

THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY Newsletter



Issue No.25

Spring 1994

The Chairman's Notes

1994 will be marked as the end of an era in the history of this Society. Ever since the residents of this Crescent got together as a body in the summer of 1973 (the first time since the last recorded meeting in the 1890's) and agreed to reform as a residents' group under a new title they have relied on the backbone of the Society's business being enthusiastically maintained by one redoubtable individual. For 21 years Monica Baly has served the residents and the cause of the protection of this Crescent with vigour, persistence, intelligence and above all time. She served for most of the period as secretary and more recently as editor of the Newsletter and, memorably, as Acting Chairman. Throughout those years nothing has been too much trouble, from pursuing special grants for the repair of the railings (1975) to getting noisy generators shut off at 4.00 am

(1992) to licking envelopes and delivering the Newsletter in wind and rain.

Dr Baly's other accomplishments as an internationally acclaimed author, biographer and lecturer are well known and we are fortunate to enjoy these skills in her many historical and other articles for the Newsletter. Typically her swansong in this issue is the story of these first 21 years of the Society; a story that only she could write. Despite all efforts at persuasion Dr Baly has decided that room should be made for 'younger blood' to take on the editorship of this Newsletter and a place on the committee: she claims, but shows no evidence, to be stale over Society affairs. We can only hope that her successor will display half her vigour and dedication. I am sure all residents will wish to join me in wishing her well and expressing our deep and heartfelt thanks for

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all she has done for so long. There will of course be an opportunity for more formal expression of these sentiments at the AGM on 13th April. I hope to see you there.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

The 20th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Crescent Society will be held on Wednesday, 13th April at 7.15 pm at the Bath and Country Club, Queen's Parade. After the meeting drinks and light refreshments will be available to which we have invited our Ward and County Councillors.

A formal notice has been sent to all residents together with a request for nominations. For practical purposes the number of officers and committee members must not exceed 10. There are now 5 officers and 5 committee members. Because of the amount of work undertaken by the committee each member needs to take on a specific task which includes Remembrancer, Liaison with other committees, Archivist and Public Relations.

PRESENT OFFICERS

Chairman Mr Michael Daw
Vice Chairman Dr Len Fisher
Secretary Mrs V Oswald
Treasurer Mr Simon Crowe
Editor Dr Monica Baly

COMMITTEE

Mrs Annabel Trechmann
Mr Christopher Woodward
Mr John Meddins
Ms Jenny Hardisty
Cdr Roy Titchen
Special co-opted member Sir Christopher Curwen KCMG from the Bath Preservation Trust.

This year all existing officers are willing to stand for re-election excepting Dr Baly, Mrs Trechmann and Mr Woodward. There are therefore 3 vacancies. It must be stressed 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 by April 4th 1994.

The committee has had a busy year and there is much to report. There is the continuing saga of the buses and our struggle to reduce their fre-

quency, planning applications have been considered, there is the pressing problem of the restoration of the Ha-ha and the ever present problem of the use and abuse of the lawn. Updates on all these matters will be given at the AGM. It is important that as many residents as possible come to the Annual General Meeting and give the committee their views.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

It is subscription time again. The subscription year starts on May 1st. Residents who have not already joined or rejoined for 1995/5 are asked to send their subscriptions of £5 per person to Simon Crowe at 5 Royal Crescent, or as indicated in the AGM papers, cheques may be combined with contributions to the Lawn Fund and made payable to the Royal Crescent Society.

LAWN FUND

Since the 18th century residents have paid towards the upkeep of the lawn, the railings and the Ha-ha through a Lawn Fund as required by the original house leases. It was administered through a firm of lawyers but since 1974 it has been administered by the Society. This aspect of the Crescent needs constant work and residents are urged to contribute. The current scale of contributions per annum are :-

Whole House	£20
Large Flat or Maisonette on 2 floors	£15
Ordinary Flat (ie 1 flat in one house)	£7

Cheques may include subscriptions to the Society and may be made payable to the Royal Crescent Society.

Non-voting members who have an interest in the Crescent may join as Friends and receive the Newsletter and other material published by the Society through the post for £5 per annum. Friends are welcome to attend the Annual General Meeting but may not vote.

TWENTY ONE YEARS OF THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY

Dr Monica Baly looks back

"Why do the people who live here put up with it?" was the question put to me by a gentleman from Texas one sunny, June, Sunday morning in 1973. He had come all the way from Texas to photograph Bath and he could not see the Crescent from the Royal Avenue because of a large stadium which had been built on the lower lawn for the military tattoo to celebrate the jubilee of the coronation of King Edgar. I realised this had blocked the view of the Crescent from April until June. At that time the lawn had no locked gates and as it was a wet summer it was a quagmire and crisscrossed with paths.

Returning home I met a group of residents including Mr & Mrs Forrester and Mr Spenlove-Brown, and I repeated the question; Mr Forrester, who knew more about the legal position of the lawn than any of us said what we needed was a residents' association to act as a forum for the residents and manage the lawn fund. Some lobbying was done and a meeting called for July which was attended by 35 residents. Mr Edward Goring who lived at No 10 and who was on the staff of the Evening Chronicle was nominated Chairman and a provisional committee was formed.

The outstanding problem was the condition of the lawn, the railings and the gates, and Mr Spenlove-Brown whose family had been associated with the Crescent for many years proposed that we recognise the 1975 bicentenary of the completion of the Crescent by restoring the railings and the gates. The provisional committee drew up a constitution which stood the test of time for many years and for this we are largely indebted to Mr Forrester.

In February 1974 the inaugural meeting of the Society was held in the Royal Crescent

Hotel, the committee was formally elected with myself as secretary and 'ways of reducing the misuse of the lawn by the general public' were discussed. The old Lawn Fund which had been collected by a firm of solicitors was bankrupt and the committee set about getting estimates for the repair of railings and gates and made an approach to the Historic Buildings Council who visited and were sympathetic. In the meantime 66 members were recruited to the Society and it was agreed that the Society take over the management of the Lawn Fund for which the subscription was doubled with no one dissenting.

In 1976 the railings were restored, the gates made to lock and subscribing members given a key. But it was not without anxiety, the bill was £3,402 (possibly nearly £20,000 in today's money). The Department of the Environment paid £2,552 leaving the Society to find £850. Residents donations amounted to £350 but there was a nasty gap of £500 that we had not got. Then, one day a Mr Millichip arrived to see the secretary, he wanted to film Joseph Andrews and use the lawn; we cordially invited him to a meeting and we did a quick deal for £1000 (£500 in advance please) and all was saved.

During the filming the unsightly forest of television aerials had been removed, and, with the backing of the Bath Preservation Trust, the Society started a campaign to remove the defacement of the Crescent by aerials and dangling wires. The chief engineer from the BBC in Bristol visited and advised on three master aerials at the cost of £80 per house. The question was would everyone co-operate? and as the file grew thicker it was decided to rely on moral persuasion and the growing attraction of roof space aerials, not to mention the inordinate

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cost of roof repairs. In the end persuasion paid and it is now hard to recollect how unsightly the skyline once was and how many facades were festooned with wires in the front.

In 1978 the Royal Crescent Hotel was acquired by Blakeney Hotels and there were a number of meetings with the Society to examine plans and to question the architect. Nos 15 & 16 had been a Guest House since 1950 and there was no prospect of reversing the change of use and after many meetings it was decided not to register opposition.

During the same year the Society started to plan social events to raise money for the restoration of the Theatre Royal, this had the dual advantage of bringing residents together and raising £500 for the theatre and our name is on the Roll of Honour. At the same time the wife of our treasurer, Mrs Phyllis Otley, suggested that we make better use of the basements and hold a Basement Garden Competition. The Parks Department was asked to judge and many basement dwellers became enthusiastic gardeners whose efforts often seemed to be of more interest to visitors than the architecture above.

Tourism was increasing sharply and 1978 saw our first protest to the City Council about the number of coaches coming round the Crescent and the damage they were doing to the road and the fabric. Letters were passed from department to department and from Bath to Avon with no satisfaction, our MP and councillors were involved. Then at one stormy AGM, patience exhausted, a special traffic committee was set up under the chairmanship of Captain Francis Burne, the administrator from No 1 who had experience in such matters. The team worked indefatigably, producing surveys, photographs, BBC interviews and eventually a question in the House of Lords,

which, against all odds, produced results. The last survey showed that something like 90 coaches a day were thundering round the Crescent.

In 1989, thanks to the chairman, Sir John Barraclough, legal advice and the sub committee and support from the Bath Preservation Trust an appeal against a second hotel being opened in the Crescent was upheld. One of the telling factors was the increase in the amount of traffic a second hotel would engender.

Unfortunately the ban on coaches did not apply to local buses and these have grown in number over the past five years. Last summer's survey showed that a bus came round the Crescent every six minutes and there were often two or three in the Crescent at the same time. Furthering our objective 'to preserve and protect the Royal Crescent and its environment' the Society has lobbied vigorously Avon, Bath, UNESCO and the media that either there should be a ban on buses, or that the frequency be reduced and that long term solutions such as access only be explored. The fight against the coaches took eight years and mountains of letters and documents, the fight against the buses looks as if it will take as long.

When the Society was formed 21 years ago the status of the Lawn Fund and the ownership of the lawn was ambiguous. John Wood left the lawn and its boundaries to residents of the Crescent to use and maintain and from the early nineteenth century a Lawn Fund was subscribed to by owners and residents. In 1992 a concert in the front of the Royal Crescent made us consider this matter more seriously and the Society is looking at the long term legal position.

The first minutes of the Society show that the members were concerned about the public access to a private lawn, this was

THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY - MEMBERS DIRECTORY 1994

Stevens	Mr & Mrs J R	30	Hargreaves	Miss P	
Robbins	Miss J M	30	Hall	Mr P	
Hudson-Jessop	Mr & Mrs L	30	Woodhouse	Mr & Mrs I	
Belsey	Mr R	29	Bardsley	Mr	
Fisher	Dr & Mrs L	29	Turner	Mr E A	
Meddings	Mr & Mrs F	29	Forrester	Mr T & Mrs R	
Stevens	Mr & Mrs J	29	Rawlins	Mr & Mrs W	
Eschic	Miss G	29	Titchen	Mr & Mrs R	
Barraclough	Sir John & Lady	28	Walker	Mrs B	
Oswald	Mr & Mrs	28a	Parker	Mr & Mrs J	
McCulloch	Miss S K	27	Daw	Mr M G	
Langmaid	Mrs E N	27	Brownsword	Mr & Mrs A	
Hall	Mr & Mrs P J	27	Crowe	Mr & Mrs S	
Myers	Dr L M	27	Trechmann	Mrs A	
Mitchell Dunmore	Mrs Jean	26	Garden	Mrs	
Forrester	Mr & Mrs R A C	25	Carrier	Mr & Mrs	
Gray	Mr A H	24	Richards	Mr & Mrs B	
Gealy	Mr & Mrs W L	23	Nesbitt	Mr & Mrs I	
Dackowski	Mr & Mrs P	23	Wadsworth	Mr & Mrs G	
Elsdon	Mr N	23	Thornton	Mr & Mrs J	
Hughes	Mrs M F	23	Kelleway	Miss R M	
Jackson	Mr J T	23	Woodward	Mr C	
Pickett	Mr & Mrs	23	Cotter	Mrs	Friend
Hutchingson	Mr & Mrs P K	23	Smith	Mr D W C	Friend
Wheeler	Miss V	23	Weston	Mr R	Friend
Kersley	Mrs G D	20	Gibbs	Mr & Mrs C	Friend
Wilks	Mr & Mrs T F	20	Spenlove Brown	Mr T R	Friend
Lamprell	Mrs J	19	Bourdon Smith	Mr & Mrs	
Baly	Dr M C	19		19 Crescent Lane	
Lang	Mr & Mrs C	19	The Rt Hon the Earl of Stockton		
Turner	Mrs E	19	4 Little Essex Street		
Semon	Mr Sergio	18	London WC2R 3L F		
Hancke	Mr & Mrs M A	18			
Whiting	Mr & Mrs	18			
Sandilands	Dr & Mrs	18			

because in 1973 there were no effective railings and gates. Once the gates were closed the situation improved and for a few years there was comparative peace, residents sat peacefully on the lawn reading their newspapers. However, in the last ten years or so the Ha-ha has been less and less of a barrier, it has crumbled and the ditch has filled in, in consequence the lawn becomes an extension of the playing area of Victoria Park. With Pitch invaders impervious to reminders that this is private property, the Society is now seeking to restore the Ha-ha to its original dimensions as a conservation project and have started a Ha-ha restoration fund. It was noticeable that when the Ha-ha was barricaded off for the concert last year the lawn remained free from invasion.

Looking back over the minutes of 21 years one is left with a sense of wonderment that a small, oft times diverse, sometimes perverse, and at all times articulate commu-

nity, has been able to achieve so much. Thanks to the constitution a large number of residents have served as officers and committee members and have given time and expertise beyond the call of duty. Thanks to the vigilance of the Society the gates and the railings remain in a reasonable state and at most times the lawn is peaceful, there has been no second hotel, coaches have been banned, a reasonable residents' parking scheme has been achieved, and we now look forward to the restoration of the Ha-ha and to the cessation or diminution of the buses.

From the start the Society acted as a responsible body concerned with its unique architectural heritage, aware that living in the cynosure of tourist eyes entails responsibilities as well as privileges and for this reason the Society has earned respect. But the price is like the price of liberty, it is eternal vigilance and the support of every resident.

Will the residents of the next 21 years be as vigilant as those from its foundation to the present?

EVENTS IN ROYAL VICTORIA PARK

a).	Bath Festival Opening Night celebrations	Friday May 27th
b).	Balloon Fiesta - 7pm	28th & 29th May
c).	Norwich Union Classic Car rally - Royal Avenue	Sunday 29th May
d).	Kids Out Event - Royal Avenue	
	250 disabled children trip to Longleat	Wednesday 8th June
	Bath Fringe - Bandstand area	
	Sculptures and other childrens events	28th May - 13th June
f).	Childrens Folk Dancing	
	Royal Victoria Park Bandstand area	11th June
g).	Elysian Games - Area below Ha-ha	25th June
h).	Karmann Ghia VW Cabriolet Owners Club	
	Royal Avenue	26th June
i)	Bath Triathlon	10th September

CRESCENT NEWS

**BASEMENT GARDEN
COMPETITION**

This competition inaugurated 14 years ago continues to generate enthusiasm and a high standard of entry. This year for 1993.

- 1st prize Mrs J Thornton of No 3
- 2nd prize Mrs V Oswald of No 28a
- 3rd prize Mrs A Trechmann of No 5

MR PETER GREENING

The Society is sorry to report the death of Mr Peter Greening of the Bath Preservation Trust who served as a co-opted member of the committee for a year. Peter Greening was a valued member of the Trust and always a great supporter of the activities of the Royal Crescent Society.

PUBLICITY

The Crescent continues to attract international interest. The glossy German interiors magazine *PRIVE* featured us as 'begehrtesten Adressen Englands' in its 'Oktober' issue. Translators are urgently required to interpret the article Please! (call Michael Daw on 315529).

FESTIVE DINNER

Our Twelfth Night Festive Dinner at the Royal Crescent Hotel was voted the best we have had - thanks to Manager Simon Coombes and his teams diligent efforts and Jenny Hardistry's organising skills. Nearly 50 members and guests thoroughly enjoyed a convivial evening at attractive and preferential rates. Members were also pleased to welcome our Solicitor Mr Tom Shepherd and his wife as their Guests and Mr Charles Smith, Friend of the Society.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

This edition of the Newsletter is sent not only to 100 Members and Friends but to every traceable resident of the Crescent. The latter are constantly encouraged to join and support the Society's work to 'Preserve and Enhance' the Crescent, and will receive the Society's new pamphlet which sets out these aims and our achievements more vividly. Copies are also available from any committee member and will be distributed elsewhere to encourage potential friends.

LIGHT UP FOR THE FESTIVAL

The Bath Festival opens on Friday, 27th May with a programme of entertainment for all the family in the Royal Victoria Park including juggling, kite flying, live theatre and music for children followed by a Balloon Fiesta and lots of varied music.

The evening is made by candles being lit in the windows of the Royal Crescent and adjacent streets at dusk and it is hoped that as many residents as possible will co-operate. If

you are fearful of fire risk, consider using electric candles as are used in the windows of No 1; the Society has identified some of these at very modest cost and will take orders at the AGM, where a sample may be seen. For maximum effect front rooms should be darkened from dusk while the candles are alight. At 10 o'clock there will be a firework display, mounted this year on the Golf Course behind the Crescent.

CABLE EVERYTHING

Your committee has been told that the laying of street cables for cable television, telephone, banking etc. could start in September this year. The franchise company (Universal studios) has sought the committee's views and we have represented our concern about the potential disturbances to our stone setts and the pennant stone paving both to the company and to the Bath City Council. It is hoped to have some responses in time for the AGM.



VALETE

Besides losing the services of Dr Monica Baly, two other members of the committee are standing down (partially in one case). Annabel Trechmann has been a stalwart, charming and hardworking committee member and secretary since 1986. We shall miss her bright and unhibited contributions and her unstinting reliability in a crisis. Christopher Woodward joined the committee as soon as he arrived in the Crescent 3 years ago as part of the Bath Preservation Trust Georgian Group. His contributions have been invaluable, bringing a lively erudition to committee meetings and he has driven the Ha-ha Committee's work intelligently and well in spite of difficulties with the City Council. Mercifully he has agreed to continue his work so we have not lost him altogether.



TOURIST BUSES

The ad-hoc meeting between Avon and Bath councils had still not been held at the time of going to press, despite having been agreed on Dec 7th. It is hoped to have more information at the AGM.

As reported in the Winter issue this meeting

is intended to identify the means of reducing the use of this Crescent by heavy tourist bus traffic. The discussions are intended to address our petition for some form of partial closure signed by well over 100 residents, and the original Traffic Regulation Order reducing numbers to 5 per hour.

Meanwhile Badgerline Bus Company, prompted by our MP, Don Foster, has for the first time since the Bus Services began, written to the Society's chairman. The letter's subtlety was recognised in the chairman's reply and both are printed below. Subsequently, Don Foster's staff, half briefed, sought a date for a meeting but could not say who was seeking one. We await clarification. Finally some members will have seen the largely favourable articles in the National press, The Independent of 17th January 1994 and the Daily Mail Magazine Saturday 13th March, bringing our concerns to a wider audience.

20th January 1994

Dear Mr Daw,

I have seen a copy of the correspondence between yourself and Don Foster, MP, concerning the Royal Crescent/Open Top Bus issue.

I have never refused to meet any group of residents over any matter affecting Badgerline but have never had the opportunity to discuss any matter with members of the Royal Crescent Society.

Whilst I suspect it may be difficult to reach agreement, I believe there may be some value in holding exploratory talks, if only to better understand each others position.

Should you therefore wish to hold a meeting, I would be more than happy to do so.

Yours sincerely

M S Curtis - Regional Director

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Chairman's Reply

31st January 1994

Dear Mr Curtis,

Tourist buses in the Royal Crescent.

Thank you for your letter of 20th January 1994

My committee and I support your view that agreement between your commercial and our conservation interests would, as you say, be 'difficult'. We have both made our positions clear to the relevant Traffic Management Authority which will decide the eventual solution to the problems your operation has created.

As the long-standing custodians of this centuries old Crescent we also note that in the 8 or 9 years since your relatively recent operation began, your current letter is the first communication you have made to this Society. Therefore your comment that you have 'never had the opportunity' to discuss matters with us is hard to understand.

Consequently we find difficulty in seeing any particular purpose at this stage in holding a meeting with you, but should you wish to initiate one, perhaps under the Chairmanship of our MP, Don Foster, we would be prepared to consider attending.

This correspondence is copied to Mr Foster.

Yours etc -

Michael G Daw

Chairman, Royal Crescent Society

WE ONLY STAND AND WAIT

At this time your committee is eagerly awaiting updates from various authorities on the following topics.

IMG - News of any concert in the park.

Bath & Avon Councils - a definitive decision on the use of the Royal Victoria Park allotments as a 'Travellers' site.

'Ad-hoc' meeting decided 7.12.93 on the reduction of the use of the Crescent by tourist buses.

Bath City Council - Public consultation exercise promised 25.10.93 on our petition to make the Crescent Access Only.

Bath City Council - Any news on the intentions regarding the Ha-ha Archaeological dig now outstanding for nearly a year.

Our MP's Staff - Clarification of who, if anyone, wants a meeting between Badgerline and the Society.