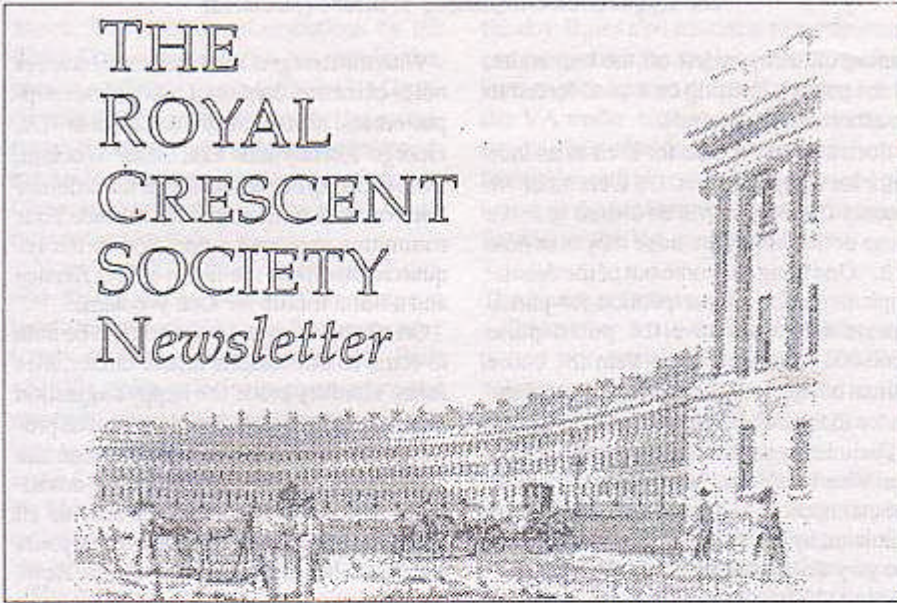


# THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY Newsletter



Issue No.24

Winter 1993

## The Chairman's Notes

Since the last Newsletter, Summer, the Concert and the main tourist invasions have all come and gone. Tourist buses are still with us, but even at the height of the season were poorly patronised. As our monitoring shows, the average occupancy is only 15 people per bus.

However, as we expected, the bus companies have kept to the voluntary agreement they devised and have not exceeded its limits significantly. Whether they would continue this 'good behaviour' if they knew they were not being monitored is a matter for subjective judgment.

Or is it? The old adage - by their deeds shall ye know them - springs to mind. The bus companies' deeds present a sad record: they have stopped on double yellow lines to deliver commentaries (illegal); they now

stop on double and single yellow lines to drop and pick up passengers (illegal); they used to bombard us, and continue to bombard the rest of Bath, with loud amplified commentary (inconsiderate and insensitive); they have never expressed the slightest concern about the visible damage they have caused to the road surface (irresponsible); they have never sought to discuss the impact of their "services" on those most affected (discourteous and aloof); they have then complained that they have been "unable" to have a dialogue with residents (economical with the truth); they accuse us of being against tourism (misrepresentation, we have always made clear that we welcome tourist, but not in buses); and finally, perhaps worst of all, they admit privately that this Crescent could without practical of fi-

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nancial difficulty be left off the tour route, whilst publicly insisting on it until forced to do otherwise (two-faced).

Such a record speaks for itself as an indicator for future conduct. On December 7th County Councillors will be invited to make some decisions and we hope they take note of it. One thing has come out of the debate: implementation of our petition for partial closure etc. could save the public purse £160,000 or more - more than the entire annual budget for basic carriageway maintenance for the whole city.

Fortunately we have strong support from our Vice President, Lord Stockton, whose robust approach could with benefit be emulated by our MP Don Foster instead of the very disappointing "keep me informed" response he has given, after some pursuit. A fuller report on the tourist bus situation will be found on another page.

After the minor brouhahas about the concert, generated by a few residents (some of whom contrived to be away at the time...), the event itself was self-evidently enjoyed by the majority of residents who used rooftops, windows, forecourts, the pavement and the Lawn itself to relish the music and the last warm evening of the summer. I sent on behalf of the majority of members, a short message of welcome to Dame Kiri and it was clear that she too enjoyed the evening and the pleasure it gave to so many.

An unexpected vindication of your committee's plans to restore the Ha-ha wall and ditch came when the lower public park was sealed off during construction of the concert arena. Throughout that time, despite good weather, there were almost no incursions onto the Lawn by footballers etc.. This must demonstrate that the less inviting the Ha-Ha barrier is made to climbers, the more private and unviolated our Lawn will remain.

With much regret this newsletter includes notes of the sad demise of two stalwart supporters and characters of this Crescent - Dr George Kersley and Col. John Woolam. Both will long be remembered for different but worthy reasons and much missed. Your committee approved a donation to the requested charity in the name of Dr. Kersley and a floral tribute for Col. Woolam.

On a happier note, I hope you will be able to come to this seasons festive dinner. Mrs Jenny Hardisty made the happy suggestion of Twelfth Night as an alternative to the pre-Christmas rush and you will have seen the other, more bibulous and pecuniary, advantages of this date in the flyer sent to all members (if you should have missed yours please call her at the Royal Crescent Hotel on 319090).

Finally may I wish all members and their families a warm and enjoyable festive season and a splendid New Year.

### TOURIST BUSES

#### County Council Progress

As we go to press, a crunch debate in the Avon County Council's Public Highways and Transport Committee (PHTC) looms close. Members will recall the six month voluntary agreement (VA) under which the bus company were to operate nine buses per hour, and our monitoring of the traffic.

County officials have produced a 17 page very detailed report for the meeting, analysing all the issues in some depth. It therefore embodies too many points to be covered fully here (if any member wishes to see a copy, please contact Chairman on Bath 315529).

However the report does at last recognise the damage caused by heavy traffic and the need to achieve a reduction in the level of use of the Crescent. It also postulates that to implement our petition in some form could save £160,000 or more on road maintenance.

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nance. But because of objections by the Chief Constable, and the bus companies, plus an equivocal stance by Bath City Council who have yet to undertake "consultations", the report concludes by recommending an "ad hoc" meeting between the two Councils to try and find a way ahead. So all may not yet be lost.

Your Traffic Committee (Dr. Len Fisher and Simon Crowe) have at some speed produce a report of its own for the meeting (copy available from Simon on Bath 483830) which principally summarises the results of our monitoring exercise (see below) but also addresses the principal issues in the County Report. Our County Councillor Maureen Wheadon is continuing to be extremely helpful in processing and presenting our views.

The main recommendations in our report are to return to the original concept of a traffic regulation order with a limit of 5 buses per hour and to test this at public inquiry because we have no faith in a voluntary scheme (see Chairman's notes). Failing this, our report recommends adoption of the request for access only with some minor modifications to meet the Chief Constable's concerns which we consider derive from too literal an interpretation of the very brief wording of the petition itself.

### **Society Monitoring of Bus Traffic**

Meanwhile you will wish to know the results of our monitoring of the bus traffic. This has been statistically analysed by your Traffic Committee and shows that for this period - as expected - the bus companies have been careful to keep fairly close to the VA. On average 9.3 buses per hour passed through the Crescent every day (with some significant peaks above that). That is still one bus every SIX minutes and at least one if not more buses in the Crescent for 60% of

the day. Buses also routinely stop anywhere and everywhere, on single and double yellow lines to pick up and drop off passengers. If the VA under monitoring produces these results, then when it operates unmonitored the incidence is almost bound to rise and get worse, as the peaks multiply under the many flexibilities the VA conditions allow.

### **The National Debate**

On another front, the last newsletter reported our contribution to the National debate on deregulation via a letter to the Department of Transport. This letter has been most ably and strongly backed up by a direct intervention by our Vice-President, Lord Stockton writing to the Secretary of State for Transport, John MacGregor. SoS's reply trod a fairly well worn path of saying that this was a local matter capable only of local solution; we can only hope that the wider issue (that deregulation was not intended to unleash damaging heavy traffic on Heritage sites, but to free local and inter-City public transport) has not been completely overlooked.

### **Our MP's response**

Earlier this year we sought the assistance of our new MP, Don Foster in our campaign. At first he acknowledged the problems here and elsewhere and promised to write further. That was in March. We heard nothing further and so wrote again in September and received a reply which added nothing to the debate, offered no support and asked to be "kept informed". He had spoken to Badgerline who again said that they had "been unable to meet with the Society". They presumably omitted to tell him that no such meeting had ever been proposed by Badgerline as the creators of the problem; it is certainly not your Committee's intention to go cap in hand to them.

This response is very disappointing, particularly when compared with the strong support given by our former MP Chris Patten, even when by doing so he was virtually tilting at his own Party's policy.

#### TRAVELLERS

Avon County and Bath City Councils have still made no decisions on where to set up sites for "travellers", but have agreed to a joint series of meetings, stretching well into 1994, to "seek clarification of the joint criteria for site selection in the Bath area". Thus the site behind Marlborough Buildings, against which most residents signed a petition prepared by the Society, is still a potential option. Your Committee will continue to monitor and report developments.

#### GAS PIPE RELAYING

As we go to press British Gas has just begun the major mainlaying works in the Crescent. Residents should have seen BG's letter giving advice about the event and some may have been visited by Mr Peter Barnett, BG's engineering officer, who may be contacted for more information on Bath 444321. He also sought a discussion with your Committee at which we explained our concerns about the proper safeguarding of the valuable and rare stone setts which make up the roadway and their reinstatement. This concern has been taken to heart, but BG's statutory duty is to replace any disturbed surface exactly "as found"; there will not, therefore, be any major repair of the undulating road surface - the undulations will be reinstated !!

#### BUSES FOR LAWNS?

Given the two continuing matters of contention which exercise us, some residents have suggested that in return for us granting use of the Lawn for Concerts, we be relieved

of the tourist bus traffic. Your Committee has looked at this but concluded that such an exchange is neither within our gift nor practical. The Society has no authority to grant use of the Lawn without the consent of every resident and the organisers of the Concerts and the operators of the buses are entirely different entities. There is no avenue by which this idea could be pursued.

#### BATH UNIVERSITY PROJECT

Bath University's Director of Development, Jointly with their Director of Architecture Building and Engineering, approached your Committee with a request for assistance in a new computer based project they are developing with Bath City Council.

The aim is to produce a detailed 3 dimensional computer model of the whole cityscape with as much detail as possible of important individual buildings. This could be used as an aid to decision making when planning applications are made: decision makers could look at the existing building or street scene in 3D on the screen and see the new proposal injected into it; they could even 'walk around' it at ground level, seeing everything to scale and in perspective. The 'model' would also provide for the first time a complete and detailed record of the City, and important buildings as they are at any given date and, over time, the history of their development and changes.

The University would like to start setting up a detailed record of this Crescent - including, if owners permitted, interior layouts and features; they sought the good offices of the Society to help proselytise the project, set up a meeting of residents and co-operate generally. Benefits to participants would be a record of their own building and, altruistically, helping a University/City project for the benefit of education and conservation.

Your Committee examined the proposal and decided that in line with policy established by members at the '93 AGM, the Society should neither take on any co-ordinating role, nor supply any details of residents or members: the University should organise its own meeting, establishing residents names etc. from public sources (eg the Electoral Roll, Council tax list etc.). Your Committee was also concerned that records of houses interior arrangements could, if reaching the wrong hands be useful to the ill-disposed. Decisions on whether to participate should therefore be left to individual residents if and when approached by the University.

#### THE REPAIR OF THE GOTHICK SCREEN WALL AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GARDEN OF NO. 18 ROYAL CRESCENT, BATH.

The new owners of the ground floor flat at No 18 have recently carried out repairs to the interesting Georgian Gothick screen wall. The former coach house, stables and yard have been replaced by the current car repair shop but this Georgian screen wall facing the garden survives, albeit in poor repair. As residents will know several relatively ambitious screen walls survive in this position in the gardens of other houses, some with elaborate classical facades, the grandest being the two storey Baldwinesque elevation next door at No 19. None other however, as far as I know, was built in the rococo Gothick style which was particularly fashionable in the middle of the century (cf. the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in the Vineyards of 1765) but continued in vogue, especially for Bath coach houses, well into the Regency period. I cannot however recall another in Bath where the doorway and windows on either side have been treated as archaeologically as here, with moulded re-

veals to their openings.

When the new owners bought the property the central doorway was blocked with breeze blocks and each window had had an incongruous modern window inserted in its lower half. Its upper half and the west window retained clear traces of grey paintwork with trompe l'oeil simple intersecting tracery, mysteriously also painted grey, outlined by charcoal or black lines representing the lead comes of diamond paved panels of glazing. They concealed the breeze blocks with vertical boarding and restored the modern window opening to a flat masonry surface by filling it with flat Bath ashlar walling. Following discussions with myself and Richard Strachey of Nimbus, the Conservators, the windows and their moulded reveals have been cleaned with fine water sprays, decayed portions and open joints have been filled with lime mortar pigmented with stone dust to match the stone and the 'glazing' has been repainted, great care being taken to match the careless variation of pane size in the original work. Since the tracery did not read as such painted grey we took the liberty of painting it to match the stone.

The effect of grey 'glazing' charcoal comes and stone coloured reveals and tracery is very convincing, especially when viewed from a distance as one enters the garden from the house. I hope that one day further funding may allow the completion of the project with a similar treatment of the door and the repair of the rest of the wall. I also trust that, following the recent refusal of the application for three storey housing behind the wall an appropriate two storey mews building with a roof will replace the repair shop. This would convert what is at present merely a wall into the back - or, architecturally speaking, the front of a mews cottage, albeit one where conventionally the occupants could not look onto the garden the

windows being sham to human eyes what would otherwise have seemed a cold and impersonal treatment of a blank wall while preserving the social conventions of a by-gone age. *James Elliott* 26.10.93

#### THE RESTORATION OF THE HA-HA

I recently chanced across a notice in the 'Bath Chronicle' of November 1773 - as Royal Crescent neared completion - announcing that "*all disputes with regard to the ground at the front of the crescent are amicably settled*". Perhaps the author of the piece spoke too soon ...

However, amid all the controversy of the lawn it might be helpful to remind Society members of the aims of the Ha-Ha project. I imagine most people are aware that over the years the ditch has filled in with earth and is no longer the obstacle it is supposed to be. The Society is trying to restore its original profile - and its original purpose. The wall itself has been surveyed and the next step is for archaeological digs to establish what profile the ditch should be.

But members have asked - why do we not simply pick up shovels and dig out a deeper ditch ourselves? Does it really matter if it does not follow the exact profile of the original?

But the Ha-Ha is not just any old ditch. No doubt there are more important ditches - nominations are welcome - but they are few and far between. This is a unique example of an urban Ha-Ha and it was a carefully considered feature of John Wood Jr.'s design. It was his vision of a city opened up to the delights of the Picturesque countryside which transformed town planning and urban life in Britain. The Committee feels that the Ha-Ha deserves to be respectfully restored to its original character.

Furthermore, we have been trying to work hand in hand with Bath City Council.

An authentic restoration plan has a good chance of receiving generous grant aid and we must not forget that the ditch itself lies within the land of the City authorities. Any work we do must satisfy them - and picking up shovels and marching into the park is unlikely to do so.

It has even been asked, why not just put up a fence? I personally think this would be wrong to because it would divide the view from the Crescent into two, separating the lawn and the gentle slope beyond. But would it not be wrong to ignore the vision of John Wood in so obvious a way? After all, don't we pride ourselves on protecting the Crescent's historic character? And it is thanks to John Wood that we have such a delightful place in which to live.

*Christopher Woodward*

PS... The paint colour of the railings around the lawn was analysed recently and is supposed that they were originally painted green. Any votes for painting over that dull Victorian Black.

#### GEORGE DURANT KERSLEY

OBE, TD, DL, FRCP, Hon DSc

Died in Bath September 1st aged 86 years

George Kersley was a pioneer in rheumatology when it was still a 'Cinderella' subject in modern medicine. The eldest son of an eminent Bath family at an early age he saw the sufferings of the visitors to Bath who came to 'take the waters'. When he completed his training at St Bartholomew's he resolved to take a research post at the Mineral Water Hospital (later the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases), this was a brave decision since with his ability, good looks and charm he could have found a post in a fashionable consultancy in London.

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During the war Kersley set up the Army School of Occupational Therapy at Taunton and worked as an adviser to the Army on the training of recruits and the rehabilitation of the wounded from the Middle East. Meanwhile, the Royal National Hospital had been badly damaged in the 'Baedeker' raids and the patients were dispersed in temporary huts, which is how I first knew this hospital and George Kersley. With the coming of the National Health Service there was an attempt to close the hospital which George Kersley fought off. There then started a long battle the 'Save the Min' particularly during the time of the Hospital Plan under Enoch Powell. George Kersley was indefatigable and fought off five successive Ministers of Health and against all odds the 'Min' survived and is now a refurbished Trust Hospital.

As a consultant George Kersley interested himself in research and was a founder member of both the Empire Rheumatism Council (Now the Arthritis and Rheumatism Council for Research) and the British Association for Physical Medicine. It was largely due to George Kersley's efforts that this speciality gained recognition from the Royal College of Physicians. George was always a fighter.

In 1979 he was elected Mayor of Bath and was also a founder member and chairman of the Bath Tattoo for which he was appointed an OBE, he was active on the Bath City Council, chairing its committees for the Arts, Libraries, Youth and the Spa, and he was still fighting for the restoration of Bath as a Spa City at the time of his death.

Since living in the Crescent George Kersley has been an active supporter of the Royal Crescent Society and a doughty campaigner in times of trouble.

Our sympathies go to his wife, Mickie,

stepson and his son and daughter by his former marriage.

George Kersley was a man for all seasons and the Crescent is poorer without him.

*Monica E Baly*

There was a well attended service of thanksgiving for the life of George Kersley in Bath Abbey on October 4th followed by a reception in the Guildhall which was a happy occasion of which George would have approved.

### OTHER CRESCENT NEWS

#### **Lt. Col. John Martin Woolam**

It is with sorrow that we record the death of John Woolam on 17th November 1993 aged 79 years. John Woolam had borne a long and debilitating illness with characteristic humour and courage for some time and our sympathy goes to Elizabeth, his wife, his daughter Suzanna and his son Philip who were with Elizabeth at the time of his death. For twenty years John Woolam was a loyal supporter of the Royal Crescent Society; we are especially grateful to him for his services as Treasurer for a number of years, putting our finances on a sound basis and organising our insurance. The Crescent will miss him with his sound down to earth common sense and humour.

#### **Mrs Clifford Francis**

We are also sorry to record the death of Mrs Francis aged 96 years who was for a number of years resident in No 5 Royal Crescent and the Widow of Judge Clifford Francis who also lived there. For several years Mrs Francis was faithfully looked after by her granddaughter, Mrs Annabel Trech-

Twelfth Night Festive Dinner

for

Royal Crescent Society Members

at

The Royal Crescent Hotel

at 8.00pm

on

Thursday, 6th January 1994

Pre Dinner drinks in the drawing room at 7.15pm

MENU

Timbale of delicate fish mousse  
bound in a chive and tomato butter

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Pheasant cushioned on braised cabbage  
Roast shallots and rosti potato

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Vanilla brulee with Christmas pudding ice cream

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Coffee and mince pies

By Special arrangement with the hotel the cost will be £16, the same as 1991 and 1992.  
Special Dietary alternative are available but advance notification is essential.

To make your reservation use the slip on your flyer or send your cheque to the Royal  
Crescent Hotel for the attention of Jenny Hardisty.

Early application is advised as a sitting plan has to be drawn up  
It is hoped that as many members as possible will enjoy this festive occasion  
meeting their neighbours and enjoy a Happy New Year

In the mean time have a Happy Christmas

Monica E Balv - Editor - 19 Royal Crescent - Telephone 424736