

Issue No 34

Summer 1997

### Chairman's Notes

As some Members will be aware, I have been out of action for a few months but I am now more or less back on track. My place was ably taken by your Vice-Chairman Tim Forester, well supported by Treasurer Stephen Little and the rest of your Committee. I am very grateful to them all. Fortunately, the buses saga had reached a peak just before I 'dropped out' and a period requiring no action on this topic coincided with my absence. Soon we shall all need to grind pretty hard on this subject and you can read all about it in the "Battle of the Buses" article

Our Annual General Meeting this year was pretty lively with much very constructive debate and a good sense of involvement all round. If you didn't make it this year do come next time: even if you don't speak, you will get another chance to meet your neighbours and hear at first hand what your Committee is doing in your name. Next year we hope to use a more benign venue. The Bath & County Club has served us well but the meeting felt that we could perhaps do better next time - watch this space. The other Battle - this time over the Lawn Invaders - may have been won by an inspired Committee idea spawned and approved in my absence. Indeed, had I been able to attend the relevant meeting I would have been against it! But, it seems to work!! Bravo!!! Again, see further inside this Newsletter.

I hope all the Members enjoy their "Summer"....

### Notes from the Editor

Our Summer Newsletter is an update for us all on the latest happenings in the Crescent.

We are very happy that our Chairman Michael Daw has made such progress from his illness and is able to make his usual important contribution to this Newsletter.

We must thank everyone else who contributed so richly to make this such an interesting edition and I hope that the rest of you will feel equally inspired and I look forward to a regular column from one or two!!

Many thanks are due to Richard Otten for making this Newsletter possible with the enormous good works of Helen Croft.

I do hope you will enjoy this 34<sup>th</sup> Newsletter.

## The Battle of the Buses

This report includes, for completeness, all the important developments since the last Newsletter, even though many points have been well aired in the local press - sometimes accurately. Chairman also updated the AGM on April 20.

### Council Progress - 1

The most significant development was the outcome of the 18 April Council Transportation Sub-Committee meeting at which Councillors had been invited to consider three options on the proposal to close the West end of the Crescent.

- a) abandon the proposal;
- b) defer for action for further consultation etc and look at banning traffic from a larger area; or
- c) pursue the matter to full Public Inquiry.

Clearly, this was a crucial meeting with only one option for us - option (c). Option (b) would be impossible and take years to accomplish. Chairman sought and obtained permission to address the meeting, with the essential moral support of Commander Titchen. He also wrote to all Councillors attending in advance and gave interviews to GWR, TV1, The Western Daily Press and persuaded the very supportive Editor of the Bath Chronicle to print a letter on the night before the meeting. All this had some impact and our long term supporters in the Conservative Party (the smallest group at the meeting) led by David Hawkins spoke heavily in our support. However, the Marlborough Lane Residents' Association also addressed the meeting against us, seeking instead a solution for the whole area from the Circus to Marlborough Lane (bigger than Option (b)). The Labour Members tended to sit on the fence mindful of costs and their duty to other Bath residents. At first the Liberal Democrats' team also appeared anti-pathetic, but began to come around to our view with a sort of compromise proposal.

The day was saved however by David Hawkins who, in a summing up speech worthy of an American courtroom drama at its best, brushed aside all the arguments and counter-suggestions and proposed that

Members press ahead to Public Inquiry for the Royal Crescent alone: this was a test case which could set a pattern for other areas.

This galvanised the Liberal Democrats who quickly made up their minds and said that this was an important Heritage versus Traffic issue, which if not grasped would be embarrassing and high profile; his actual words were "get on with it". Thus the decision in our favour was carried with only Labour out of the running - though they did not vote against us, they abstained.

Officials expected to be ready for a Public Inquiry in October; we await confirmation of that timescale. They also warned that this would attract National attention, even suggesting at one point that Swampy might get involved! Meanwhile, we will be rallying our supporters and will issue a special flyer for residents' supporting action as soon as a date is announced. Already Jon Tham, Managing Director of The Royal Crescent Hotel, who is fully in support has alerted some senior figures in the national heritage firmament and it is clear that BNES officials are also on our side. Even the most cautious of Councillors at the meeting acknowledged the seriousness of the problem.

### Council Progress 2

Despite the above, in mid July it seemed that an unheralded spanner was about to be thrown into the works. Without advance warning a Bath Chronicle report revealed that in two day's time Councillors were to be invited to "Consider starting work ... to restrict entry for public service vehicles to the whole heritage area surrounding the Circus and the Royal Crescent".

Alarm bells rang: this was the very essence of option (b) which we had got Councillors to reject, and what about the Public Inquiry scheduled for the Royal Crescent alone?

Many phone calls later, tracking down and getting the meeting papers from the Reference Library, gouging assurances out of Officials etc, it appeared that this might be a separate initiative following on from the Council's year old determination to tackle the impact of tourist buses city-wide and their actions in response to Ministerial advice. Nevertheless, the meeting paper recommended that of several areas of the City to be tackled, efforts towards the restriction of public service

vehicles in the heritage streets be directed as a priority. Chairman therefore thus saw a danger that work on the closure of the Royal Crescent on its own could be jeopardised by deployment of the Council's limited resources on the wider area. Accordingly, Councillors Hawkins and Cox arranged for that question to be put to the meeting and an assurance was obtained that our work was not put at risk in any way by the new initiative. Phew!

#### *Other Support*

Media coverage of the bus problem continued to be heavy throughout May - July. Correspondents, all against the buses, had many letters published. They wrote from all over Bath: our friends from Catherine Place, the Circus, Leighton Road, Peasedown St John, Lower Bristol Road, Summerfield Road, Pierrepont Place etc. Many were incensed by the advent of the fourth bus operator - The Bath Bus Company - and the obvious lack of existing controls. The Editor of the Bath Chronicle devoted three editorials and nine news articles to the general subject - mainly unfavourable to the operators. Our MP Don Foster wrote to the Minister for Transport, Gavin Strang, urging him to act to solve the problems caused by the open top buses and calling for a review of a legal loophole (which we had spotted some time ago) allowing them to register as "local services". He said "They should not (operate) at the expense of residents or of visitors who prefer to travel around the City on foot." We could not agree more! The Tourism Marketing Advisory Group stepped up its existing antipathy by stating that the buses "have a negative effect on the City's visitor trade". The TMAG is made up of representatives from the three main political parties, Bath guesthouses and hotels, leisure attractions and allegedly the City Chamber of Commerce (although their CEO wrote later to say that it supported the buses as an "integral part of the City's tourist industry" - a lone voice we hope).

#### *The Next Stage*

The next stage is now our preparation and gathering of our resources and supporters for our representations to the Public Inquiry. As soon as the date is announced you will receive a flyer asking for your help in various ways. Your Committee hopes you will feel able to join this last

## Annual General Meeting 1997

Some 50 Members plus our regular attendee Councillor David "I wouldn't miss it for the world" Hawkins and our Community Policeman Alan Hale attended this year's AGM at the Bath & County Club and joined in lively debates. The existing Committee was re-elected "nem con"- either a healthy endorsement of these willing victims or a reflection of unwillingness to serve by anyone else! The former view held sway in President's handsome vote of thanks and its warm endorsement by all present. The full Committee for 1997/1998 is listed elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Chairman's report covered developments since the last Newsletter and the details are contained in various articles in this issue. Treasurer Stephen Little's report covered a lot of ground and is also the subject of a separate article. Chairman, in thanking the Committee in general for its work, singled out Treasurer for his energy and attack for particular praise: this was well deserved. Several initiatives are reflected in his article but the two most significant results of his first year of office are the very timely and professional conduct of the accounts and production of the annual figures (which were fully endorsed by the Meeting) and his work in persuading forgetful residents to pay their annual subscription. This has resulted in a record membership well exceeding the 100 mark.

The Meeting approved Treasurer's proposal for a modest increase in Subscription - the first in 18 years - from £5 to £6 per annum with a discounted rate of £5 per person where there are two or more members in one household. This will further help to get Society finances on a more solid footing.

The Meeting also approved Treasurer's proposal that Committee should seek charitable status for the Society so as to take advantage of tax benefits and encourage covenanting of subscriptions and to enhance the general standing of the Society.

PC Alan Hale gave a brief outline of Neighbourhood Watch schemes first proposed two meetings ago but not instituted for lack of actual support at a special meeting and indicated his willingness to give more

detail if enough residents showed interest. It was agreed to try once more but to abandon the proposal if apathy ruled.

Use of and protection of the lawn caused much concern as in previous years and this is the subject of separate article.

Concern was also expressed, though not widely endorsed, about the visual interruptions to the architectural uniformity of the Crescent caused by window-boxes. Most Members found them colourful. More support was shown for the removal of Victorian window-blind casings and overgrown bushes which also detracted from the uniformity and Committee undertook to seek owners' co-operation in removing them. Chairman warned of English Heritage's current policy of leaving structural elements "as found" rather than restoration to a particular point in a building's life.

A proposal that the Society encourage the Hotel to seek its own, say 3, dedicated parking spaces did not attract support.

Finally, the Meeting endorsed the need and directed the Committee to explore again a more attractive venue for future meetings and the AGM closed at approximately 9.00pm.

### The Royal Crescent Ha Ha Another Step Forward

On what was surely the hottest day in June, Phil Andrews and Jenni Morrison of Wessex Archaeology arrived to carry out another investigative dig on the Royal Crescent ha-ha ditch. The main aim of the dig was to determine the exact location, shape and profile of the ends of the ditch prior to our proposed restoration. The dig was carried out at the east end of the ditch and wall, it being assumed that the west end could be located by symmetry. In addition to the dig hand auguring was carried out in about six points along the wall to establish its construction.

The various excavations revealed that the ditch had a rounded, bowl-shaped end which coincided with the point at which the straight end of the railings begin to curve around the lawns of the Royal Crescent. There is no reason to believe the west end is not similarly shaped. No evidence was found of any structures or 'end features' in the vicinity of

the excavation. The ditch was 2.5 metres wide at the ends, widening to 4 metres at the centre, but the majority of the ditch is likely to be 4 metres in width.

It came as no surprise to find evidence of both deliberate and natural in-filling. There were quite large quantities of bottle glass and pottery dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century together with some stone rubble which could have been dumped as building debris. The natural in-filling is probably the result of leaves and other vegetation being trapped there by rain water which was unable to drain away through the clay subsoil of the ditch. There is no evidence that the ditch has ever been cleaned out since it was first formed.

The ha-ha wall was originally 2 metres in height at the east and 2.5 metres at the west end, the infill now obscures almost a metre of the base. Evidently the wall was built on the natural clay with no foundations. A foundation appeared to be unnecessary as the wall interfaces the stable, natural clay lying on the north side of the ditch and did not act as a revetment holding back a large volume of unconsolidated soil.

What may well be regarded as extremely good news as far as restoration is concerned is that there is evidence that the wall was of a dry stone construction, with mortar used only on the ends to increase their strength. This type of construction would not only allow drainage to take place over the whole height of the wall, but would add to the authentic appearance of the restored wall. It would also make restoration a great deal less expensive to carry out.

Finally, our grateful thanks must be extended to Gillian Sladen of the Bath Preservation Trust Gardens Committee, and to John Phibbs, Principal of the Debois Landscape Survey Group, both of whom have a wide experience of restoring historic gardens and ha-has. The depth of their knowledge and generously given aid has already, and I sincerely hope will continue to be of enormous benefit in the project.

Jenny Hardisty



## Treasurer's Notes

The proposals to raise the levels of subscriptions and Lawn Fund contributions contained in the last Newsletters were put to the AGM with mixed results. The proposal for a modest increase in members' subscriptions from £5 to £6, with double memberships in one household remaining at £5 each, was accepted and will take effect from next year. The proposal to link minimum Lawn Fund contributions to Council Tax bands did not find favour, however, and it was agreed instead to double the present rates for next year, and to double them again for 1999. These are the first increases for 18 years and well below inflation for that period.

The number of paid subscriptions and Lawn Fund contributions is currently well below last year's totals, so it is hoped that the more forgetful among you will have your memories jogged by this note. Individual reminders will shortly be sent to the tardy, so please do your best to reduce the number of reminders required.

The AGM gave agreement for our application for charitable status and this has now been sent to the Charity Commissioners in Taunton. Their reaction is awaited with interest; they might require some slight amendment to our constitution to ensure that our stated objects can be considered exclusively charitable. If so, this will of course be put to the full membership before the application is progressed.

There will be nothing further to report on the subject of conservation grants until we have re-applied next winter. Meanwhile, the Council have agreed to keep us informed of any work they intend for their portion of the railings so that we can arrange for an estimate in conjunction with theirs and derive some benefit from economy of scale.

After last year's annual motorised breach of the railings, the Council sent us a bill for temporary repairs to the damaged area. As this work had not been requested or authorised by us, we replied that we did not consider that we were liable for this charge. But just as we started to assume that the logic of our resistance to this claim had been accepted by the Council, we received a "pay up or else" demand. Further discussion left the Council in no doubt that we would be extremely reluctant to acknowledge liability for an unrequested service and they eventually agreed not to pursue their claim.

## The Lawn

The battle to stop footballing invaders seems to have been won by an inspired idea from your Committee, which at first sounded unpromising: just let the grass grow. Almost immediately disgruntled would-be players were seen disconsolately leaving their former pitch when they discovered that the footballs failed to bounce in the longer grass. Few have been seen since on the few good weather days that we have had.

Actually the first attempt slightly misfired. The grass grew prettily sprinkled with daisies and along came the Council's mower set at its usual cutting height, instead of the six inch height Treasurer had asked for: and back flew the players! Since that hiccup the lawn has grown back again and now looks like a verdant meadow but what do Members think? If you have a view on what is a trial action, please write to Tim Forester at No 12. The revelation of so many weeds and non-grass has alerted the Committee to the need for a fresh bout of weed-killing, scarifying etc and this has been ordered for the appropriate (seasonal) time.

Meanwhile, the less frequent cutting should reduce costs and the absence of footballers has been widely welcomed. Let us hope this battle has indeed been won for good.

A proposal at the AGM to erect more signs to help to deter intruders was approved (although we already have 13), this time using the phrase "No ball games". After the Meeting David Brain very kindly offered to design the notices and the Committee has the matter in hand.

Committee was also directed to investigate whether unauthorised use of the lawn was a criminal offence under the law of "Mandamus". President and several residents had had most helpful reactions from the Police, who had expressed and showed a willingness to respond to help residents eject intruders, although on one occasion a lone young Policeman exercised discretion rather than authority when faced with up to a score of muscular, aggressive footballers. Use of loud hailers to address invaders and mobile telephones to visibly summon the Police was also mooted. It was clear that instant reaction to invasions was

required and this will necessitate vigilance and willingness on the part of any or all residents to jump to it.

### **The Royal Crescent Hotel**

Managing Director John Tham and General Manager Ross Stevenson generously invited all couples and Members to a champagne preview of the completed refurbishment of the Mansion House in April. A most enjoyable evening ensued, with attentive staff on hand in all the rooms to explain the detail. Our President Sir John Barraclough expressed Members' appreciation for such a jolly evening and looked forward to continued and renewed co-operation with the Hotel. An eye-witness report follows later.

This spirit continues apace (for example the free venue for the fundraising cocktail party and the use of the Hotel's facilities for car passes for the Festival Opening Night). A planned discussion of further specific measures awaits only Chairman's restoration to full faculty: a further report will be in the next Newsletter.

Meanwhile, further developments at the Hotel move forward: the original basement restaurant has been upgraded to The Pimpernel Restaurant, described in a recent article as "more than just food: a trip to an art gallery, a sensurround experience ride, a soothing massage for a frazzled soul". The refurbishment of the Dower House and beyond has just been announced as we go to Press.

One policy change already announced is that the general public will no longer be able to take afternoon tea at the Hotel. To maintain standards this is now reserved for guests at the Hotel and Blue Ribbon Card Holders.

This evening renewed the affection between the Royal Crescent Society and the

Alex Torrance, Assistant Concierge of the Royal Crescent Hotel went in a party of six to an audition at South West Television in Bristol. They had supper afterwards and forgot about it.

The surprise was that a letter came inviting the three couples to participate in an audience in Manchester at Granada Television on Tuesday January 24<sup>th</sup> 1997.

The party took off to Manchester and stayed in hotels and throughout it all had great fun.

However, Alex was picked out of the audience with other contestants and actually won the competition and £15,000.

It had been agreed over the initial supper, and wine that was drunk with it, that any prize won would be split into three. This arrangement was honourably kept and Alex refurbished his house and bought some golf clubs.

The money has all gone!! But what fun!

### Royal Crescent Society Cocktail Party Sunday July 6<sup>th</sup> 1997

What a joy to find the heavens full of sunshine and fleecy clouds over Bath for the Cocktail Party.

At last we were all able to enjoy the garden of the Royal Crescent Hotel, smiling people arriving realised that this was the most enchanting evening afters weeks of endless uncomfortable weather.

Glasses of wine filled out happy moments and delightful eats were served.

We were pleased to welcome new faces.

The trees and lavender bushes surrounded us as we looked into the sky at the balloons disappearing into the clouds.

Talk rose - people met people and the air filled with endless enjoyment. Raffle tickets were sold by Caroline Carrier and Veronique Oswald in the absence of Mrs Mickie Kersley who was unable to attend owing to summer cold and was greatly missed.

Sir John Barraclough called to order and Lady Barraclough drew the tickets.

The prizes always draw excitement - Lesley Brain fell upon Champagne boat trip kindly donated by the Hotel and Sir John won day at Bath Races kindly donated by Stephen Little.

I myself acquired a magical kettle with a high speed bottom.

Sir John Barraclough gave an affectionate speech noting the absence of our Chairman Michael Daw owing to illness and wishing him a speedy recovery.

I'm sure that a delightful evening was enjoyed by all as we said our goodbyes and made our way home.

John Carrier  
5 Royal Crescent

## Filming

Society finances have again been helped this year by two film projects, whose producers have agreed to contribute, as recompense to the affected community for the disruption. The Society has excellent relations with Richard Angell and the Bath Film Unit, who point prospective filmmakers in our direction. We have of course no rights of refusal over the use of the public street, but most units acknowledge the moral obligation to contribute towards the upkeep of the very setting they need for their production.

The first film was very small, a BBC Science Unit here for a couple of hours with almost no disruption and a consequently modest contribution. A second, memorable affair was the filming in and out of the Hotel of parts of an episode of Inspector Morse, complete with the famous maroon Jaguar. The Crescent at night turned into day with massive floodlights from the west end and the filming took several days.

It netted a four figure sum to the Society and one or two residents agreed to special lights in their windows (and were also presumably suitably paid?). The whole event seemed well received by most residents, many enjoying the sight of the TV stars, human as well as automotive.

By contrast, an initially favourable reaction by Circus residents to the filming in June of a BBC drama about the slave trade turned a little sour when the 70 tonnes of gravel sent up clouds of dust and the eventual removal of temporary plastic door coverings peeled off some paint. Nevertheless, anachronistic traditions of filming licence were well upheld as sheep grazed on the Circus grass, which was of course not there in the 1780s when the film was set!

### **"Basement" Garden Competitions**

The Basement Garden Competition was originally suggested in the 1970s by a venerated resident, and sometime treasurer, the late Richard Otway. The Society likes to think that notwithstanding the modesty of the prizes, the Competition has fulfilled its original aim of encouraging residents of "Courtyard" properties to be adventurous in planting their open areas. Certainly some of these are now outstandingly attractive and fragrant and give much pleasure to all who see them. One was the sole subject of the gardening feature in the Sunday Times Style section a few years ago. We have also enjoyed over the years the kind services of Mr Stanley Hitt, the Horticultural Advisor to the Council, who generously gave his time to judge and to come to AGMs to present the prizes, besides putting in a plug for his Annual Flower Show.

At the 1996 AGM our President proposed and the Meeting unanimously approved an additional competition for the "Most Improved Garden" and the 1<sup>st</sup> prize for this was presented at the 1997 AGM. At this it was also decided that this new competition should stand alone. There had been a certain repetitiousness of winners of "The Best" and it was clear that those with well-established gardens had so severely caught the bug, they no longer needed further encouragement. Members therefore agreed President's proposal that encouragement of "the Best" was more worthwhile. President agreed to be judge and jury and prize financier. Chairman has written a suitable letter to Mr Hitt thanking him for all he did. So the only game in town is "Most Improved Courtyard Garden" and there are about 9 months left before the 1998 AGM for you to star:

there are no formalities, just do it! The Courtyard Garden Competition is renamed in honour of the first winners Mr & Mrs David Brain at Nos 28 & 30. The winners of the last Basement Competition will be recorded in the next issue.

## Living Dangerously

Who said that the No 1 end of the Crescent was where it all happened? The high rollers are making a comeback. Admittedly you've had two cars through the railings to our one, but now we of the "West end" can claim a near miss in the air. By my reckoning that puts us ahead of points in the danger stakes.

It was Day 3 of the Festival - Whit Sunday - and hot air balloons were taking off with gay abandon below the Ha Ha. Even the battle hardened occupants of Nos 28 and 30 basements were saying to one another that the whole exercise was, well, perhaps just a touch foolhardy.

Scarcely had we returned to our gardening (the President's prize was already spoken for but there was always next year) when a shout went up. In no time (even less than it took to compose this) a crowd gathered around the corner, gazing upward.

A witness described how one of the balloons had struck a tree immediately after take-off, skirted No 30 and, failing to gain sufficient height, crashed onto the roof of the Language School in Marlborough Buildings. It dragged along to the roof next door where the basket remained stuck for a few moments - prompting speculation that one of the occupants might have fallen out - before the balloon soared up and away. We could still see it even then heading towards the M4.

Police and firemen arrived commendably quickly and the road was closed. A search for bodies revealed, however, that mercifully no one had been hurt, the damage being limited to chimney pots, slates and cars parked below.

So, we, the high rollers, assumed a nonchalant air and went around telling anyone who would listen that it wasn't much really, life was quite often like that - down our end of the Crescent.

## SNIPPETS

### Bath's Traffic

Hidden away on a business page of the Bath Chronicle in late July, one learned that the Council is "determined that by December (which year? - Ed.) it will be able to recommend a long term solution to the traffic problems of the City Centre". The Chronicle went on to suggest that the Council may come up with radical proposals which it would fight through the consultation process and be biased towards pedestrians rather than vehicles. Perhaps they might be really radical and recommend another "study" at vast expense.

### Bath Festival Opening Night

Residents' reactions to this year's events were again mixed. Some felt it again lacked focus, but nevertheless, 20,000 too many one felt attended. Others opined that it was all very jolly and colourful.

Support, in the shape of placing the free candles lighted in our windows at dusk, was equally patchy: about half the houses co-operated, as in recent years. The contrast of the early years of this element of the evening when almost all houses played their part was stark.

The best part of the evening was the magnificent fireworks display which many voted the best ever.

The organisers were extremely co-operative in providing car passes and policing the lawn and thanks are due to Ross Stevenson, General Manager, for kindly allowing the Hotel to be used as a distribution point. The posts and rope along the top of the ha ha was surprisingly effective at keeping non-residents off the lawn not only for the night itself but for nearly two weeks after, until they were removed.

### Balloon Crash

Times and Chronicle readers who have time only to scan their papers might have been forgiven for thinking that the May 20<sup>th</sup> balloon crash incident had hit No 30 since it was the most prominent building to feature in the dramatic pictures. In fact the balloon basket hit



Marlborough Buildings causing considerable roof damage and No 30 had a lucky escape. "An accident waiting to happen" was the general reaction. The full story is in Bill Oswald's article.

### Balloon Noise

Audi Cars laid on a combined publicity/charity event in July. Aimed at supporting a disabled children's charity, the main visual impact was a large Audi sign on a tethered balloon in the park below the Crescent. This offered rides ascending some 20 feet in the air, but the noise of the burners caused serious concern to some residents who complained to the Council. The rest of the event was well away from us, being below Royal Avenue.

The organisers had informed Chairman, as a courtesy gesture, about the event only 2 days before, but were rather economical with the truth. Concerning the balloons, they only said that there would be some ascents and played up heavily the charitable aspects. Balloon ascents are of course nothing novel here but the continuous roaring of the burners was not anticipated. Therefore on such information it would have seemed curmudgeonly to object and in any case we have no formal sanction over events in the park. Since the noise lasted some 5 hours had more facts been available we might have tried to influence matters more strongly: another lesson learned perhaps.

### Balloon Glow

The BITE Festival closed on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> with a jolly concert in the park in front of our lawn. Instead of the hoped for singing of Placido Domingo, the "Bootleg Beatles" recreated a 60s atmosphere with the familiar and catchy tunes of the time. The usual stage and bandshell was erected and dismantled with a minimum of fuss and in record time and some residents had picnics on the lawn. Noise levels were monitored by B&NES Environmental Officers and were set so as not to exceed 80dB at the sound desk. Members will have formed their own view as to how acceptable the event was. Do write to Vice Chairman Tim Forester at No 12 - our representative on the BITE Committee - if you have a view. The evening ended with a small "Balloon Glow" near to Marlborough Buildings, featuring the Royal Crescent Hotel's elegant new balloon. A group of Hoteliers entertained by Vice Chairman voted

the event better than the Festival Opening Night: more informal and no smelly food stalls.

#### Bath Preservation Trust

As Members are aware, the Society has reciprocal membership with the Bath Preservation Trust and enjoys the privilege and immense tangible benefits of having one of its Trustees, Sir Christopher Curwen KCMG, on its Committee.

Members may need reminding from time to time of less well-known benefits. First, Treasurer holds two BPT membership cards which entitle bearers to free entry to No 1 and to a 10% discount in its Museum Shop. Members may *borrow* these cards on application to the Treasurer. Secondly, the Trust's Annual Newsletter and its Annual Report are also received by the Society and may also be borrowed on application to the Secretary.

#### Annual "Outing"

As we go to press many Members are looking forward, with fingers crossed for the weather, to what may hopefully become an annual event - a summer evening visit or (before the term acquires more scandalous overtones) an "Outing".

This year David and Leslie Brain have very kindly offered to organise a picnic at Iford Manor. Its Italianate walks, the Cloisters and the whole prospect sounds delightful and a full report will appear in the next issue. If you haven't already booked your place and you receive this Newsletter in time, call the Secretary.

#### Park Events

B&NES Officials and especially our indefatigable Councillor David Hawkins continue to be very helpful in getting organisers of events in the Park to let us know in advance. Usually this is at very short notice, but so far the events have been very low key (standfast the BITE and Audi events - see above). How far we can influence such matters remains to be tested currently. We have succeeded in the past in stopping some, for example, the proposed RAC Rally which would have roared through the Crescent one morning some years ago.

### Cable Services

United Artists Communications with whom your Committee held helpful discussions two years ago has been taken over by Tele-West Communications, though some of the UA staff remain. Their current forecast is that cable will not reach the Crescent until 1998 at the earliest; it may well slip to 1999, with a decision possible in late 1997. Only half of Bath is currently connected, that is the South West and South East, although the Company claims it is well within its licence targets of the number of houses it is mandated to link up per year.

### The Royal Crescent *circa* Thirty Years Ago

*'Remind me to remind you we said we would never look back'  
A reply to Mr Tom Rowland (Newsletter No 33 P15)*

The grass may have been growing between the setts and the lawn railings were in a poor state but,

*'all but six of its houses divided into flats of varying grottniness' 'it was not'.*

Over one third of the houses had only one family or occupant, the rest, as now, were divided into either maisonettes or flats with varying degrees of skill, planning permission about alteration to the interiors was less strict that it is now. In total there were fewer housing 'units'. Nos 27 and 28, the home of Mrs Spenlove-Brown were joined, as were numbers 13 and 14, as they are now. No 16 was a discreet Guest House and numbers 30 and 29 belonged to the West Dean estate where they housed 'the odd Cezanne or Van Gogh' for the owner, a son of Edward VII (illegitimate) who apparently spent most of his time in Texas. However, the estate paid the lawn fund without prompting, while the caretaker cultivated the basement garden with the glorious wisteria as one of the joys of the Crescent.

The residents in the rest of this 'crumbling edifice' included, until she died in 1962, Lady Celia Noble who was a doyen of the musical world with whom Queen Mary used to come to tea when she was staying at Badminton. Lady Noble was succeeded by Miss Wellesley-Colley, a

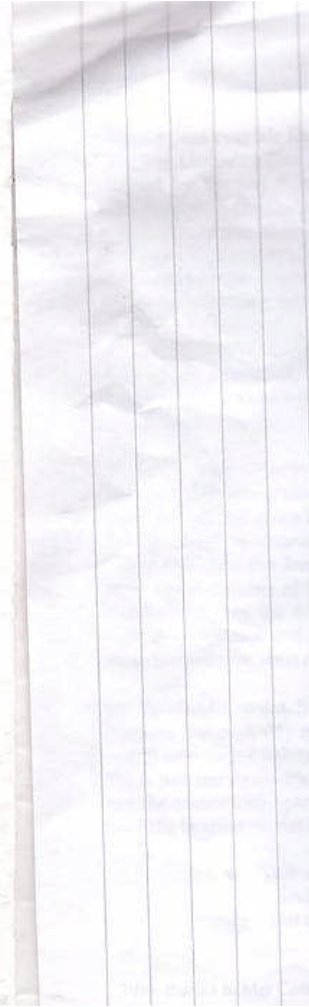
great niece of the Duke of Wellington, complete with her Rolls and chauffeur, and when it came to the argument about the colour of the front door, had more money for QCs than the Council.

At No 15 there was Mrs Tizzard, another patron of the arts, who held soirées to whom well-known musicians came and on whose comings and goings we humbler residents looked on with awe. At No 21, the sister-in-law of Harriet Cohen, had five grand pianos and with whom Yehudi Menuhin came to stay and to rehearse. In those days, during the Festival, you could hear the concert for the evening being rehearsed and floating down from the windows in the Crescent. It is my proud boast that, on going to get into my car early one morning, (no parking problems in those days) I found Mr Menuhin (looking over the railings at the peaceful scene) who talked to me about Bath as being 'one of the last civilised cities in England' I agreed, and my day had been made.

Further along the Crescent, among other distinguished residents there was Mr Jeremy Fry, with whom Princess Margaret came to stay, and who, with his neighbour in No 9, Charles Ware, was one of the main benefactors in the restoration of the Theatre Royal.

Although No 16 had become a 'Guest House' its clientele was distinguished. I remember Lady Warwick, who I used to meet - as did most residents - putting in our orders at Cater, Fort & Stoffell, the high-class grocers who had a branch in Margaret's Buildings where orders were delivered free and brought up the stairs. Also in the Buildings there was a first class butcher, a wonderful cobbler who undertook all kinds of repairs, and a good greengrocer who also delivered, with sundry other useful shops that came and went. Everyone met in Margaret's Buildings, it was virtually our community centre. Supermarket shopping may be more efficient, but not nearly such fun and they do not deliver.

The so-called grottniness had some advantages. I remember this time thirty years ago well. I had injured my back and was off work for a month and I used to take myself on to the Lawn with a sun-bed and read and listen to the birds. Not a sound anywhere but for the thrushes and blackbirds and the occasional car and perhaps the greeting from another resident who had come to join me. Then, of course, we were not security conscious car doors were left open as were front doors of divided



houses. When collecting for Poppy Day I just went in and up the stairs and knocked on each door.

I cannot pass over Mr Rowland's comment about No 1 being a 'Common Lodging House'. This is rubbish. A Common Lodging House was defined by Section 9 of the Public Health Act 1936 and had to be registered with the Local Authority, of which the Rowden Houses were a typical example; they were the last resort for the homeless. Now, alas, they sleep in doorways, under arches or in the parks. No 1 was merely a rather run-down house that was sub-divided into bed sitting-rooms whose tenants were mainly elderly ladies whose main delight seemed to be to feed the birds in the park.

And on the subject of the debate on windows and cills, Mr Rowland should pay a visit to the excellent Building of Bath Museum and get his facts correct.

Of course some aspects of the Crescent have improved. More houses have had their stone cleaned, most roofs are now in good condition, the lawn railings and gates have been restored, thanks to the Royal Crescent Society. We have encouraged basement gardens which now attract more admiration than the Ionic columns, though, curiously enough 30 to 40 years ago a number of beautiful rose trees seem to sprout up from the foundations. On the other hand, thanks to our popularity for tourists with their coaches and buses, the road is in a far worse state and the stone towards the west end has darkened perceptibly.

Mr Rowland's point is the rise in the market value of the houses. Property has probably risen by a factor of 25 to 30, but then so has what would now be my salary if I were still employed, and many other things. But is this our yardstick? The value of the Crescent is its unique beauty and the community spirit of the people who live here. The quality of life has little bearing on the market price of your house or flat.

✦ 'Talk about the market and valuation  
And the cash that goes therewith  
But the grotty Crescent yesteryear  
Chuck it Rowland' \*

Monica E Baly ☐

With thanks to Mrs Cotter and the Spenlove-Browns for helping my memory

## **Restaurant Winner!**

For those of you who remember with affection The Eastern Eye when it was in Argyle Street, you are in for a treat. It has re-opened in Quiet Street and is well worth visiting just for the architecture alone. The restaurant occupies the first floor of a building that was erected in 1824 and then called 'The Auction Mart and Bazaar'. I am told that it is an unusual example for Bath of a Georgian building planned from the first for this commercial purpose and the whole thing is designed to impress. The large and lofty hall was originally used for exhibitions and meetings, then became a chapel for a breakaway sect of Methodists and more recently serving as part of the offices of the gas board. A vast room runs from front to back and the Choudhury family hasn't made the mistake of employing interior designers to create an 'Indian' style interior but has simply relied on the wonderful space and extravagant domed ceiling to speak for themselves. They had added stylish Indian pictures and their own touches.

The night we went was not long after they had opened and they were reassuringly close to being full but even the most difficult of Michael Winners would have been satisfied by the space around each table. Plenty of room for the trolleys on which the food is brought to the table.

The food of Bengal and Northern India is best at its most delicate - forget the days when Indian food was best washed down with copious quantities of liquid. I had an Eastern Eye speciality of breast of chicken fillet, gently spiced and shallow-fried in ghee and then blended with a cheese and cream sauce. Delicious. We all have our favourite food. Mine is the onion bhajee and these great confections, both crisp and light, were no disappointment. Bengali desserts are famously sweet but the rose-flavoured curd cheese suited me very well and David soon polished off some Indian ice-cream. The service - everyone who works there seems to be part of the family - is keen and attentive. Mr Choudhury and his family deserve that this bold move should be

## **This Month's 18<sup>th</sup> Century Recipe**

### **Raspberry 'Vinegar' (Cordial)**

Makes about 3 pts/1.7 litres

3lbs/1.4kg fresh or defrosted frozen raspberries  
3 pints/1.7 litres/7½ cups distilled white vinegar  
White Sugar

Put the raspberries and vinegar in a bowl and leave covered, for 5 - 6 days, stirring occasionally. Mash well and strain through a jelly bag without exerting any pressure. Measure the liquid and allow 1lb/450g sugar to each 1 pint/575ml liquid. Bring to the boil slowly, stirring well to dissolve the sugar. Simmer for 20 minutes. Skim and leave until cold. Pour into sterilised screw-top bottles or jars and seal tightly. Use a tablespoon of raspberry vinegar in a glass of cold water as a cooling drink or to soothe a cold or fever. For a fuller flavour add more mixture.

From the Jane Austen Cookbook□

### **Victim Support - Who Needs It?**

Victim Support is a nation-wide run charity whose Patron is HRH Princess Anne. The Scheme started over 20 years ago in Bristol and has since spread throughout England and Wales. Bath district is relatively new to the scheme starting only 6 years ago.

Volunteers come from all walks of life and all ages ranging from students to pensioners. Most work in the area where they live and give whatever time they can to visiting people. Full training is given and out of pocket expenses are met. The work is very varied and rewarding.

People are referred to Victim Support by the police or they make direct contact themselves to ask for help. This comes in a variety of ways; some volunteers choose to help with practical tasks such as mending windows or replacing locks. Others enjoy offering clerical assistance in the office or organising events for fund-raising and publicity. I am one of about 25 volunteers working with victims of crime in the Bath district which involves a confidential visit to people's homes. I have found the majority of cases are burglaries, but they can include murder, rape, arson, violence etc. We do not get involved with car theft or commercial businesses unless a person is perhaps attacked and needs some assistance. Elderly people in particular suffer from the effects of a burglary; it is a shocking and a disturbing intrusion into their lives. Sometimes it is difficult to offload feelings on friends and family. Advice can also be given on compensation and insurance claims; sometimes we liaise with other agencies.

People suffering a crime may react in a variety of ways. Most will not suffer long term harm but may find it a traumatic experience. Their contact with Victim Support may be brief, or it can last over a period of weeks or months.

Victim Support also runs the witness service with which I am also involved and which helps victims, witnesses and their families before, during and after hearings. Trained volunteers provide free and confidential information and support. This service is operating at Bath Magistrates Court and in a growing number of Crown Court centres in England and Wales. Going to Crown Court as a witness or as the victim of a crime can be a worrying experience. The witness service can offer a visit to the Court and, possibly, a first look around a court room, information on court procedures; someone to accompany a witness into the court room if they have to give evidence etc.

Victim Support Bath District deals with about 2,000 victims of crime a year and receives some funding from the Government which is used to run an office with Ken Jefferies, an ex-policeman, and his able assistant Jan who liaises with police and makes sure the service is managed effectively. A management committee oversees the work and Members who give their time include housewives, solicitors, accountants etc.



Other costs are met from donations and fund-raising activities. Garden parties, plays, jumble sales are held to keep the service going but it is always an uphill task! I also assist the fund-raising committee and here I would welcome some ideas! Our main event this year is to put on an auction of donated items in the Autumn, which we trust will be an enjoyable event whilst raising the necessary money for this worthwhile cause.

I hope many of you will be able to attend.

Jenny Otten

### Obituary Mrs Majorie Wilks

Residents will be sorry to learn of the death of Jo Wilks on 5<sup>th</sup> June, the sister of Mrs Kersley who had lived in the basement flat of No 20 Royal Crescent for twenty years. Jo Wilks died after considerable suffering just 18 months after the death of her husband, Frank. They will be remembered by those who knew them as a handsome and charming couple, friendly, but little involved in life outside their close family circle. They fit, as few people do, Gray's lines:

"Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of days"

And the Crescent the poorer without them.

Mrs Wilks leaves a daughter, Cheryl, and two much loved grandchildren, Matthew and Joanna, to whom we extend our sympathy, as we do to Mrs Kersley who has had more than her share of watching suffering and of bereavement in the last few years.

## Your Committee

The Committee of The Royal Crescent Society, unanimously re-elected on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1997 is shown below. Members will normally serve until the 1998 Annual General Meeting when they may stand down or offer themselves for re-election. Under the Constitution the Committee is also empowered to co-opt additional Members who do not need to be residents of the Royal Crescent, for particular tasks where special expertise is required: there are currently two such Members as shown.

		House No
Chairman	Mr M G Daw	10
Vice-Chairman	Mr Tim Forester	12
Hon. Treasurer	Mr Stephen Little	22
Newsletter Editor	Mrs Caroline Carrier	5
Hon. Secretary	Mrs Veronique Oswald	28A
Members:	Mrs Mickie Kersley	20
	Mr John Meddins	29
	Mr Bill Oswald	28A
	Mr Richard Otten	17
	Mr Ian Woodhouse	14
Co-opted Members:	Sir Christopher Curwen KCMG	Trustee Bath Preservation Trust
	Mrs Jenny Hardisty	Ha-Ha Committee

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Bath District

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Mr Kenneth Jefferies Co-ordinator,  
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