

# THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY *Newsletter*



*Issue No. 26*

*Autumn 1994*

## Chairman's Notes

The major news this issue has been conveyed to all residents (i.e. including non-members) by my letter of 24th August, reprinted in this issue. That representatives of all political parties on both Councils, together with Officials, should now have accepted that the open topped buses should be excluded from the Crescent is most heartening. It is also a partial

vindication of the democratic process which we have used, rather than the more sensation-seeking activities of residents in another part of Bath. We still have several hurdles to surmount before the ban is finally implemented. But it was clear when I spoke to Councillors individually the night before the meeting, and collectively at it, that they are now convinced of our view of the matter. Let us

hope that those residents who have been unhappy to permit the Lawn to be used for concerts will, in the light of this new unanimous approach by Councillors over the buses, feel able to reconsider their opposition as a quid pro quo and restore the normally harmonious atmosphere of life in this wonderful place.

This issue of the Newsletter has been prepared by an Emergency Team lead by Roy Titchen, former

Chairman, in the absence of an Editor following the retirement of Dr Monica Baly. As we go to press we believe a new Editor has been found, to start with the next issue. I hope Members agree that the Newsletter is vital to the Society and that you will join with me in wishing the new Editor welcome and all success. □

## Annual General Meeting 1994

The 1994 AGM was held as usual in the comfortable surroundings of the Bath & Country Club by kind permission of the Club Committee on 13th April. This year's date, though unavoidable, lived up to its unlucky number. A very large number of members were unable to attend and kindly sent their apologies. From these notes it is evident that a more appropriate date would have attracted the more usual level of attendance. Your committee promises to do better next time.

Despite this slight drawback a lively but brief Meeting ensued and we were joined by our very supportive Councillors Maureen Wheadon and David Hawkins. The Chairman reviewed the year's

Committee activities, concentrating on the Bus saga as it then stood and the legal position on the Royal Crescent Lawn. The meeting endorsed the Committee's actions and recommendations and directed that all residents would need to be consulted on the latter topic when the options had been more clearly defined and before specific action was taken. There was much discussion about protection of the lawn from invasion and your Committee's further comments are in a separate article.

The meeting also accepted the Annual Accounts and directed that, in view of the lack of formal requirement for an Audit, an Internal Audit team, made up of



Committee member should perform the function. (These have since been appointed: Mrs Trechmann of No 5 and Mrs Forrester of No 12).

Handsome tributes were paid to the outstanding work of Dr Baly and Mrs Trechmann over the years and small gifts in recognition were presented to them on behalf of Members. The meeting also noted with gratitude that Mr Woodward, though no longer able to serve on the full Committee, would still lead the Ha Ha Restoration project, imbuing it with the skills he had already displayed so effectively.

With these 3 resignations, 3 unchallenged nominations and the willingness of the remaining Committee to stand for re-election, the new Committee for 1994 will be as follows:-

Mr Hitt, the City's Horticultural Adviser, again presented the 1993 Basement Garden Competition Prizes and congratulation go to the winners:-

1st Prize John Thornton No 10  
2nd Prize Veronique Oswald No 28a  
3rd Prize Annabel Trechmann No 5

Members also enjoyed a tasty Buffet and drinks in the County Club bar and Annexe, meeting other residents - some for the first time. ☐

### Festive Annual Dinner

Following the great success of the Festive Dinner in January this year, you Committee has earmarked 12th Night 1995 for the next one. More details nearer the time, but do put a marker in your diary for :

6th January 1995

Chairman	Mr Michael Daw	No 10
Vice Chairman	Dr Len Fisher	No 29
Treasurer	Mr Simon Crowe	No 5
Secretary	Mrs Veronique Oswald	No 28a
Remembrancer	Mr John Meddins	No 29
Members	Mr R Titchen	No 10a
	Mr T Forrester	No 12
	Mr I Woodhouse	No 14
	Mrs G Kersley	No 20
	Mrs J Hardisty	No 15/16
Co-opted	Mrs J Hardisty	No 15/16
Ha Ha Committee	Mr C Woodward	No 1
Bath Preservation Trust	Sir Christopher Curwen KCMG	No 1

## Tourist Buses The Beginning of the End

Dear Resident,

### OPEN-TOPPED BUSES

Representative Councillors of the relevant City and County Committees met on 14th July and agreed unanimously that the Open-topped Buses must be banned from this Crescent. They directed Officials to recommend the practical and procedural means of implementing the ban to a further such ("Ad Hoc") meeting.

This is a major advance and a direct result of the Society's campaign, residents' traffic monitoring and petitioning and the Society's lobbying of Councillors and others.

There are several bridges yet to cross, though we can hope that, given the representatives' decision-in-principle, most will be matters of form. The next stages, as we understand them, are:

1. Officials recommend means of implementing the ban; this could include, as we have petitioned, closure to through traffic by some appropriate and sensitively designed demountable barrier at one end.
2. Further "Ad Hoc" Meeting debates and we hope, agree

3. Representative Councillors report back to full City and County parent Committees.

4. Full Committees endorse recommendations, we hope.

5. County and City formally exchange views etc.

6. Draft legal/statutory instrument is formally advertised and objections invited.

It is at this point that matters will get more difficult. The Bus operators are virtually certain to render formal objections of their own and to orchestrate a chorus of others sufficient to force a Public Inquiry. This may attract more National attention.

This Society will continue to keep all Residents informed of developments and to lead the campaign. Besides residents' virtually unanimous support for a ban, we also have the backing of UNESCO, Bath Preservation Trust, Bath Society, all 3 political parties and others. Nevertheless the battle is not yet won and we must be seen to maintain our stamina and resolve over a long



## Quid Pro Quo

Some Councillors asked that, in return for this much desired ban, those residents who have objected to this of the Royal Crescent Lawn for Annual Concerts be invited to re-consider. This the Society's Committee earnestly invites objectors and potential objectors to do please - perhaps looking at the whole of the two matters, now they have been linked, afresh. Some Councillors have made clear, and it is also your Committee's view, that increasing the potential audience size by 3000 seats, would widely be seen within the City and beyond

as a generous gesture. It would do much to repair our current image, which is important to many residents. It would also seem to be a relatively small price to pay for the great advantage of the bus ban and would help our general case when we come to argue it in the public forum of the Inquiry etc. I commend such reconsideration to those concerned.

Yours sincerely,

Michael G Daw  
Chairman ☐

## The Lawn

Members will have noted elsewhere in this newsletters that a small working group has been set up to examine ways of helping residents to obtain more enjoyment from the magnificent amenity of the Royal Crescent lawn.

At present when the weather is set fair the lawn is often invaded by a large number of the public usually intent on playing 'organised' games such as football. Whilst a small number of brave residents has occasional success in persuading the invaders to retreat below the Ha Ha, the process can be uncomfortable and, even if

successful, verbal exchanges can be acrimonious. When called in as a last resort the police are often reluctant to get involved, trespass being a civil offence and the lawn being regarded as private property.

Suggested solutions to the invasion problems are many, ranging from employing security guards at critical times to not cutting the grass and praying for rain at weekends. However more serious and permanent help in the form of the revision of the Criminal Justice Act, now being processed through Parliament, may be at hand.

Under this Act, certain forms of trespass will become criminal offences which should make the police much more responsive, though the new situation will need careful exploitation and help from residents will be necessary. It would be especially helpful if more residents could be seen to be using the lawn. Do not be bullied into sitting in a corner; put your deck chair in the middle. When clearing invaders from the lawn, the response often given is that they have been invited by someone living in No X. To avoid difficult situations arising, your committee has decided to draw up a Code of Conduct covering use of the lawn. This will be produced in draft, bearing in mind the terms of the new Act, and circulated to residents in time for amendments to be accommodated and ratified at the next AGM.

Whatever solutions are adopted, it is inevitable that residents will be the target of ill-informed criticism. It is not until the critics come to face with hard evidence that he hearts and minds battle can be won. Evidence, especially photographic, was a very important factor in our success in the banning of long distance tourist coaches. Keen photographers please note that we shall need pictures of lawn invasions (preferably with a line of tourist buses in the background). Much will depend upon the demarcation of the lawn so the Ha Ha is likely to become a critical issue if only for legal reasons; as Members will be aware, progress on the Ha-Ha Restoration currently awaits City Council responses. Whatever we do will not be universally popular and your solid support will be needed. □

## Residents' Parking not permitted

You might think that an invitation to renew a resident's parking permit implied that it would be granted provided you paid the fee and further provided there were no changes in your circumstances from those existing at the time of granting of the expired permit. You would be wrong.

Some residents of Royal Crescent

disappointment that the condition for issue of resident's parking permits have been varied. The newly introduced an unannounced condition is based on in-house legal advice from the Avon County Solicitor and Deputy Clerk. He has advised that where person is not paying full Council Tax this (sic) is not their "usual place of abode". Thus six weeks



after the application and payment it is refused and a refund is made.

In the case of the Royal Crescent in particular, this is not only a misleading and possibly incorrect attitude to adopt, but also represents a loss of revenue.

From the wording of the advice it would appear to incorporate the need to verify that the Council Tax had actually been paid for the period covered by the permit. Where the Bath City Council offers payment by instalment facilities on a Direct debit basis payment will not have been made. Further, the payer can stop a direct debit payment on a unilateral basis

at any time.

On the revenue point, there is no lack of parking space on Royal Crescent throughout the hours of 8.00 am to 6.00 p.m. on Monday to Friday, so why forego the income?

Finally, in the case of those who have the good fortune or perhaps burden of two residences, it is a matter of choice for the resident as to the electoral roll upon which he prefers his/her name to appear. If the choice is not Bath, then no parking is permitted. Another case of pointless and wasteful bureaucracy? □

## Bath Festival Opening Night 1994

Despite Bath Festival Trust's self-congratulatory views of the success of the Opening night activities, published in the local press, residents' reactions were mixed. Many felt that a nice atmosphere had been created for those moving around the various stalls and minor events in the park. More were disappointed that there was no major spectacle and no madrigal singers - who have in the past delighted all at the end of the evening. Many residents did light the (free) candles in their windows but more did not and

everyone.

The Trust and the police did very well to allow the usual car passes for entry after the road closure and we are grateful to Simon Coombe of the Royal Crescent Hotel for permitting the use of his front desk for their distribution. The Trust failed to provide the promised programmes.

Generally the crowds were well-behaved and jolly. The fireworks were pretty - but invisible to most residents, being safely on the Golf Course, but the consensus was that the evening lacked pazzazz. □

## Cable - An Update

Universal Artists Communications (UAC) have the statutory franchise to provide every street in Avon, including this Crescent, with a fibre-optic cable link to their television, telephone, etc. service near Bristol. Residents will be invited to tap into the main cable and have aerial-free TV (many stations ) and/or UAC telephone service.

In most streets the road or pavement will be dug up for the main cable, but your Committee has been assured that for this Crescent, alternative ways of laying it are being sought. At a presentation to the Committee, Allan Robertson, UAC Director of Public Affairs and David Rogers, UAC Director of Planning and Construction, explained their ideas. They and their teams will be consulting all residents individually.

Your Committee emphasised the need to protect and preserve the recently relaid Pennant Stone paving stones, and of course the architecture. In general principle your Committee welcomes the event of cable, (providing it is acceptably concealed and providing it is not damaged), since it could accelerate the removal of unsightly roof top aerials.

UAC have promised to keep in touch with the Committee on proposals, but it will be for individual residents to make their own decisions. Meanwhile an information service telephone number has been provided on 0454 612349.

First approaches to residents by UAC are expected in the Autumn.

### Concerts

The planned 4 September Concert in the Park below the Crescent Lane by Julia Migenes was cancelled because of poor ticket sales.

The organiser, Greg Lynn, confirmed your Committee's supposition that, despite stories in all the National media that "Placido Domingo had been stopped by a few residents objecting to the use of the Lawn", Senor Domingo had never been formally booked....!



## News in Brief

Residents have sent flowers and send their best wishes to Enid Langmaid, a long standing resident of the Royal Crescent, who is very ill in Oakfield Nursing Home.

\*\*\*\*

We wish Mrs Le Roux a full and speedy recovery of the badly broken arm following her recent accident.

\*\*\*\*

An ice cream van parked opposite No 1 from time to time and when challenged to produce his Street Trading Licence, the driver swore but left. His continued and obviously illegal presence on other occasions was reported to the Police. His presence also encouraged people to climb the railings to reach him and increased litter in the area.

\*\*\*\*

Bath City Football Team sought permission to use the Lawn for a photograph, but in view of past objection to use of the Lawn this could not of course be granted - the Society does not at present have such authority. Instead the Team assembled on the mound below the Ha Ha and the result published in the Bath Chronicle on 1st August was splendid.

\*\*\*\*

The new "Great Antique Hunt" programme on BBC 1 late on Sunday afternoons uses the Crescent (and a bloodhound!) as a background for its opening title sequence. Perhaps we should seek a copyright payment?

\*\*\*\*

Having declined an invitation to appear on Channel 4's "The Big Breakfast Show", to discuss the Tourist Bus issue, on grounds of trivialisation, your Chairman agreed to an interview on the same Channel with Mary Goldring as part of a documentary investigation of the benefits and penalties of increasing tourism. The grilling took over an hour and at a ratio of 14 to 1 (filmed time to transmission time), perhaps he would have had an easier ride "in bed with Paula Yates"!

\*\*\*\*

Unusual views of the Crescent are contained in an elegant new book of drawings of Bath entitled "Our Town" by Francis Elliott, son of James Elliott, Conservation Architect/Consultant to Bath City Council. The book is priced at £12.95 and is available from Bath booksellers, at the Bath Preservation Trust's bookshop in No 1 and also at the Building of Bath Museum.

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Fifty years ago, we understand, there was a serious proposal that the British Legion should acquire the Royal Crescent for conversion into a convalescent home for ex-Servicemen. Fortunately for us all, nothing came of it.

The Bath Society, with which the Royal Crescent Society has a reciprocal membership (as with the Bath Preservation Trust), has notified the following which members are welcome:-

- Thursday 20 October: "First year of the revived Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution" by Linda Wigley, Development Manager.
- Thursday 17 November: "The development of Bathwick Hill" by Michael Rowe.

Both talks start at 7.30 pm at the Society's Green Park Station Headquarters (first floor Meeting Room) and entry is £1.00 as members of an affiliated association.

## Reflections on Confinement

by Barnaby Walker

*Barnaby Walker, son of Royal Crescent author John Walker, was a prizewinner with 'Reflections on Confinement' in Amnesty International's recent nationwide 'Prisoner of Conscience' short story competition. He wrote it while a sixth-former at King Edwards' School.*

The water was dripping through a crack in the ceiling and collecting in a slight depression in the floor. The small pool was growing at an infuriatingly slow rate. He couldn't remember when he had first noticed it, as all of his days tended to blend into one. He knew the day, when blades of light shot through the cracks in the loose

stone work, and the night, when the cell was so dark it could have been boundless (though he felt its eight by ten limits).

The boredom of imprisonment was surreal; in fact, he was not confined in this eight-by-ten space, but in an altogether smaller one: his head. And, with the lack of reference points from the outside world, he wasn't sure whether he'd gone mad or not. The dripping water, however tiny, was a piece of the outside which had got in. It held a kind of hope for him. The chain was still too short, though. He pulled at it, feeling the pipe that he was chained to give slightly. He remembered the first day he'd got here: he had pulled the pipe out of the wall and had been beaten nearly to death, awakening more tightly bound that



before. An entirely futile gesture, as it turned out. That was one of the few beatings he could remember; his brain had resigned its vessel to the battering it was taking as he had soared over the abyss of pain on a sickening wash of numbness. The beatings were indistinguishable after that, the stunning impacts and humiliation becoming routine. He had a sudden, bizarre image of sitting in a bar with one of the sullen guards after all this was over, reminiscing:

'Remember the time when you kicked me so hard in the stomach I vomited blood? Ha, ha!'

That terrible room with its grey, dusty floor, rusty with bloodstains, home-made torture instruments hanging from brown nails, the unexpected whirlwinds of blows and jabs, had all become another element of the interminable drudgery. They knew they had him longing for death, and they were just waiting for him to break. But he wouldn't.

Drip! Another droplet fell into the pool, ripples riding almost to its edge. He had never really looked at them before, but the ripples were quite remarkable in their perfectly circular form, an odd and hypnotic minor phenomenon when you thought about them, when he got out, he would surely be so fascinated by such minutiae it would take him a whole day to walk down a busy street. You learned to appreciate

everything in a place like this. The slices of sunshine that penetrated the bricks were growing long and fading again.

How sickening the comfort of a bed would seem after all these years of the stone floor and the mouldering cushion. It appalled him, but he had adjusted to life here, come to accept it. His memories of the world were so far away that they seemed oddly false. He couldn't have given up hope, because he carried on living. If he wanted suicide he knew, and they knew, he could do it, yet his acceptance of this confinement was a denial of the likelihood of release. The water dripped on still, but he tested the chain, and it wasn't long enough yet.

This was no kind of life. This was simple existence. Life was rich and deep; this was as spare and stark as the cell he sat in. The present was not worth living for, the future possibly worth existing for. This was the conundrum that unravelled almost constantly in his mind, and there was no real answer, other than his continuing confinement or release. He heard a sound not worth turning for; he was being fed. Probably a tin plate of bread and cold meat, with a cracked mug of water. How strange he must have looked to the guard, sitting, staring, utterly impassive. Ironic that the guards, the very symbols of his unfair imprisonment, were his only



*The Royal Crescent Society Autumn Newsletter*

contact with the outside world, the only proof he existed. And still time wore on, Stretching and contracting under the spell of his mind.

*His mind.* The reason he was in here. He had the intellect, and the stupidity, to contradict, to stand alone. He knew that the guards, and others like them, were brainless: they cared little for politics and just wanted a meaning, a cause to justify their existence to the world. They had acknowledged their own status as insignificant, and thought that, by joining, they could make a difference, even though there were a hundred fools willing to take their place, should they die. They belittled themselves as mere statistics in an army, let their individuality be stolen.

Oh, how complacent he had been in his intellect, and power he assumed it wielded, how surprised when they came for him. He had thought it impossible. He realised then, however, that he had only the vaguest concept of their power. They could take him away and lock him up. Perhaps he was no more important than one of their soldiers. But, at least, he had humanity enough to condemn the suffering of others - *they* inflicted pain with terrifying detachment. Brute force was the basest, most animal form, of superiority; it could neither be appreciated nor criticised, and certainly couldn't be

argued with, Intelligence was a far more worthy strength, and humanity worthier still.

He tested the chain; it was long enough. He stood, his joints flexing and creaking, and leant over the pool, which he knew contained something he had not witnessed for years. He saw what they had done: a beaten face. But he looked beyond that and liked what he saw. And he smiled.

*Now 18, Barnaby is currently in Chile, working as a teaching assistant at a school in Santiago before going to university next year. Barnaby also had a short story published in Paperclips, an anthology of West Country writing, which was published last year. □*

This Newsletter is published by the Royal Crescent Society Editorial team led by Mr R Titchen, 10a Royal Crescent, Bath. □