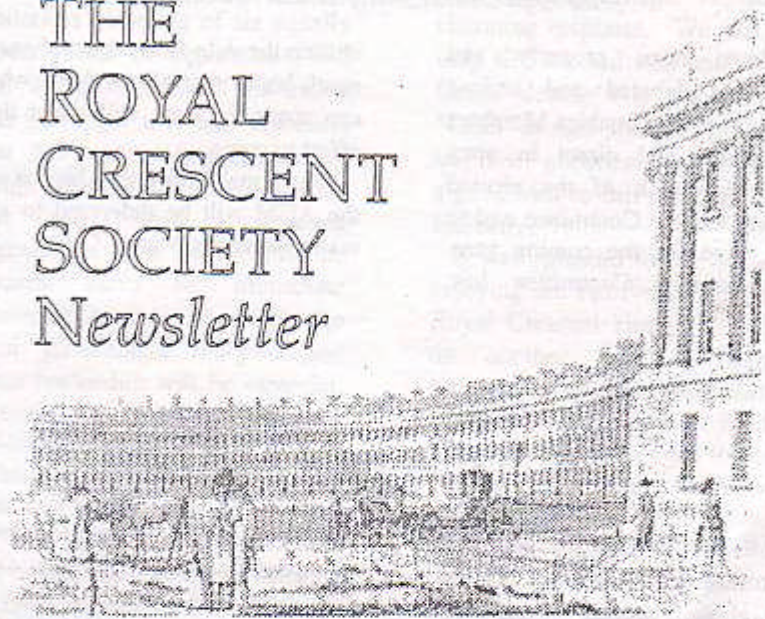


THE
ROYAL
CRESCENT
SOCIETY
Newsletter



Issue No. 27

Spring 1995

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 5th April 1995

The Annual General Meeting of the Royal Crescent Society will be held at 7.15 p.m. on Wednesday 5th April 1995 at the Bath and County Club, Queen's Parade, Bath. Afterwards, drinks and light refreshments will be available to which we have invited our Ward and County Councillors, as an opportunity to meet Residents.

ALL RESIDENTS are invited to

to attend this event and to take part - voting on motions being limited to paid-up Members of the Society (please contact Simon Crowe at No. 5 or by telephone on 01225 483830 for subscription forms etc.).

The Society's AGM is an important event in the life of this great Crescent and for all who live here. It has been only at previous AGMs that the issues affecting us

all have been properly and effectively debated and actions initiated. It also enables Members to examine and direct in open forum the work of the elected Officers and the Committee and to elect those for the coming year. Your current Committee has

chosen the date with care and very much hopes that all residents who can spare the time will make the effort to come.

The formal Convening Notice of the AGM will be delivered to all residents during March. □

Chairman's Notes

Our new Editor, Mrs Caroline Carrier, has created a bumper number for her first issue. To keep this up she is of course eager for contributions from any Member or Friend. In particular, - responses to articles would be most welcome. This could create a useful dialogue, rather than every contribution coming from your Committee.

The principal opportunity for dialogue and discussion is of course the Society's Annual General Meeting. Details of this year's event are on the front page and your Committee does hope that you will be able to come and to contribute. The usual social gathering afterwards is another opportunity to meet your Committee and fellow residents. Exceptionally this Newsletter is sent to all traceable residents to

encourage participation, membership of the Society and contributions to the Lawn Fund.

Besides the mixed news on the Tourist Bus Campaign on another page, your Committee and some residents have received some curious enquiries for information from alleged students. Your Committee became suspicious about these letters both because of their tone, similarity and lack of proper provenance. Each sought a great deal of information and each revealed that the author had done little or no preparatory work. Our response to the first one suggested such preparatory work by culling newspaper and library files to be followed by a chaperoned discussion. Nothing more was heard. No further responses will be made to such dubious requests.

Finally, it was with much regret that we watched, virtually helpless,

that the Council decided that

its affairs could be best run by a leaderless gathering of six equally senior Heads of Departments and that the post of Chief Executive was no longer needed. The facts that the post is long-established (originating as the Town Clerk), that no large competent organisation is so run and that the Council faces an immediate administrative turmoil during the local government reorganisation when leadership will be essential, carried no weight with the politically major party. The additional fact of the exceptionally high quality of the then incumbent Clive Abbott was discourteously cast aside. On Members' behalf I wrote to Mr Abbott conveying our thanks to him for his open-minded helpfulness to us in the past and for his discreet oiling of the wheels on several occasions, besides wishing him well in his new post

with English Heritage. He made a charming response. We can now only sit back and wait until the six Heads decide that they need a "Chair" at their various discussions and that - goodness - wouldn't it be a good idea to call the post "Chief Executive"?!

It was splendid to see so many enjoying the Festive Dinner at the Royal Crescent Hotel (full report on another page). General Manager Simon Coombe and his staff again provided a faultless evening. I look forward to seeing even more residents at the AGM.

We reprint in this issue an interesting opinion of the Royal Crescent which challenges extant accolades. New rebuttals are welcomed.

Michael Daw - Chairman R.C.S. □

Crescent News

Christmas Greetings

Christmas Greeting cards were received from Avon County Councillor Mrs Maureen Wheadon, City Councillor Mr David Hawkins and our MP Don Foster and the Bath City Council Housing Department.

Cable Laying

United Artists Communications, responsible for laying the new cable systems in the City (as reported in previous Newsletters) are still unable to provide a firm new forecast for the start of work for this Crescent. They have undertaken to provide details of their proposals well in advance, including the proposed method of laying the main cables without disturbing the street or pavement surfaces. This information was promised as long ago as early August last year.

U.A. have just advised their plan to write to all residents soon about main cable laying.

A Lady of Style

The modest prizes awarded in the Society's Basement Garden Competition were eclipsed last Autumn when one of the frequent winners became the main subject of a two-page colour spread in the National Press - reward and recognition indeed! Mrs Annabel Trechmann's garden was captured at its much admired peak in a large picture in the Sunday Time 'Style' Section of October 23rd 1994. The lengthy accompanying text contained much erudite horticultural detail and praise from the paper's gardening expert and also commended the different but admirable results achieved by Cdr and Mrs Titchen at No. 10A and Mr and Mrs Wilks at No 20.

Alternative View

Most pictures - etchings, paintings and drawings - of the Crescent are taken from the East end and the view with No. 1 prominent in the right foreground has become somewhat hackneyed over the years. The alternative view, from the West end, with No. 30 in the left foreground, is rarely depicted. The earliest such engraving was made in November 1804, by J.C. Nattes and published by W. Miller of Albemarle Street in London. The original is understood to be in the Bath City Council Collection. Now this picture has become more generally available in the form of one of a set of Table Mote on sale at Mementoes. The reproduction is charming, containing

interesting street activity and Brock Street (not very accurately) and 1 Circus in the background.

Tourist Buses

The Bad News

*A*von & Bath Officials have continued to delay producing options for implementing the ban agreed by all parties at the Ad Hoc Councillor Meeting last July. Your Committee is deeply suspicious that Officials are hopeful that the problem - and the work - will get lost in the revisions to the Local Government Structure. We are determined that that shall not happen and have again asked Councillors to press for action.

The Good News

*R*egency Tours (the blue tourist buses) are suddenly on our side! Their very courteous Managing Director, Guy Huntley-Parlour, offered to throw down a challenge to the other bus operators to stop touring the Crescent. In doing so he neatly demolished most of the arguments Badgerline have used in defence of their traffic. The full text of our Joint Press Release which went to all the local media is reprinted below.

Joint Press Release - February, 1995

Tourist Bus Operator Joins Fight To "Save The Crescent"

*R*egency Bus Tours today announced that they would stop their open-topped tourist buses from going through The Royal Crescent immediately, contingent on other operators following suit.

In a statement issued today Regency Tours said: "We are very concerned at the damage that is being caused by vehicles in the Crescent. It is quite evident that the damage being done to the cobblestones is commensurate with the size of the vehicles that roll over them. We have one of the most classic examples of Georgian architecture in the country and it behoves us to both

The Royal Crescent Society Autumn Newsletter

"As a company we are prepared to reroute our vehicles to go below the Crescent through Victoria Park. The view from there is almost as good, and considerably better from a photographic point of view.

"From a commercial standpoint it is our experience that the great majority of passengers would pay little heed to such a change. Most people come to Bath to view the Roman Baths, but the fact that the baths are within a pedestrianised precinct does nothing to deter them from a tour of the city."

The move was warmly welcomed by residents in the crescent. Michael Daw, Chairman of the Royal Crescent Society, said "This is a triumph of common sense. All the residents and others who love and respect The Royal Crescent will be grateful. Regency Tours have set a fine example and have vindicated our long campaign to ban these damaging buses from the Crescent. In view of this strong statement we look forward to the other two operators, Badgerline and Ryans, taking up the challenge and following suit. If they did, the public would be saved the expense of legislation which is being proceeded with. All three political parties supported our call for a bus ban and directed Avon and Bath officials to prepare ways and means six months ago."

Anyone for Cricket

The Friends of the Circus is the residents' association for the Circus in Bath, sometimes known as The King's Circus. Their leader, Mrs Vivienne Rae-Ellis last year conveyed to us a challenge to a game of cricket. The idea was to play if possible by 18th Century rules, players appropriately dressed. The aim was to promote a friendly relationship between our two residents' organisations.

Time did not permit taking up the invitation last year, but it is hoped to resurrect the idea for 1995. Your Vice-Chairman Dr Len Fisher (01225 424341) and your Treasurer Simon Crowe (01225 483830) are taking the lead and are looking for volunteer players and spectators. The hope would be to have the game some time in the summer on our Lawn. Do volunteer!

Garages at Nos. 27 and 28

The unsightly state of these garage sites continues to cause distress to all who see them and particularly to those living immediately adjacent to them. Protracted legal proceedings to extricate them from their current entanglement with the bankrupt developer, the relevant Bankers, etc. are being pursued with some vigour by the original Owner. Your Committee wishes him luck in his endeavours and hopes that the current mess will soon be transformed into something more appropriate for this sensitive and valuable site. (The Society's efforts to pursue the matter with the developer some years ago were met only with demonstrable lies, evasion and eventual silence).

Mrs Joyce Mitchell-Dunmore

With much regret we record the passing of Joyce Mitchell-Dunmore at the end of 1994 after a mercifully short battle with cancer. Joyce was a much liked figure in the Crescent, infecting all whom she met and helped with her energy and enthusiasm for life. Besides running her two widely separated homes and bringing up a very happy and lively family, she undertook much voluntary work and counselling and was the author of several best selling books under a non de plume. In recent years she had recently stimulated her love of the Crescent and was busily engaged on the refurbishment of her house. The garden, with its possibly 19th Century layout, is now flourishing thanks to her work. She will be missed by all who knew her and whose lives she affected in her un-assuming but very warm way. Our sympathies go to

Enid Langmaid

b. July 1912. d. 6th February 1995, aged 82 years

Members were saddened to learn of the death of Enid Langmaid in Oakfield Nursing Home after a long illness borne with great courage and dignity with her main concern and interest others rather than herself.

Enid was born in Ripley, Surrey, the daughter of Dr and Mrs Sutcliffe. Her father was a medical officer in the First World War and was taken a prisoner of war having stayed behind with his men when he could have escaped. He died tragically of typhus in 1916.

As a young girl Enid showed great aptitude for dancing and became an exhibition dancer for the great Victor Sylvester; she was presented at court in 1933 and, in 1936, at the age of 24 years, she married the handsome naval officer Kenneth Langmaid. Captain Langmaid had a distinguished naval career and later was author of fifteen books. In their retirement Enid and Kenneth came to live at No. 27/28 Royal Crescent in 1955 in the days when the Crescent was like a village and all residents seemed to know one another and if there was more than six cars parked we thought something was happening. Sadly Kenneth died in September 1986 and is remembered in the Abbey by the cross he bequeathed.

Enid was a founder member of the Royal Crescent Society, she attended all the meetings, sometimes asking pertinent questions and she gave support in all our undertakings. The familiar sight of that slight figure walking around the Crescent will be sorely missed.

During her illness Enid was supported by her doctor, her friends and neighbours and particularly her long standing friends Canon and Mrs Shanley Cotter. A regular attendee at the Abbey, which she loved, she was also supported in her faith by the Rector, Prebendary Richard Askew.

Enid leaves a daughter, Mary Rose who lives in America and two much loved grandchildren.

Monica E. Baly, C

Bath Festival Opening Night Events

The Bath Festival will this year open on Friday evening 19th May. As usual the opening event will take place in the Public Park below the Royal Crescent Lawn. It will be principally music-based and will involve last year's very popular Samba Band starting at 6 p.m., followed at 7.15 p.m. by a choir made up of some 110 local school children who will perform various works, some based on preparatory workshops they will have held with the Akasai Jazz ensemble who will themselves take over at about 8.15 p.m.. A different band or group will round off the evening which officially ends at 10 p.m. (the end of the public entertainment licence).

As is now traditional, free candles will be provided by the Festivals Trust and residents are once again encouraged to place these on the central meeting bars of their windows and to light them as dusk falls. This can provide an enchanting spectacle - the more who take part the better. At about 10 p.m. the fireworks display will start, launched from the Approach Golf Course, but best seen, with the candle-lit Crescent in the foreground, from the lower part of the Public Park.

The Crescent will be closed to traffic from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. and Car Passes will be available exclusively for residents and their guests; details of which will be available nearer the time.

Two new features this year will be firstly a dramatic 25 foot sculpture of a kneeling angel to be built in the park in front of No. 1; this will be illuminated with fireworks and eventually set ablaze. The second new element will be a dome-type stage similar to (but 20 feet smaller than) those used for the Carreras and Dame Kiri Concerts: this will be erected about a week before the Opening Night, in the Public Park below our Lawn facing away from the Crescent. The schools choir and the other musicians will perform in it. It will be dismantled the next day to make more room for the Balloon Fiesta, which will have started on the Friday and will continue over the whole weekend. □

Chinese New Year Arrives With Bangs!

The night of Saturday 4th February 1995 will live in the memory of several residents not only for the start of the Chinese New Year but for the several explosive disturbances which marked the event.

Late in the evening a car crashed through the railings at the East end. Later - and continuing almost until dawn the next morning - residents in 3 adjacent houses had their rest severely disturbed by very loud thumping music from the ground floor flat of the central one of the three. Most people enjoy a party, but this event's incessant and prolonged disturbance to others showed an untypical lack of consideration. To make matters worse, those disturbed had not even been invited!

The car, a red Vauxhall Cavalier CD 2.0i was driven at sufficient speed along Brock Street and at our Lawn railings for it to break them open and curl the heavy stanchions and top rails like paper. One whole section was wrenched out and carried well onto the Lawn and several individual rails were hurled into the air and rained down like arrows, embedding themselves into the Lawn. The car narrowly missed a pedestrian on the pavement on its left and a parked

taxi on its right. It made a very loud noise as it hit the railings and careered to a halt some 60 feet out on the Lawn, leaving a trail of scarred grass and bits and pieces of car trim scattered in its wake. Mercifully no-one was hurt and the body of the car remained intact. Immediately the 3 occupants leapt out and fled down across the Public Park, pursued by a Policeman with a large Police Dog. More Policemen arrived very quickly, secured the car and arranged for its early removal by Hinton's Garage. They then set off in further hot pursuit, revealing that the car had evidently been stolen. As we go to press we do not know whether the thieves were caught, but are pursuing a claim with our insurers for urgent repair of the railings. If you have any further information which you think may help this claim, please contact your Treasurer, Simon Crowe at No. 5, on (01225) 483830.

Finally that same night, true celebrations of the New Year generated explosive fireworks behind the Crescent at various times. Your Committee hopes that the New "Year of the Pig" progresses more quietly than it began. □

The Royal Crescent Hotel's Blue Ribbon Cocktail Party

To celebrate our presentation of the RAC Blue Ribbon Award The Royal Crescent Hotel decided to hold a Cocktail Party last October for all those on the Blue Ribbon Club Mailing list. The invitation was very well received with well over 100 acceptances.

Before I go any further perhaps I should explain briefly what the Blue Ribbon Award is. The RAC has given the hotel a Four Star rating - the star rating is based for example on whether a hotel has an indoor swimming pool, full night portering service, size of the reception area, and not on the type of service and standards of comfort guests might expect at the hotel. RAC had also given us an "H" for Hospitality, "C" for Comfort and an "R" for Restaurant. However the highest overall accolade achievable is the Blue Ribbon and the hotel had been working towards this over the 3 years previous to winning it.

I am sure most people who came to the Cocktail Party expected to have a small drink, and to have to stand about making polite conversation for the next several hours. Not so. Not so.

Guests were offered a drink on

arrival - and then the fun began. Armed with a questionnaire to complete as the evening evolved, we firstly went down to the Gainsborough Room for Wine Tasting where we had to name the grape variety of 4 wines, then over the garden to the Pitman Room for a demonstration of pasta making by the Head Chef and a Cheese Tasting, upstairs to the Boardrooms to attempt to name 4 liqueurs by sniffing ONLY, and finally to one of the sumptuous bedrooms to try to name 3 items of obscure silver domestic equipment. For those with any energy left there were a selection of bedrooms to visit before returning to the Drawing Room for coffee and home made biscuits.

Although no-one managed to score full marks on their questionnaire, there were three clear prize winners. Mrs C Henderson won the 1st prize of a weekend for two at Billesley Manor, Ms S Wiles the 2nd prize of luncheon for two at The Royal Crescent Hotel and Mrs C Johnson the 3rd prize of a bottle of champagne. Belated congratulations to all three!

Jenny Hardisty,
Secretary, Royal Crescent Hotel. □

Festive Dinner - 1995

Once again the Society held its annual get-together at the Royal Crescent Hotel. The venue was chosen by popular demand and the number of members attending reflected this by increasing yet again. In fact this year's dinner was supported by the largest number of Society members so far. We were pleased to have the opportunity of thanking Mr Sheppard for all his support over the year by inviting him and Mrs Sheppard as Guests of the Society. The Dinner was held in the Dower House Restaurant on Thursday 4th January - the evening before Twelfth Night - as Simon Coombe was unable to promise us

the use of the Restaurant on Friday 5th.

Once again, Simon Coombe was able to offer the usual Lunch time menu and price for our Dinner which made a considerable saving, and we were able to bring our own wine with no corkage charge.

The Dinner of Baked Codling, Pheasant on Rosti Potato and Tangerine & Lemon Parfait was delectable. In fact the whole evening went without a hitch and was thoroughly enjoyed by one and all.

If you didn't come this year, don't miss out next time round!

Jenny Hardisty. □

Note from the Editor

As a fairly new resident of THE ROYAL CRESCENT - although I can say that my husband is an original BATHONIAN (born & bred) I have been presumptuous enough to try to follow in the esteemed footsteps of Dr Monica Baly the former Editor of this Newsletter who recently retired. We must be very grateful to Dr Baly for her excellent work.

I am very grateful for the encouragement that I have received and hope that we can all work together to make the quarterly Newsletter an interesting and topical document recording the current history of The Crescent as well as the past.

Any ideas and contributions should be sent to me -

CAROLINE CARRIER.

No. 5. The Royal Crescent. □

A Nocturnal Visitation

Acrophobics such as myself quake at the thought of stepping out onto the first floor balcony of The Royal Crescent to clean our windows, the better for bus passengers to view our domestic scene. To Tennyson's "What pleasure lives in height?" we answer "None at all, thank you very much, and would you mind not bringing the subject to our attention again?"

Still less do we expect nocturnal visitors to appear by the same route. Our visitor chose five in the morning as a suitable time to peruse our furnishings through the large Victorian windows. Yasmin's attempts to strike fear into the visitor's heart by adopting a fierce expression and jumping at the windows were somewhat diminished by the fact that Yasmin is a cat and not a leopard. They were sufficient, though to drag us from bed on the assumption that the Third World War had chosen our flat as an appropriate place in which to break out.

We hastily removed Yasmin to a place of safety and preceded to confront the visitor, elegant in a sable coat and gazing at us with a silent "miaow". The visitor was placed in the bathroom, where the "miaows" lost their silent quality,

and were timed with great precision to the five minute interval at which we were just dropping off to sleep.

In the morning, a survey of first floor windows revealed one that was marginally open, and our visitor was returned to a relieved owner. William Lowndes's book on The Royal Crescent reveals that Bath's fashionable society met regularly at No. 29 towards the end of the eighteenth century. We can only assume that our elegant visitor had attended many such events in a previous incarnation, and was seeking to continue the habit in this one. Since our windows and those of the owner are separated by some thirty apparently impassable Ionic columns, the social urge must have been a strong one indeed.

Len Fisher
29, The Royal Crescent. □

Growing Plants in the Crescent

When I first bought my flat in the Crescent, I was appalled at the grim prospect that I saw out of my drawing room and bedroom windows - solid dirty stone, no green fields or plants. I decided that I had to have a little garden. A few pots maybe some herbs and honeysuckle round the door to bring a bit of fragrance into the diesel-filled air. The problem was that I had no money for luxuries, but "necessity is the mother of invention" so I looked around to see what I had. Some blocks of stone left by past builders and a stone trough or two that I had brought with me and an empty area.

Gradually I acquired homeless plants. At the start I acquired a sad *Yakushimanum Rhododendron* rescued and brought to Bath, already so large that it took four friendly builders to carry it down the steps; a *Pieris* which was just a stick given good compost tucked into a corner and cosseted; an *Azalea* thrown out of the window box at Popjoys and on its way to the dustbin, and later *Aldophe Audusson*, a *Camellia* brought to join the throng.

Soon I was learning what all basement gardeners have to learn - where does their light come from

and for how long, each are having its own microcosm climate. Does the sun shine down in winter or only in summer? I learnt the hard way. Bulbs planted appeared so late they clashed with the bedding plants for summer. My honeysuckle grown from a cutting from Somerset grew but did not enjoy the unnatural position and proceeded to have mildew every summer, no wonderful fragrance wafting through the windows just diesel fumes. I replaced it with *Ivy*, which would be less susceptible to the conditions and was happy to be well clipped.

I discovered that growing plants in pots and boxes require time, effort and money. It is an artificial situation and therefore one must replace the soil every two to three years, fertilise methodically and from spring to autumn water daily, ignoring the fact that it might have been raining, as not enough falls into the pots to keep the plants happy.

It's very relaxing after the pressure of a day's office work to come back on a summer's evening to one's plants. I find I spend anything from three quarters of an hour to an hour watering, dead heading and generally checking over my plants. The problem comes when you want to go on

holiday. Then you have to liaise with fellow gardeners, either from the basements or the roof to help out.

It really is very satisfying to get plants in an artificial situation to grow and thrive. My lemon tree comes out in the summer, no

lemons as it was grown from a pip but lovely smelling leaves. So does my coffee Arabica whose flowers smell as good as jasmine and this tree does produce coffee beans but I have not yet roasted them!

Annabel Trechmann. □

Sacred Cows

In the rose-coloured history book of every Englishman, nothing will ever match the good taste of the Georgians. No creation symbolises this great age of elegance better than its own new city, Bath, and no part of that city epitomises the period better than the great sweep of the Royal Crescent.

But popular history and tourism purvey many distortions. There are only two important things about the Royal Crescent: its shape and its progeny. As part of a piece of town planning by John Wood the elder, it is significant. Curving a street to provide more space a view - or both - became a standard device of British urban design for the next two centuries. But beyond these factors, it is a flawed piece of architecture.

The shape was probably Wood the elder's only contribution to the crescent - it was designed and

built by his more pedestrian son - and in the shape we find the problem of the design. The crescent is half an ellipse. For most of its length it has a long, shallow curve, which tightens up at each end so that the gables face outwards. As with all long, shallow curves, it seems flatter when seen from a distance. While the plan may look like half an enclosed space, in reality it is more like a bent row of houses.

By the eighteenth century the problem of designing a monotonous row of houses had been solved: they were designed together as one long Classical Building, like a large palace. The facade was varied to give the building a prominent centre, and features were often added to mark the ends. Wood the elder did exactly this on the north side of Queen's Square.

John Wood the younger, however, seems to have thought that the crescent would be more of an enclosed area on the side of a hill than just a long building overlooking a valley. This must have led him to turn his father's design of the crescent. Kings Circus has 30 houses forming a circle, and each house has an identical pattern of columns facing into the space in the middle. The crescent is designed in the same way. It is a row of houses faced with identical columns that are almost evenly spaced from one end to the other.

Kings Circus is successful. Its character is formed as much by the shape of the space in the middle as by the buildings round the edge. The Royal Crescent, on the other hand, encloses no space. It is a long, repetitive facade of barely relieved monotony. This was not wholly intentional. Wood the younger tried to do something to the centre and to the outward-facing gables by introducing variations in the spacing of the columns. But these are so minor, particularly in the centre, that they are virtually unseen.

The Royal Crescent has neither the character of an enclosed space nor the variation that can give interest to a long Classical building. The design of its facade uses features that are only successful in quite a different

the architect to correct this weakness are wholly inadequate.

The Royal Crescent will always be important as the origin of the most enduring features of British urban design. Perhaps Wood the elder, had he lived, would have added his own idiosyncrasies, just as he did at Kings Circus to make it so much more rewarding. In the event, his son could not create the architecture to match his father's vision.

Reprinted with the permission of Perspectives Magazine and the Author.

This article does not represent the Society's views. Responses are invited. □

This Newsletter is published by the Royal Crescent Society.
Editor: CAROLINE CARRIER,
5, THE ROYAL CRESCENT. □

