

MASTER

THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY Newsletter

Issue No. 17

Summer 1991

Our First President

The Society's new Chairman Michael Daw
pays tribute to his predecessor

The departure of Sir John Barraclough as our Chairman for the past 3 years marks the end of a significant era of achievement in the Society's history. His is a hard act to follow and I am honoured to have been elected, unopposed, to the Office of Chairman as his successor. I shall, naturally follow much of the course he has charted and look forward with the help of our new Committee to further consolidation and pursuit of the principal objective of the Society - to 'preserve and enhance the amenities of the Royal Crescent and its surroundings'.

Thus, as your new Chairman my first and most pleasant duty is to represent and record residents' debt to my predecessor.

As those who have followed these notes over the past 3 years may have perceived, Sir John has raised the standing of this Society - in the eyes of all those who influence the conditions of our existence for good or ill - even further than his predecessors.

Under his indefatigable leadership and initiative the Society is now fully recognised as a sensitive and sound body of opinion on matters which, be-

sides pursuing the Society's objectives have a wider impact than those of a purely self-serving residents association.

For example his personal pursuit of the open-topped bus saga exposed to the public attention for the first time the serious flaws in existing national legislation governing such 'services'; aided by representatives from some equally concerned Residents' Associations (including the FBRA which he initiated and founded in 1988) his efforts laid the foundation for the proposals now before the City and Avon Councils to ban all the open topped bus services initially, but then institute permission for a limited number of tours per day - for which companies may bid.

Such changes are not achieved easily but by the expenditure of time, persuasion and sound argument with many authorities including the Depts of the Environment and Transport, our MP, County and City Councillors and officials etc.

We may feel fortunate as well as grateful that these and many other matters reported in earlier Newsletters were in such experienced and capable hands and that Sir John was able to deploy his skills to the benefit of us all for so long.

In recognition of his contribution and to perpetuate his association with the Society, the AGM in April unanimously endorsed the proposal that Sir John be invited to become our first Honorary President. He kindly accepted and made it clear that he wished still to take an avid interest in Society affairs and would lend his weight and advice whenever possible.

Turning now to other matters, firstly the pavements and carriageway repairs. The good news is that, after further Society pressure, the pavements will be laid - both sides in pennant stone - beginning in mid summer. The less good news is that no funds have



Sir John Barraclough's campaign against the open-topped buses exposed flaws in the present legislation.

been allocated for repair of the carriageway: indeed the allocation for the whole city by Avon County Council is the derisory sum of £15,000 which, as Councillor Hawkins has pointed out, could be spent in one afternoon. Council officials continue to pursue this and we await further news.

On an allied topic, the Society received proposals from the City Council for an increase in the number of lamp standards and an improvement to the lamps themselves. Your Committee took the view that since the Council could not supply any additional standards to exactly the design of the existing ones, and since the present disposition of standards was adequate, this proposal should be rejected.

This approach was supported by the Bath Preservation Trust. On the matter of changing the lamps themselves, the

The Royal Crescent Society Summer Newsletter

Council have agreed to obtain a sample of the proposed new lamp and if thought suitable to consider its temporary installation in one standard so that residents may assess its impact. The fact that we were consulted before action is of course, most gratifying and reflects the Society's position I have noted above.

A small group has now been formed - called for want of a less risible name, the Ha-Ha Committee - to pursue the restoration of the ha-ha. This operates under my Chairmanship, reports regularly to your Main Committee and comprises Christopher Woodward, with the kind co-operation of the Bath Preservation Trust, and Mrs Jenny Hardisty, with the kind co-operation of the Royal Crescent Hotel. Both are also members of your main Committee. Discussions on funding, grants etc are pending with the City Council as we go to press, these having been unavoidably delayed because of domestic misfortunes on the Council Officers' side.

Repair of the accident damage to the railings is now complete to the right standard and the opportunity has been taken to use the same contractors to strengthen the weak footings of adjacent railing sections (as a separate contract charged to Society funds), and to patch the gap in the Ha Ha wall (east end) temporarily in advance of the major works.

Application of weed killer to the lawn awaited only the advent of a rainy period so that the grass would not become too scorched. As reported last time we received advance notice of the start of the treatment.

Finally, I must repair my serious

omission of important business at the AGM. In bidding farewell to departing Committee members and thanking them for their most valuable contributions, I failed to highlight the outstanding service of Annabel Trechmann who has triumphed, despite many other pressures, as our ever-willing and irrepressibly cheerful secretary for so many years. We all owe her a singular debt of gratitude for her careful manipulation of her many responsibilities so that Society business could be conducted sensibly. We also welcome her successor Shirley Parker who will bring new skills to the task, building on Annabel's foundations and welcome also our other new Committee Members. A detailed report of the AGM is elsewhere in this Newsletter.

As reported at the AGM we have been quite successful over the last year in suggesting to those who make films, TV shows advertising photographs etc in the Crescent, that they might like to contribute towards its upkeep via Society funds. Most companies have acceded willingly to such suggestions and the result is reflected in the Accounts and in the Editor's report of the AGM. Since then the Bath City Council's Marketing Officer has offered to inform us directly of any such planned activity and to put intending users in touch. Already one contribution has arrived for this year.

I was pleased to meet our new Community Policeman PC Alan Hale just before the AGM and invited him to attend: he is keen to get to know residents in his parish and hopes to remain in the post for some years. The Editor expects to run a profile on him in a future Newsletter. ❖

The AGM: action and change

by
Dr Monica Baly

The 17th Annual General Meeting of the Society took place on Tuesday, 16th April 1991 at the Bath and County Club with 25 members present, rather fewer than last year. Sir John Barraclough, the chairman, welcomed the members and in his report pointed out that he had used the last Newsletter to let residents know something of the extensive range of business now being undertaken by the Society. Apart from the items mentioned we were now representing the Society's views to Bath and Avon Councils on the subject of traffic in Bath and the laying of TV cables.

Mr Michael Daw, Vice Chairman, reported on the arrangements for the opening night of the Festival and hoped that there would be a better response to the lighting of the candles this year.

The Society was now engaged in an initiative on rebuilding the ha-ha and restoring the railings to the lawn. This had led to a new consideration about the precise ownership of the Crescent Lawn, or the Crescent Fields, as they were known. This is particularly important if we are to prove a case for traffic damage against Bath and Avon. Although the right of residents to use

the lawn is time honoured since the end of the C18th, the archival material so far available does not clearly establish ownership to the residents. Mr Daw asked if anyone had original leases that established right to the land or papers which indicated to whom the early ground rent was paid and to let him know.

This request has since been followed up by a letter to all residents. All the literature and the histories of Bath seem to assume that the lawn was intended by John Wood to belong to the owners of the houses in the Crescent, but so far we have no legal documents and proof to back this up.

The rebuilding of the Ha-Ha will be a costly undertaking. In the past unsuitable material had been used and the ditch had become filled in with rubble so that its original 18th century profile had been significantly altered. In addition it no longer forms a barrier between the private lawn and the public park.

Mr Christopher Woodward, of the Bath Preservation Trust, who lives at No 1, has been seconded to the committee and, together with Mrs Hardisty, he will be managing this project including the publicity and the necessary fund raising. All residents will surely back this project on conservation grounds alone. Apart from that, in the 18 years of the Society the most common and universal complaint from members has been that the lawn is not treated as the private place that it is and that it is continually invaded from the public park.

Mr Ian Nesbitt, the Treasurer, was able to report that the General Fund had improved, but this was largely due

The Royal Crescent Society Summer Newsletter

to the persuasion of the Vice Chairman in obtaining contributions from would-be film companies and the like which had swelled the coffers to the tune of £850. However, with the prospect of the repair of the railings and the Ha-Ha we are going to need all the money we can raise, and even more film companies.

The Chairman, Sir John Barraclough, was not seeking re-election, Mr Wilks had left the Crescent and Mrs Walker and Mr Bill Wallis had served their term. There was one nomination for chairman, Mr Michael Daw, and two for general committee members, namely Dr Len Fisher and Mr Chris Woodward. The remaining members and office holders were returned unopposed. Thanks to the co-operation of the Royal Crescent Hotel, Mrs Jenny Hardisty had been co-opted to work on the ha-ha project. The work of the Society is now such that it is necessary for each committee member to take on a special task and for there to be sub-committees.

The new committee as elected or confirmed at the AGM is:

Mr Michael Daw, Chairman, No 10
Mr Ian Nesbitt, Treasurer, No 3
Mrs Shirley Parker, Secretary, No 10
Dr Monica Baly, Editor, No 19
Dr Len Fisher, No 29
Mr Graham Wadsworth, No 3
Mrs Annabel Trechmann, 5
Mr Christopher Woodward, 1
Mrs Jenny Hardisty, co-opted member

Dr Peter Woodward, non-voting Special Member, Bath Preservation Trust.

Cmdr Titchen in proposing a vote of thanks to Sir John for his skilful and indefatigable chairmanship over the last

four years pointed out that Sir John had raised the profile of the Society with the Council, the public, the media and the establishment; in order that we should not lose Sir John's influence and skills he proposed that the Society should have a new non-executive Office of President and Sir John should be the first incumbent.

This proposal was seconded by Mr Daw and warmly endorsed by the whole meeting. Sir John graciously accepted the new appointment saying how, despite the strenuous nature of Chairmanship, he had enjoyed his tenure and how much he appreciated the unstinting support of his committee.

Mr Hitt, Bath City Council's Horticultural adviser who judges the basement gardens, commented on how they enhanced the Crescent and added to the city's floral reputation; they gave great pleasure to visitors and residents alike. The awards were as follows:

1st Prize, Mrs Annabel Trechmann, No 5.

2nd Prize, Mr & Mrs T F Wilks, No 20.

3rd Prize, Mr & Mrs B Richards, No 4.

After the meeting the members enjoyed a buffet supper and met PC Alan Hale, our community policeman, who invited residents to join the Car Watch scheme.

As always with a Crescent party it was a splendid opportunity for meeting neighbours, old and new, and for exchanging news and views. The Crescent has some of the characteristics of a village with the lawn as our bit of 'defensible space' and our village green. ♦

Keeping The Cre

Rust may rot the stonework

No 19 Royal Crescent has been repaired with the benefit of a grant under the Bath Town Scheme. During the course of the repairs to the roof and the stonework it was found that rusting iron clamps had damaged the stonework of the main entablature spanning between the capitals of the Ionic columns. This has now been repaired.

The discovery of this buried ironwork led to a preliminary brief inspection from the ground level using field glasses of the other buildings in the Royal Crescent.

As the result of this No 1 was scaffolded and repairs made to the stonework of the entablature, again affected by the buried ironwork, have been carried out. In both cases the 'jacking' action of the rusting ironwork has caused the stone to fracture.

Other buildings in the Royal Crescent may be similarly affected. This problem affects the main entablature spanning between the capitals of the Ionic columns.

There is a further problem with some of the volutes to the Ionic capitals themselves and certain sections of the columns may be in a poor condition, as

a visual inspection may reveal. In order to explain the background to these problems to owners, occupiers and others with an interest in the Royal Crescent, a meeting was held in the Guild hall on 14th March when the City Council's Conservation Officer, David McLaughlin, explained the problems answered questions and gave advice about grants.

The meeting was well attended but unfortunately, it seemed to attract the experts rather than the owners and residents whom it affected.

This is a serious problem, it will not go away. No 19 and No 1 are not the only houses likely to be affected. The price of living in a Grade 1 listed building is eternal vigilance. In the next issue we hope to publish an article by David McLaughlin in which he will deal with the problem more fully and offer advice to residents on what action they may need to take.

The occupants of No 19 more than endorse Major General West's comments on the 'Trials of Restoration', published in an earlier Newsletter, but after 'the winter of our discontent' if not made 'glorious' they were at least relieved by the good humour, efficiency and consideration of the workmen. It was worth it.

To those likely to embark on repairs, take Charles West's advice, be well supervised and do not cut corners. ♦

ent In Good Repair

Restoring the Ha-Ha

by
Christopher Woodward

The first question anyone asks about a Ha-Ha is where on earth the name comes from. In 1770 the 'arbiter elegantiarum', Horace Walpole described the clearing away of boundary walls and the digging of ditches in the early part of that century as 'an attempt they deemed so astonishing that the common people called them Ha-Ha's! to express their surprise at finding a sudden unperceived check to their walk'.

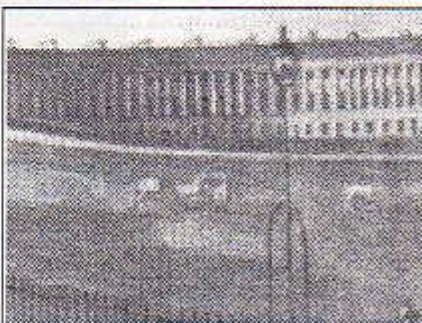
This does seem a somewhat dubious explanation - and unfortunately Walpole does not go on to say whether these Ha-Has ever worked as a sudden and unperceived check to gangs of football players. He was certainly right in calling the invention of the Ha-Ha - it was derived from French military fortifications - "the leading step for all that followed". It enabled the great landscape gardeners of the time, such as William Kent, to open up sweeping views and at the same time to keep the Picturesque sheep and deer on the other side of an indivisible boundary.

The Royal Crescent has a perhaps

unique example of an urban Ha-Ha as John Wood the Younger used the device to blend the lawn with the countryside in the view from the windows. To re-create the original effect of 'rus in urbe' there would have to be lambs gambolling in Victoria Park rather than language students, as is still the case below Lansdown Crescent.

The Ha-Ha Committee has been formed from Michael Daw, Jenny Hardisty and myself in order to restore it to its original character and appearance. The wall has lost many of its stones and has been re-pointed with cement mortar; over the years the ditch has filled up with accumulated debris.

The Ha-Ha is a historic feature of great interest that now is neither effective nor attractive and with our sorely stretched funds we shall do our best to make it so. ❖



Horses were once kept in their place by the Ha-Ha - detail from an engraving of the early 1800s.

The Royal Crescent Society Summer Newsletter
SUBSCRIPTION FORMS

A. MEMBERSHIP

I wish to join THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY and enclose
£..... for my/our subscription(s) for 1991.

Signed.....House/Flat No.....

B. LAWN FUND

I also wish to subscribe to the Lawn Fund and include my paym
of - delete as appropriate - £7 (for a small flat)/£15 (for a large
flat)/£20 (for a house)

Signed.....House/Flat No....

NB Payments may be combined, with cheques made payable to
THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY and addressed to:
Mr Ian Nesbitt, Hon. Treasurer, 3 The Royal Crescent.

Re-opening the great window debate

by
Dr Peter Woodward

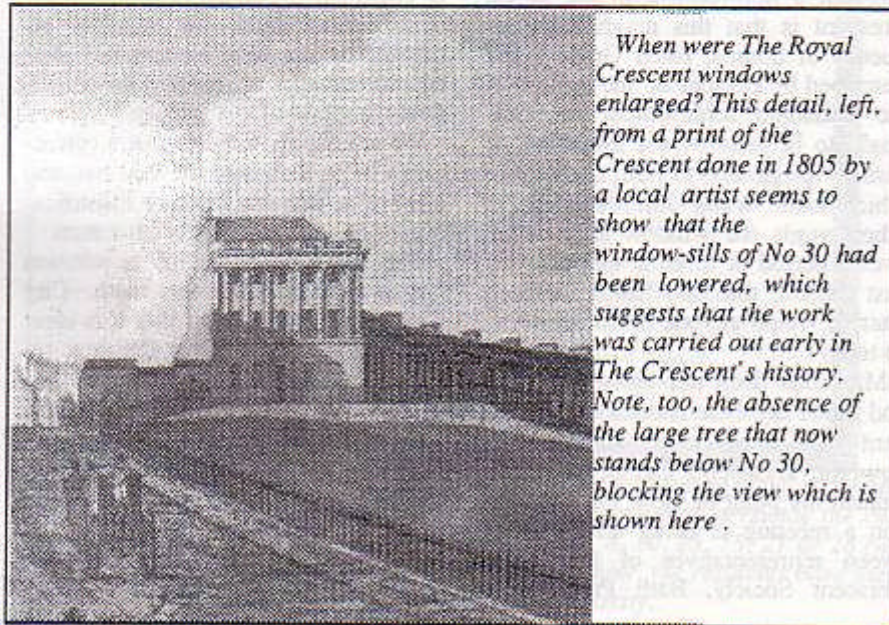
Members of the Royal Crescent Society will know that in 1990 Bath Preservation Trust commissioned a study of alterations to the windows of the Royal Crescent and that Mr Graham Finch (who carried out the study) has now presented his report. Thanks are due to the many kindly residents who allowed access. In brief, Mr Finch's conclusions are these:

1. The first-floor windows were originally like those of No. 1 are now,

i.e. with a higher window sill, and a window opening containing two equal sashes of six panes which conform with the ideal Palladian proportions.

2. The windows were enlarged by cutting away the stonework and lowering the sills early in the 19th century (probably 1810-1820), and as the increase in height was approximately equivalent to the height of an original window pane, the fenestration was kept as close as possible to the original pattern by replacing the two equal sashes of six-over-six panes with unequal sashes of six-over-nine panes. About half of the houses in The Crescent have now had windows restored to this pattern.

3. Window shutters have been altered in a variety of ways to suit the enlarged windows: sometimes vertical displacement, sometimes insertion of a 'blind' shutter, sometimes replacement



When were The Royal Crescent windows enlarged? This detail, left, from a print of the Crescent done in 1805 by a local artist seems to show that the window-sills of No 30 had been lowered, which suggests that the work was carried out early in The Crescent's history. Note, too, the absence of the large tree that now stands below No 30, blocking the view which is shown here.

☞ continued from page 9
with new shutters.

4. Plate glass became available in about 1840. After that date (in some cases very much later) the six-over-nine unequal sashes were removed and replaced by equal heavier sashes containing plate glass. This admitted so much sunlight (and heat!) that sunblinds were fixed externally to reduce the glare.

5. Restoration since World War II has led to the re-introduction of glazing bars and smaller panes but alas not in a uniform manner.

6. Mr Finch concludes that window restoration needs to be rigorously controlled and should continue the pattern of those houses which have already introduced six-over-nine-pane sashes, retaining the elongated windows.

My own view as a lover of architecture but a non-resident of the Royal Crescent is that this magnificent sequence of houses, listed Grade I and described by Pevsner as 'the summit of the Palladian achievement in Bath' ought to be seen by the thousands of visitors (pilgrims?) to Bath in the form which John Wood Jnr. intended. In other words the window sills ought, over a period of time, to be put back. Just suppose that they had never been altered; would anyone dream of doing so today?

Mr Finch does not agree with me, and I dare say there is not a single resident who does either. And indeed, powerful arguments can be advanced against my point of view. For that reason a meeting is being arranged between representatives of the Royal

Trust, Bath City Council, English Heritage, and the Georgian Group to discuss the principles involved and perhaps to formulate a policy. ♦

No worry over basements

Residents may have seen a report on the front page of the *Bath and Wilts Chronicle* on 24th May about a City Council initiative to take over unused basements - by compulsory purchase if necessary - in an effort to boost the City's reducing housing stock. The report attributed remarks to a Dr Geoffrey Thompson identified as 'Chairman of the Royal Crescent Residents' Association'.

This of course was inaccurate on four counts: there is no 'Royal Crescent Residents' Association'; Dr Thompson is chairman of Catherine Place Residents' Association; the remarks attributed to him were inaccurately stated; the remarks as reported do not reflect the views of this society.

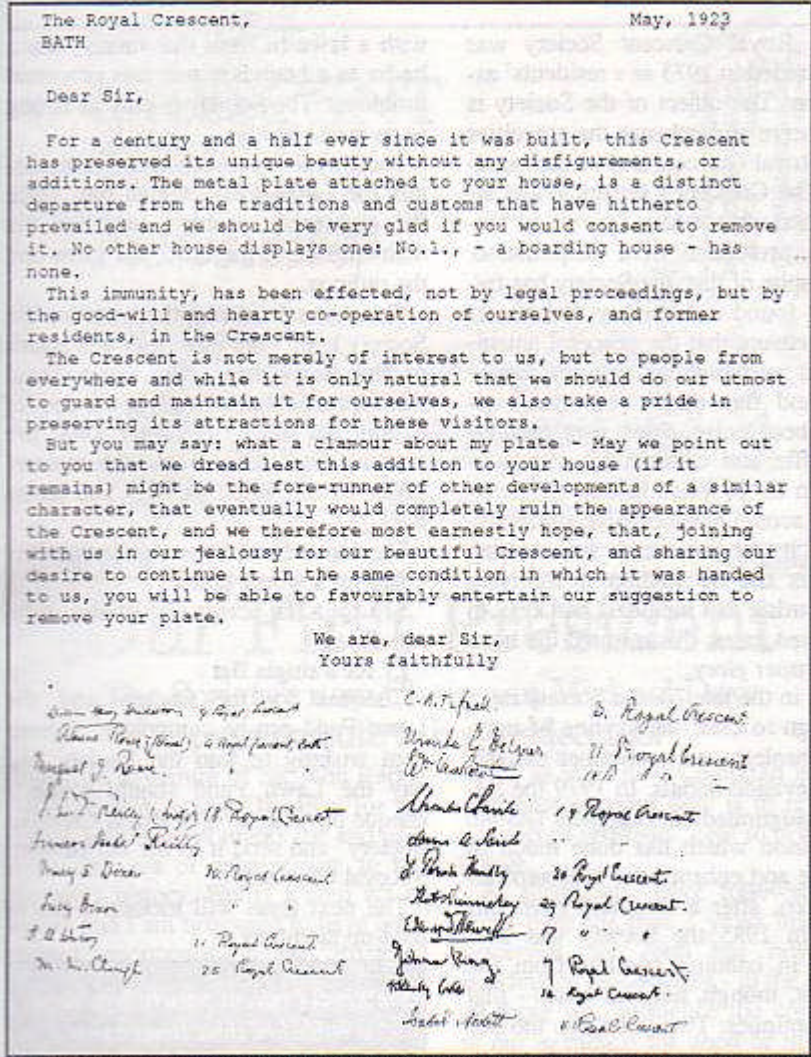
We are happy to report that a correction was published of the first two and last errors, including proper identification of this Society and its Chairman.

The topic of basement acquisition has now been discussed with City Council officials. From this it is clear that no basements in this Crescent are targetted as part of this initiative. ♦

BUS DECISION

Avon Council approved the restriction on open-topped buses on July 24. Badgerline may insist on a public inquiry. The Society will continue its fight which has led to this milestone

An Early Protest. . .



Does anyone know who was the culprit displaying this disfiguring metal plate what did the plate say? Did the opprobrium of his neighbours persuade the culprit to remove it? It could have been either No 2, 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 27 or 28 (believe that last two were empty). Note that then as now, the residents base their case on being the guardians of an inheritance for posterity.

Aims of The Royal Crescent Society

The Royal Crescent Society was founded in 1973 as a residents' association. The object of the Society is 'to preserve and enhance the amenities of the Royal Crescent and its surroundings'. The Crescent's historical and architectural importance gives it reasonable protection from despoilation, but, in spite of this, the Society has frequently found it necessary to take action to ensure that the peaceful amenities and surroundings are not diminished and this entails constant vigilance about noise, litter, ever increasing traffic and commercial encroachment. In its 18 years history the Society has scored some notable successes. In 1975 it was responsible for restoring the gates and the railings to the lawn and ensuring that members had keys to the locked gates; this restored the lawn to its former glory.

Then, in the late 70s the Society ran a campaign to clear the skyline of ugly, often obsolete, and sometimes dangerous, television aerials. In 1979 the Society inaugurated the Basement Garden competition which has done much to improve and enhance the basement areas. Then, after a long and strenuous battle, in 1985 the Society was successful in banning coaches from the Crescent, though, not alas buses - that fight continues. Two years ago the Society was largely responsible for winning an appeal against a proposal that there should be another hotel in the Royal Crescent.

Living in 'the finest sweep of Palladian domestic architecture in Europe'

with a lawn in front that merely has a ha-ha as a boundary presents perpetual problems. The Society is only as strong as its membership.

The Royal Crescent Society administers the Lawn Fund, which has, since the eighteenth century, paid for the maintenance of the lawn, the gates and the railings.

The Annual subscription rate for the Society is £5 (this includes three issues of the Newsletter). The Lawn Fund rates are calculated to cover the cost of cutting the lawn (well over £400 per annum) the insurance and the maintenance of the gates, railings and ha-ha wall.

The Lawn Fund Subscription rate is:

£20 for a whole house

£15 for a flat across two houses or on two floors

£7 for a single flat

Cheques for the Society and the Lawn Fund can be composite. A resident wishing to join the Society and pay the Lawn Fund should make a cheque payable to "The Royal Crescent Society" and send it to Mr Ian Nesbitt, 5 Royal Crescent.

The next issue will include a list of paid-up members. ♦

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