and persistent in the matter.



5 little, genial perfect work of art', according to *The Observer*. His love of good food and splendid wines led to the formation of the Saintsbury Club to honour him and to indulge in both.

Saintsbury's life was long enough for him, when young, to have been excited by Swinburne's first poems and, when old, to have been asked to review T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which he sensibly declined to do. He came to the Crescent after his retirement from Edinburgh University, where he had been



'It takes a lot of guts to be openly such a skunk as that'

Professor of English Literature, notable for his vast and erudite works on prosody and English criticism, and reverted to what he had done before he entered academic life, which was literary and political journalism.

While living at No. 1 he wrote his three *Scrap Books*, published between 1922 and 1924, which are autobiographical jottings on whatever took his fancy. They are an acquired taste.

My copy of his first volume has a scribbled note from an admirer, saying that Saintsbury was 'a man to honour'. George Orwell, who called Saintsbury 'probably the most widely read man in Europe', wrote of it in *The Road to Wigan Pier* 'it takes a lot of guts to be openly such a skunk as that'. Orwell was no doubt thinking of such asides in the *Scrap Books* as: 'I know some-

thing of history, and I have never heard or read of any class - tyrant, aristocrat, capitalist, slave-holder, buccaneer, middle-class shopkeeper - so absolutely and exclusively governed by selfishness as Trades Union "Labour".' And: 'The two commandments of "Labour" are: Nobody else shall have anything that I have not. Somebody else shall pay for everything I have.'

Saintsbury's written and conversational style was convoluted. A student once noted a typical sentence in a lecture: '...but while none, save these, of men living, had done, or could have done, such things, there was much here which - whether either could have done it or not - neither had done.'

Who could guess what he is writing about in this typical passage from *A Scrap Book*? 'But personally I do not know anything which has, during my own lifetime, experienced so severe and so prolonged a decadence as the article which was sold by that admirable person who out Cleoned Cleon (O for him to be in England now!); which, becoming alive, supplied the loyal subjects of Queen Niphleseth; which formed, in another sense, the subject of one of the pleasantest essays of Charles Lamb; and which was judiciously selected by King Valoroso as the solid of his breakfast to the Prince of Crim Tartary.' His subject is pork sausages! (He regarded beef sausages as always an abomination.)

He died at the age of 87 in 1933, having lived an immensely productive life until the very end. He had retired to Bath because of its associations with the 18th century. He was seeking, he said, 'rest and refreshment'. He found them both in the Royal Crescent. ❖

The parking problem

David Kirk traces its cause and effect from the 18th century

IN OCTOBER this year, residents of The Royal Crescent were sent particulars of a new block of flats in nearby Margaret's Buildings.

The estate agent's blurb cannily hinted that anyone seeking that holy of holies, an off-street parking space, should invest £85,000 in one of his attic flats. The selling point was that it had its own parking space. The object being to sell off the flat and retain the space. Desperate times demand desperate measures. But parking in the vicinity of the Crescent has always been a problem and one that was apparent from the outset.

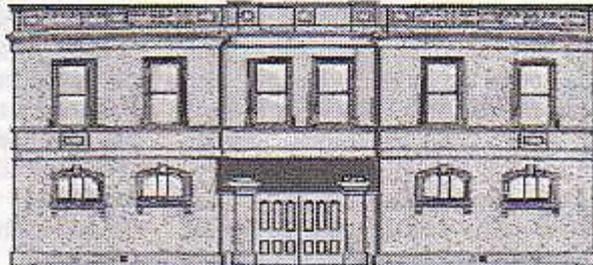
When John Wood first unveiled his plan to wedge the great semi-ellipse of thirty mansions into the area bounded by Upper Church Street, the Via Julia and the Muddle brook (the site of Marlborough Buildings), the builders found that nine, possibly ten, houses (nos 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 27, 28, 29 & 30, including the two

magnificent end pavilions, had insufficient space at the rear to build stables and accommodation for coachmen, facilities without which no first-rate house was then considered complete.

The alternative - to leave a fine 18th century carriage and pair in the road overnight - was unthinkable. Apart from the needs of the horses, the temptation posed by a valuable open landau with the 'keys' in the ignition would be more than any self-respecting Georgian footpad could endure.

Thus began the mad quest for 'garages' that continues to this day. How the denizens of the end houses coped with the dilemma can be judged by the 18th century blurb of estate agents Hill and Burchall, the Chestermans of their day, who point out in 1772 that a house at the eastern end, the property of a gentleman leaving Bath after only a few months (traffic beadle's first scalp?), can be had with a parcel of land suitable for building a stable in the vicinity of far-flung Belmont. Failing that, rented facilities behind the Circus were all that was on offer. Sixty-seven years were to elapse before another house, No 6, finally got its coach house, when the present structure was shoe-horned into the small rear garden. Even when an

*North elevation of
14 Crescent Lane :
the grandeur that was
home to a family of six,
two bachelor grooms,
five horses and
two carriages.*



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owner procured a rented mews property on a long lease there was no guarantee that it would remain part of the estate. The break-up began as early as 1834, when No 29 The Royal Crescent came on to the market and the 'large and convenient detached double coach house and stables in Cottle's Lane' (now the eastern end of Julian Road), with 52 years lease unexpired, was sold at auction as a separate lot.



Y THE 1850s commercial interests had begun to nibble away at what remained of our parking heritage, when the coach house and yard at No 8 Crescent Lane became the first of the centre properties to be rented out to livery stable keepers.

Bath would continue to run on horsepower until well into the present century (one of the last carriages in private hands could still be seen around the Crescent as late as 1930), but the upkeep of an equipage was becoming a rich man's pursuit.

Such a man was Charles Mackillop Esq. In 1877, the new owner of No 14 Royal Crescent caused quite a stir when he promptly demolished the old Georgian stables at the rear to make way for the handsome neo-classical pile we see (modified) today.

A Scot and a philanthropist, Mackillop valued his staff and provided excellent facilities. His coachman, George Harding, and wife Ellen raised four children in the commodious quarters above the animals. Dorcas, their youngest daughter, was born there in 1879. Two bachelor grooms completed the menage.

Two years before Mackillop had moved into the big house at No 14,

another family, with the quaint name of Tall, had settled into the humbler milieu of No 10 Crescent Lane. During the 71 years they hired out their carriages and, later, cars (the longest tenure of any family connected with The Crescent), the Talls owned or rented just about every stables, coach house or yard that came onto the market. Officially these included Nos 6, 7, 7a, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 20, 22, 23 & 27, plus Weston Stables, St James's Street Stables, Victoria Mews and four properties in Circus Mews, of which Catharine Cottage is now the surgery of our local GP, Dr Bridget Mathews.

Carriage proprietors par excellence, there was nothing they couldn't get you, be it a wedding carriage, pleasure brake, open landau, brougham or Victoria, by the day, week, or month. But the Tall's greatest achievement consisted in keeping the largest number of stables and coach houses together for the purpose for which they were intended for the longest period of time. Unfortunately, it was not quite long enough. The Tall story came to an end in the blitz of 1942, when No 10 was the only stables to sustain a direct hit. By 1946 the family had sold out to Brown's Garages.

In the mood of postwar austerity it was too early to predict the later boom in car ownership and too late to prevent the once elegant coach house declining (with notable exceptions) into the hotch-potch of tyre depots and small workshops we see today, the regal coachmen in gleaming boots and splendid silver-buttoned greatcoats supplanted by metal bashers and Quick-Fit fitters. ❖

in the subjects and welcomed Mr Lee as 'an old friend of the Society'. Mr Lee, who was accompanied by his resident Bath Traffic Manager Mr Brian Stevens painted a vivid picture of the last 20 years development, ranging from the Buchanan Tunnel Plan to present and future problems and plans. He welcomed the opportunity to address the gathering, but even more relished the discussion which would follow.

His theme was that public recognition of environmental issues as a high priority did not yet include a recognition of the price to be paid. 'There are no simple solutions,' he said. Correcting a difficulty in one area almost always had an impact on another area. Nevertheless, he did feel that steady progress had been made over the last 15 years, his aim being to maintain a 'dynamic balance' and allow time for change to be accepted.

He also believed that it was for the general benefit that the County was in control, as it could both take an overall view and attract a level of resource and talent not open to more local authorities. He stressed the strong level of co-operation which he and Bath City Council officers enjoyed - notwithstanding equally strong differences of professional view on certain issues.

A lively discussion period followed with questions ranging from specific detailed issues to wider-ranging topics such as the prospects for a total traffic ban in the centre of Bath, which the newspapers seized on in their coverage. The meeting went on until almost 10 pm: in all, Mr Lee had been grilled for two hours! ♦

Who lived in your house?

Dr Monica Baly researches the Crescent residents of 100 years ago

No.	Occupier	Owner	Rateable Value
1	Allan Bowker	Nugent	£140 5s
2	.....	Pontifex	£119 5s
3	Julia Severs	Baldock	£140 5s
4	Emma Studé	Baldock	£148 15s
5	John H. Sperling	Eden	£148 15s
6	Adolphus Buckhardt	Morris	£119
7	George W. Micksethwaite	Greenwood	£119
8	John E. Churchill	Churchill	£153
9	Wm H. Henderson	Henderson	£148 15s
10	Anthony Hammond	Hammond	£148 15s
11	Henry Mann	Burton & Coy	£144 10s
12	Isaac Pitman	Stone	£144 10s
13	.....	Bennison	£148 15s
14	Charles W. Mackillop	Mackillop	£212 10s
15	John Stone	Stone	£170
16	Wm Brackenbridge	Brackenbridge	£212 10s
17	.....	Barker	£212 10s
18	Alexander Falconer	Church	£148
19	Edward Handley	Walmesley	£161
20	Percival Huth	Tanner	£127
21	Harriet Offley	Brisco	£144 10s
22	.....	Care	£148 15s
23	Edward J. Morgan	Morgan	£148 15s
24	Fanny F. Scott	Middletton	£140 5s
25	Ellen Peel	Hartley	£140 5s
26	.....	Simms	£127 10s
27	Ann Maria Walsh	Walsh	£127 10s
28	Flora and Alice Bruere	Not specified	£127 10s
29	Elizabeth Wallbridge	Wilkins	£127 10s
30	Scott Hawkins	Blathwayt	£136

The highest gross estimated rental was £250 a year and the lowest (and average) about £140. Rents altered comparatively little during the 19th century. Only five or six houses were occupied by their owners.

Society Notes

Basement Garden Competition.

This competition was started some ten years ago at the instigation of Mrs Phyllis Otley of No 3. Mr Otley was for a number of years our valued Treasurer. The competition is judged by Mr Stanley Hitt of the Parks and Gardens department and he reports that this year the standard was higher than ever and judging more difficult, but he made his decision on the way that available space was utilised and on the imagination shown.

First Prize: Mr Le Corre, No 24.

Second Prize: Mrs Annabel Trechmann, No 5.

Highly commended: Mr Thornton, No 3.

Members will remember that Mr Le Corre's garden featured in Ann Halpin's *The Window Box Book*, published by McDonald. Mr Thornton, a frequent winner in the past, also won an award in the city-wide Bath competition.

Farewell. Mr and Mrs Rob Weston have left No 5 Royal Crescent and Mr Weston has resigned as Treasurer. We congratulate Rob and Karen on the birth of their daughter and wish them well in their new home.

New Committee Members. Two co-options to the Committee have been made which now stands:

Chairman: Air Chief Marshal Sir John Barraclough, No 28. *Vice-Chairman:* Mr Michael Daw, No 10. *Secretary:* Mrs Annabel Trechmann, No 5. *Treasurer:* Mr Ian Nesbitt, No 3. *Editor:* Dr Monica E. Baly, No 19. *Members:*

Mrs Barbara Walker, No 10. Miss Gillian Eschele, No 29. Mr Bill Wallis, No 28. Mr Graham Wadsworth, No 3.

Friends of The Society. Several people, including past members, have expressed a wish to receive the Newsletter and to be kept in touch with events. The Committee has decided to offer a new category for such people and is considering a suitable subscription rate to cover the sending out of the Newsletter. If any member knows of such a person please tell the Secretary or the Editor.

Bath Preservation Trust. The Trust is appealing for new members. It is important that the Trust represents the views of as many people as possible. Advantages of membership include: influencing its policies; free entry to No 1 The Royal Crescent and Huntingdon Chapel; 10 per cent discount on goods in the No 1 shop (this can be especially worthwhile at Christmas time); regular free newsletter; lectures and social activities for members.

Christmas Dinner. There was a good response from members and the dinner will be held on Wednesday, December 13 at the Lansdown Grove Hotel, at 7.30 for 8.00 pm. The cost of the three course Christmas dinner is £11.50 a head. Those who have not already indicated their intention to attend and who wish to come should inform Mrs Barbara Walker, 10 The Royal Crescent as soon as possible.