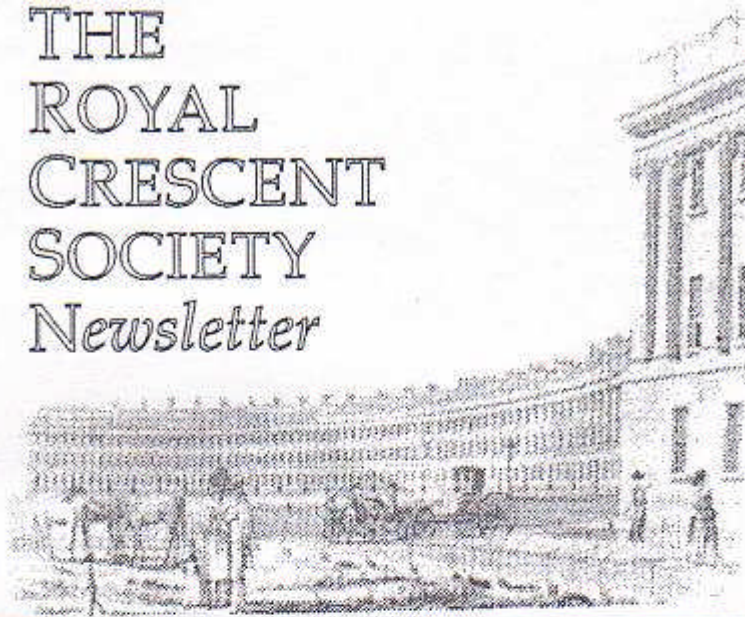


# THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY *Newsletter*



Issue No. 19

Spring 1992

## Rallying round the Crescent

Our Chairman Michael Daw reports on  
a famous victory and summer song

**A**'MODEL of gracious living probably without equal anywhere in the world'. So said *The Times* describing the Royal Crescent in a recent two-page feature on Bath and adding to the paeons of praise already heaped on John Wood the Younger's masterpiece over the centuries.

Our reputation increasingly attracts such welcome attention, but it can also appeal to the more crass opportunism of the entrepreneur. The latest of these was the Royal Automobile Club, which

sought to start a car rally in the Crescent on a busy Friday morning in March, to close the road from 6am and probably to ban parking from the day before, though they carefully avoided mentioning this.

Your Committee objected at once on the grounds of noise, intrusion, fumes, gross domestic disturbance and the general inappropriateness of such an event in a Grade 1 residential environment. An enquiry in January brought no response from the Parks Department (a co-organiser with the RAC)



and your Committee mounted a vigorous campaign to persuade councillors to reject the proposal. Our letters to the Chief Executive attracted extensive coverage by all three local newspapers and B.B.C. local radio. The Bath Preservation Trust also lent their support. Copies of our objections were sent to our Ward Councillors, and led by David Hawkins, the chairman, to whom our thanks are due, the relevant Committee rejected the application and moved the event to the more appropriate setting of the Royal Avenue.

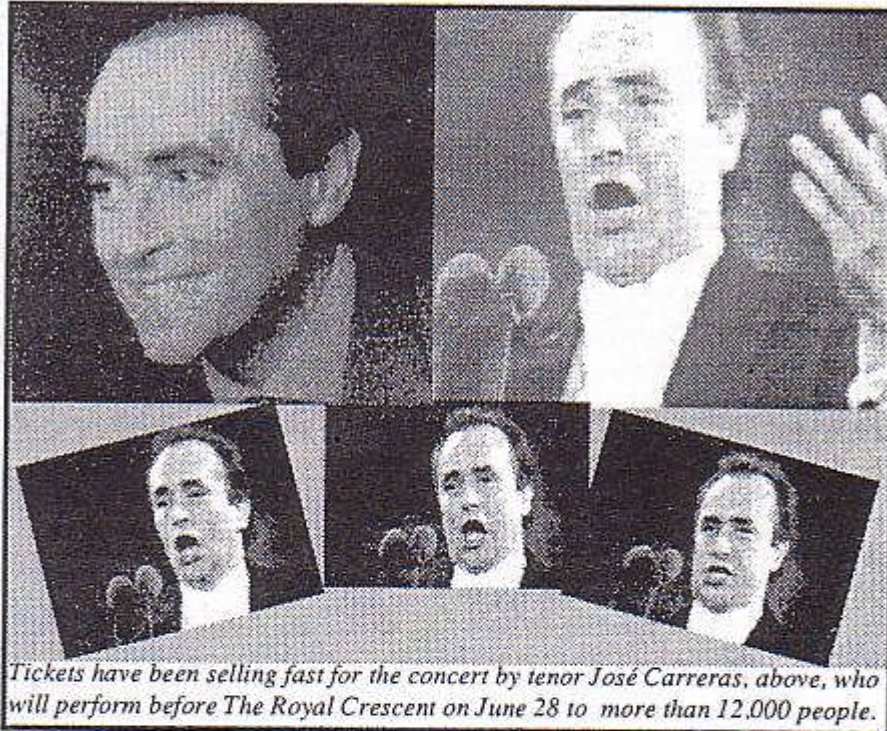
Another battle to preserve the ambience of this Crescent has been won, but again, only through the vigilance and efforts of your Committee. It is virtually certain that without this action the

event would have gone ahead with the attendant misery for residents and visitors alike.

Contrast such an offensive proposal with the pleasure to many thousands and the major tourist boost to the City, which we hope will be brought by the fine singing and music on a summer Sunday evening in the planned José Carreras concert on 28th June.

The organisers of this event, although still commercially based, have gone to some pains to minimise the impact on residents and to help and protect our interests.

The outline of the event will be found elsewhere in a separate letter to members and I anticipate giving fur-



*Tickets have been selling fast for the concert by tenor José Carreras, above, who will perform before The Royal Crescent on June 28 to more than 12,000 people.*

ther information at the Annual General Meeting on 27th April.

At the time of going to press there is

much to be finalised.

**O**n another front there is unlikely to be any reduction in the frequency

## *AIMS OF THE SOCIETY*

THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY was started in 1973 to enhance and improve the Crescent and its environs and to protect it from commercialisation. The Society has had a number of significant successes in its endeavours besides the administration of the lawn and its boundaries.

There has been the stopping of a second hotel, the banning of coaches, the fending off of commercial encroachment and itinerant vendors and fly posters, the laying of paving stones and the inauguration of a Basement Garden Competition. The Committee hopes that you will support this valuable work which is of direct benefit, not only to the fabric of this jewel in the crown of Bath's C18th World Heritage status, but to you as a resident.

*The Royal Crescent Society Spring Newsletter*

of open-topped tour buses this summer. Members will have seen the situation outlined in my letter in January, where Avon County Councillors debated a new Traffic Regulation Order which would reduce the frequency of buses to 5 per hour (the best improvement we can hope for at this stage.)

Because of the number of objections to the Order, many surprisingly from Bathwick Hill residents, Councillors have little option but to defer further pursuit of the Order pending a site visit (presumably including a bus-ride) and discussion with Bath City Councillors and officials. We will continue to watch and lobby.

Work to relay the tarmac paving around the Lawn railings with Pennant slabs is now 'probably' to be funded by Bath City Council, but the Director of Engineering and Property Services, advised by the Director of Environmental Services, have now said that they will not start until the railings and their bases are put in a better condition. This is likely to be an expensive project for which your Committee has insufficient funds at present.

We also believe that the cause of the major deterioration in the condition of the railing bases since they were last reinstated in 1975 must be the heavy weight of traffic.

This is firmly disputed by Avon County and Bath City Councils, and we await further advice from our solicitors and engineers before deciding how to proceed. It would be a pity to lose the opportunity for such a major

improvement to the Crescent.

This Newsletter is the one issue a year which is sent to all residents, owners and occupiers of the Crescent besides Friends, members of the Society or not. We earnestly hope that those not already members will join and that they, and existing members, whom your Committee thanks for their support, will all come to the Annual General Meeting on 27th April, to voice your opinions, hear the latest news, and perhaps even gossip, meet your Ward Councillors, elect your Committee and have an enjoyable social evening renewing acquaintances with neighbours and friends. Full details are on another page and I, and the Committee, look forward to seeing you there. □

*The Royal Crescent Society  
Newsletter  
is published three times a year.*

*Editor: Dr Monica Baly*

*Design, Typesetting &  
Printing: John Walker*

*With thanks to Peter Wilks  
of  
Network, Julian Road  
for word processing.*

# The day bombs fell on Bath

Dr Monica Baly  
recalls the time  
when Hitler  
tried to destroy  
The Royal Crescent

At the outbreak of the Second World War Bath was considered to be safe from attack and received evacuees from London, and, at two days notice, the Admiralty, who requisitioned the hotels in the middle of Bath.

After Dunkirk a bomber offensive was the main contribution that Britain could make to the war. At first it was anticipated that only military targets would be attacked, but after 1941 such niceties were no longer observed by either side.

On 28th March, 1942 Bomber Command attacked the port of Lubeck which was also a mediaeval, Hanseatic town with wooden houses, of which 40 per cent were destroyed. Hitler was furious and vowed revenge. Part of the revenge was to be Bath.

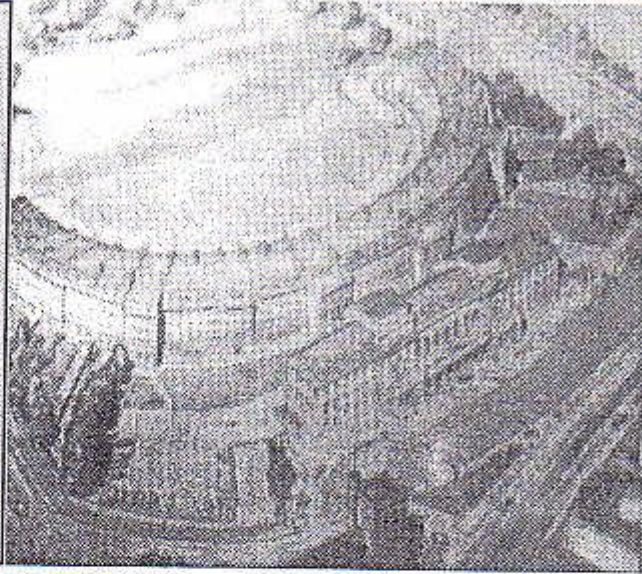
On 25th April, at 10.15pm 163 German bombers crossed the coast and as they turned towards Bath the sirens

sounded but few people took any notice thinking that it was just another raid on Bristol. However, the actual sound of bombs falling galvanised people into action and most took cover, often in the large cellars under the road. The Kingsmead area suffered most and the whole area was soon alight with incendiaries on the way to the gasworks. The Civil Defence and Fire Services came into action but they were hampered because the telephones had been cut and there was no co-ordination with the headquarters at Apsley House and there was a shortage of water.

The incendiary bombs were effective in burning houses and creating a target for the succeeding aircraft but at first there were comparatively few casualties. The All Clear siren sounded and people came out of their shelters but soon the sirens sounded again and the wardens shepherded them back. One outstanding tragedy was the Scala cinema shelter in Oldfield which filled again and received a direct hit at one end.

It is not known how many people in the shelter were killed, bodies were blown across the road and some were unidentifiable. At the same time bombs fell all around Oldfield Park and many houses were destroyed. People could see the bombers clearly and the gunning was so close that people had to take cover. First Aid workers and rescue services worked valiantly and ambulances took the worst casualties to the two hospitals where the staff worked continuously dealing with pri

*How The Royal Crescent might have looked if the Abercrombie Report had been implemented. Changed into a civic centre, with buildings at the back swept away to make room for a new Council Chamber and Committee Rooms, forecourt and a large car park.*



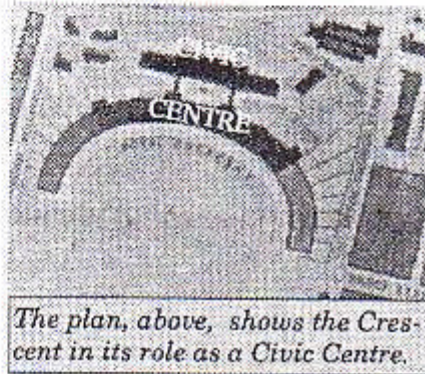
ority cases as best they could. The dead were left or ferried to make-shift mortuaries. At last dawn appeared and the bombers flew off.

On Sunday, 26th April with fires still burning and people digging in the rubble, the Salvation Army and other voluntary services trying to deal with the homeless and the bereaved, many people, fearing another attack, decided to get out of Bath even if it meant a night in the open.

This meant that some buildings were without firewatchers and some of the voluntary services were depleted. That night the sirens sounded again; this time the defending fighters had some success, but it was a harrowing night and several acres of buildings came under concentrated attack. Once again Kingsmead was the main target, a bomb fell on the rails at Bath Station

and St John's House was demolished.

Then the raiders attacked to the North. The most famous loss was the Assembly Rooms which had been newly restored. The Fire Brigade headquarters at No 3 Royal Crescent ceased to function when a near miss blew out the black out curtains; Nos 2 and 17 were gutted by incendiaries. Behind the Crescent, on the triangle, St An-



*The plan, above, shows the Crescent in its role as a Civic Centre.*

*The Royal Crescent Society Spring Newsletter*

drew's Church went up in flames and much of Julian Road and around was devastated.

That night two hotels were hit and partly demolished, the Francis in Queen's Square and the Regina opposite the Assembly Rooms, causing much loss of life. St James's Church, which stood on Littlewoods site, received a direct hit.

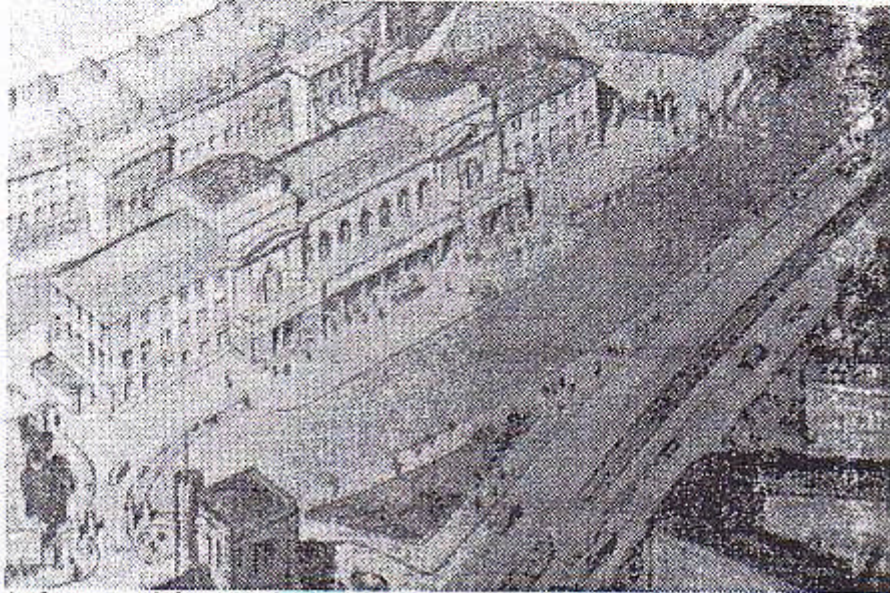
Ironically, the crypt was being used as a mortuary for bodies from the previous night, now they floated out in the water from the Fire Service; one of the more macabre scenes of that dreadful night.

Severe though the raids were they failed in the primary objective of destroying the cultural targets in Bath;

the damage was mainly in the suburbs and the Georgian heart of the city was left largely untouched. But the damage was great. Three hundred and twenty nine houses were totally destroyed, 132 had to be demolished and 19,147 suffered some damage and the final death toll was estimated at over 400. Sadly some bodies were unidentified and others were unidentifiable.

Most of the bombed areas remained derelict for years. In 1958 the view from the back of the Crescent was of large areas of waste ground with a profusion of rose willow and buddleia and plenty of scope, amid the brambles, for the parking of cars.

For years there was rubble at the end of Northampton Street and where St



*A close-up of the new Council Chamber planned for the rear of the Crescent, separated by a forecourt from Julian Road. St. Andrews Church, bottom left, was to remain, with its spire removed.*

Andrew's Church once stood eventually, and mercifully, there was a green sward. On the North side, packing case concrete blocks were erected on the rubble, named aptly Phoenix House, but they were sadly out of scale with the surrounding architecture and at odds with the typical Bath roof line. In the Crescent itself Nos 2 and 17 were sympathetically restored by the late Hugh Roberts of Brock Street, but for many years a number of the houses showed the

signs of the ravages of war and neglect.

The Abercrombie Report of 1946, the plan for post-war Bath envisaged massive rebuilding which would have destroyed much of the south of Bath and would have turned the Royal Crescent into Council offices surrounded by car parks (see map). The earth over John Wood the younger's grave must have trembled. Fortunately the plan was too big to be adopted. As it was most of the architectural gems were rebuilt as they had been as was the case of the Assembly Rooms.

In many cases it was a question of infilling but in some cases valuable sites were lost. A wing of Green Park disappeared, St James's Church was pulled down as were other churches and chapels. In Carlton Road Georgian arti-

san cottages were replaced by what Fergusson calls 'hen coops' visible from every vantage point and the

unloved Technical College, in the midst of Georgian houses, continued the isolation of the south west of Bath.

At the back of the Crescent the complex of Georgian artisan houses around Lampard Buildings was lost. The Bus Station and the Southgate shopping complex, not exactly architectural gems, have replaced what

was admittedly a run down area by the river.

At the end of the war the residents of Queen's Square gave their garden as a memorial to those killed in the raids on Bath, but strangely there exists no official memorial to this tragic time in the history of Bath.

Now fifty years on as we look at the phoenix that arose from the ashes we may ask with Adam Fergusson\* which was the Sack of Bath, Hitler or the post-war planners? □

*\*The Sack of Bath by Adam Fergusson (Compton Russell, 1973).*

*This article was taken from a lecture given by Niall Rothnie and his well researched book *The Bombing of Bath* (Ashgrove Press 1983), which can be read at the Bath Reference Library.*

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## Don't forget: April is the month of our Annual General Meeting

**T**HE 18th Annual Meeting of the Royal Crescent society will be held on, Monday, April 27th, at 7.15 pm at the Bath and County Club, Queen's Parade by kind permission of the Club Committee. After the meeting, drinks and light refreshments will be available, to which we have invited our Ward and County Councillors.

A formal notice convening the meeting with the agenda has been sent to all residents together with a request for nominations for the Committee and its Officers. Only paid up members are entitled to vote at the meeting.

Our Constitution requires that all Officers retire after serving five years and are not eligible for re-election until after the Annual Meeting of the following year. Committee members retire after serving three years and are also not eligible for re-election for a further year. Because of the many changes in 1990/91 no Committee member has served more than two years.

For practical purposes the number of Officers and Committee must not exceed 9 and there are, therefore, now 4 Officers and 5 Committee members. Because of the amount of work undertaken by the Committee each member

needs to take on a specific task, this includes such tasks as, Remembrancer, Press and Public Relations, Archivist and Liaison with other Committees.

### **Present Officers**

Chairman: Mr Michael Daw (served 1 year) No 10

Secretary: Mrs Shirley Parker (served 1 year) No 10

Treasurer: Mr Ian Nesbitt (served 2 years) No 3

Editor: Dr Monica Baly (served 3 years) No 19

### **Committee Members**

Dr Len Fisher (served 1 year) No 29

Mrs Annabelle Trechmann (served 1 year) No 5

Mr Christopher Woodward (served 1 year) No 1

Mr Graham Wadsworth (served 2 years) No 3

Ms Jenny Hardisty - co-opted for the HaHa project.

Special Co-opted member Dr Peter Woodward, adviser from the Bath Preservation Trust.

All existing Officers and Committee members are willing to stand for re-election except Mr Graham Wadsworth who is resigning because of commitments abroad. We will miss Mr

## It's subscription time again!

THE SUBSCRIPTION year starts on May 1st. Residents who have not already joined, or rejoined, for 1992/3 are asked to send their subscriptions of £5 per person to: Mr Ian Nesbitt (Treasurer) 3 The Royal Crescent.

Also, since the 18th century residents have paid towards the upkeep of the lawn, the railings and the Ha-ha through a Lawn Fund. It was originally administered by a firm of lawyers and now for convenience is administered by the Society.

This essential aspect of the Crescent needs constant work and it is hoped that residents will contribute.

The current scale of contributions to the Lawn Fund is:

Residents occupying...

Whole House £20 per annum

Large Flat or maisonette on two floors £15

Ordinary Flat (one floor in one house) £7

Cheques may be composite and made out to the Royal Crescent Society and Lawn Fund.

Non-voting members who have an interest in The Crescent may receive the Newsletter and all other matter published by the Society through the post for £5 per annum. Friends may also attend the AGM.

Wadsworth's expertise on public relations and publicity. There is, therefore, one vacancy on the Committee. It must be stressed, however, that all remaining Officers and Committee members must, and do, stand for re-election and other candidates may be put forward. Candidates must be proposed and seconded by members of the Society.

The Committee has had a busy year and there is much to report. There is the continuing saga of the buses and our efforts to curb their frequency, paving stones have been re-laid, planning applications considered, the all

too pressing problem of the stonework, the problem of pitch invasions on the lawn, the vexed question of Residents' parking and the never ending requests to use the Crescent and the lawn for film or commercial purposes.

Now there is the pressing problem of the restoration of the Ha-ha and its cost, the most major project ever undertaken by the Society.

It is therefore, important that as many residents as possible come to the Annual Meeting and give the Committee their views; this is our main opportunity of canvassing members. □

## Who was the Hon Charles Hamilton?

Dr Monica Baly spotlights a forgotten figure in the history of The Royal Crescent

READERS may recall that in the winter of 1988 we published 'The Building of the Royal Crescent', in which we produced part of the contract between the Hon. Charles Hamilton of Painshill Surrey and the builder Sam Kirkham made on 21st June 1773. Charles was precise in his requirements including the detailed layout of the two 'Necessaries' in the garden.

Who was the Hon Charles Hamilton who also brought property in Lansdown with a garden that stretched down to the back of the Royal Crescent? A recent lecture on his life and work revealed that Charles Hamilton is as worthy of a plaque as some of his neighbours who are thus remembered.

He was the 14th son of the Earl of Abercorn and during the Grand Tour he studied art and garden design in Italy. On return he acquired an estate at Painshill in Surrey to which he devoted years landscaping and creating a garden of different moods with long views across Surrey, complete with grottos, a Gothic temple, a Chinese arched bridge and a ruined Abbey. Today this beautiful C18th Park is being restored to its

former glory by the Painshill Park Trust with the Prince of Wales as the patron.

In his day Charles Hamilton was known for his garden designs rather like Capability Brown, with whom he did not necessarily agree. When he came to Bath at the age of 69, having given up Painshill, he continued gardening, growing rare plants and vines on the Lansdown slope (what is now Northampton Street). There is evidence that he advised on gardens and estates around Bath including Beckford and Bowood, and it is interesting to ponder the layout of the garden at the back of No 14 under his masterly hand. He died aged 82 years, still gardening. □

*Lecture given by Mavis Collier, archivist to the Painshill Park Trust to the History of Bath Research Group.*

### HELP WANTED

THE editor very much welcomes articles, letters, criticisms, suggestions and items of news from members. We would welcome your views and opinions about life as it is, or as it was, in The Royal Crescent.

## TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION

By P. Birchell

ON Tuesday the 3rd October and following days. The neat genteel and fashionable household furniture, some fine old china, India cabinets, a curiously inlaid ivory work chest etc. at no.14 in the Crescent late belonging to the Hon. Charles Hamilton.

The furniture consists of handsome four post bedsteads with mahogany carved posts and cornices and silk damask morine stripe and other furnitures, half tester and four post servant's bedsteads with green cheney and linsey furnitures, fine bordered goose feathered beds, blankets, quilts, mattresses, silk, morine, caffoy, window curtains and cornices, Bruxelles, Wilton and Scotch carpets, pier glasses in carved gilt and white frames, girandoles, dressing glasses, mahogany pier, dressing, pillar and joining dining table, chests of drawers, night tables, an elegant inlaid writing and dressing table, mahogany drawing room, dressing room, and parlour chairs, sofas, settees, mahogany side board and pedestal urns, handsome cut glass lustres, a marble urn carved and ornamented on a painted pedestal, an exceeding good eight day clock and a Buzoglo stove, good copper, brass and other kitchen furniture.

To be viewed on Monday preceeding and mornings of sale which will begin at 11 o'clock.

Catalogues to be had at the place of sale and of P. Birchell, upholder, appraiser and undertaker, Queen's Square Bath.

*The above notice, from the Bath Chronicle of Monday September 25 1786 of the items to be sold by auction from No 14 Royal Crescent after the death of Charles Hamilton is useful as an indication of the furnishings in a fashionable house in the*