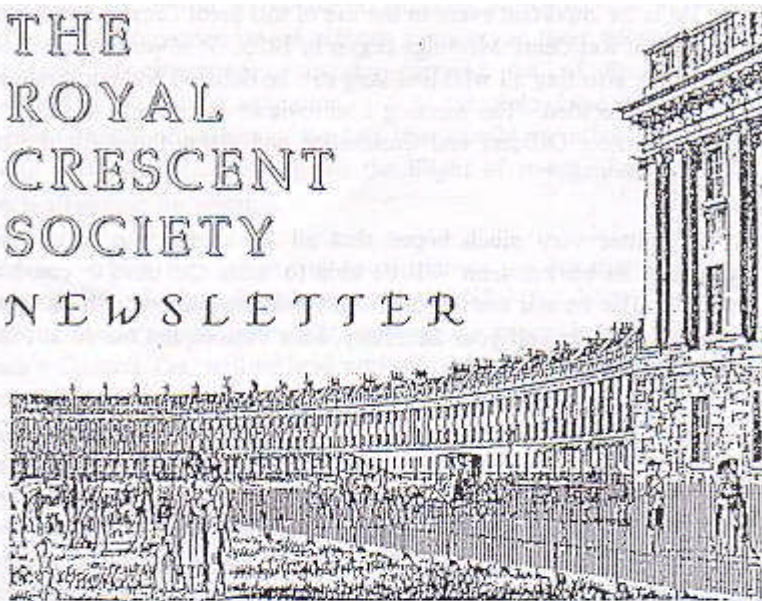


THE
ROYAL
CRESCENT
SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER



Issue No. 30

Spring 1996

(Note: Issue 31, Winter 1995, misnumbered as 31, vice 29)

Annual General Meeting Monday 29th April 1996

The Annual General Meeting of the Royal Crescent Society will be held at 7.15 p.m. on Monday 29th April 1996, at the Bath and County Club, Queen's Parade, Bath. Afterwards drinks and light refreshments will be available to which we have invited our former County Councillor and our "new" Bath & North East Somerset Councillors, as an opportunity to meet Residents.

ALL RESIDENTS are invited to attend this event and to take part. Voting on motions will of course be limited to paid-up Members of the Society (please contact Tim Forester at No. 12 or by telephone on 332086 for subscription forms, or renew/join at the event).

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This AGM is an important event in the life of this great Crescent and continues the tradition of Residents' Meetings begun in 1825. It is the principal forum at which matters affecting all who live here can be debated and corporate actions discussed and decided. The meeting also reviews and directs the work of the Society's volunteer Officers and Committee and elects those for the coming year.

Your Committee very much hopes that all Residents who care about the Crescent and its environment will be able to spare the time to come and to participate. The formal convening Notice will be delivered to all Residents during April. Please call your Secretary, Mrs Veronique Oswald at No. 28A on 421790 if you do not receive one. □

Chairman's Notes

Signs of spring everywhere - not least in this glorious setting. The now annual event of a car going through the railings marked the 1st small overnight flurry of snow and all traces of subsequent showers seem thankfully to be gone. Beautiful crocuses emerge from the nearby Circus Lawn and the elegant new railings around the even closer Cavendish Place near their most decorative completion on or even ahead, of time. We must offer them our congratulations on a splendid project, quickly realised. Such improvements - like the fine cleaning of their specific site, contributing as they do to the overall standards and ambience of the whole of what 18th Century writers dubbed the "New Town", or "Upper Town" area.

We do our best too and it is only the combined forces of commerce and obstructive officials which prevent us from stopping the appalling and damaging buses, as we did so successfully with their precursors, the single-deck coaches, some years ago. This Newsletter contains a long and detailed report on the latest development in this saga, and I very much regret that it makes depressing reading. We have tried hard and achieved much along the way: we got all political parties to agree (and some to change their view), we got official reports to endorse the need, we got the amplified commentary to be switched off (uniquely), we got the illegal parking at the West End stopped, we attracted Nationwide media publicity with features in several National Newspapers National and local television and radio and we have kept up the pressure in the local press. Great stuff. But in the end what has happened in real terms? The

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buses are still with us. Officials have so delayed actions, have misrepresented views and swallowed wholesale commercial proposals that it is difficult to believe their protestations of sincere support, or their adherence to normal standards of objectiveness in the carrying out of their public duties. Councillors too, whilst very supportive in principle, have in the final analysis seems virtually powerless in the last few months to influence the conduct or speed of Council business, given the blight of re-organisation which is the catch-all excuse for inaction.

And so we look forward to and must perforce put our trust in our new local authority Bath & North East Somerset or B&NES (for short). They will have a difficult initial period and whilst enjoying the proceeds of a 14% increase in Bath's Council Tax, will be hard pressed to decide the priorities for allocating them. New Councillors (though we are delighted to see David Hawkins will still represent us), new, remote building, new procedures and Committee structures, and a larger and more structurally diverse constituency to govern. In these circumstances we wish them all well, but must recognise that closure of this Crescent to through traffic will require superhuman efforts for it to survive for early action against the many competing matters which vie for their attention both socially and politically. The way the proposal is being passed over to them by Avon is disgracefully unhelpful (see article) and will not make their decision any easier.

However all is not doom & gloom. Shutting one's senses to the unspeakable buses, life here and in the City offers much to enjoy. Our courtyard gardens are flourishing and the ingenuity of winter planting in the increasing number of increasingly elegant window-boxes gives pleasure to many - apart from architectural ultra-purists who consider them anathema to the building's alleged uniformity; they seem at the same time to ignore the wide variations of window treatment, sill levels, railing design, etc.!

We can also look forward to the AGM. Your Committee hopes very much that as many Residents as possible will attend and participate - or at least come and listen and learn and meet fellow denizens of this wonderful place to live. □

The news on this topic, as we go to press, is in Chairman's view deeply depressing. The actions and inaction of County and City Officials and their refusal to respond to Councillors directions and to their and our pressures have set our campaign back several years.

Summary

Briefly (and this article exposes the gory detail below), we had expected that with all the unnecessary delay Officials have caused to the July 1994 directive to work out ways and means of implementing the closure of the Crescent to through traffic, the task of implementation would have passed as a simple matter to the new local authority (B&NES). But officials have instead fabricated and obfuscated the case to the extent that the task will be passed over as a complicated and awkward mess allegedly requiring more investigation, more "work", etc., before the closure can even be formally advertised as a Traffic Regulation Order. This will give B&NES - who will have a very difficult first year - every excuse to take the view that it is all too difficult and to put it on the back burner; when it does emerge it seems highly likely that the whole case may need to be argued all over again. The timescale for action is thus unforecastable and meanwhile the buses and the damage and all their other bad impacts continue. The detail of events since the last Newsletter will follow.

Detail

We reported last time that City officials had at last begun the series of "consultations with interested parties", which they had been directed to do in July 1994. Your Chairman and Vice Chairman went to one on December 18th, chaired by David McLaughlin, Principal Conservation Officer, Bath City Council (BCC), and also attended by John Porter, BCC Traffic Engineer and Roger Witt, Avon County Council Traffic Manager, Environmental Control. We were shown detailed plans for the closure of the West end of the Crescent, told that the best legislative means of implementation had been decided and advised that this would all be presented to the relevant Avon Committee for

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endorsement at their last meeting in March, so that it could be passed to B&NES for action. Mr Witt proposed that it be recommended for B&NES to put it in for approval for their 1997/8 budget as the first year would be too crowded. We rejected this and insisted that it take its chances in the first year. Officials expressed their desire to see the matter through as positively as possible and said they believed it was essential action to preserve the Crescent.

It also emerged that in discussions of the detailed proposal, Badgerline had intimated that if the proposal were seen not to be directed solely at their buses but at stopping all through traffic, their Board might not press for a Public Inquiry. This is excellent news if followed through.

At this point - and as reflected in Chairman's comments at the Festive Dinner - matters seem to be progressing as well as could be hoped. We also knew that consultations had been held with the Bath Preservation Trust and the General Manager of the Royal Crescent Hotel, who were all in full support and who had all reported back very positively. The next step, eagerly awaited, was the formal written Report which officials would jointly prepare for the Avon Traffic Sub-Committee Meeting. By courtesy of our Councillor Maureen Wheadon, it arrived on the Friday before the Tuesday Meeting. You can read it for yourself, in full, below. Remember, this is the result of almost 2 years of "work" by City & County Officials.

COUNTY OF AVON

PLANNING, HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT (HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT) SUB-COMMITTEE

12TH MARCH 1996

PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING COMMITTEE DECISIONS (DIVISIONS: BATH CENTRAL AND WEST WEST)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To enable Members to review progress in implementing decisions made at previous meetings and matters arising therefrom.

2. Latest Position

2.1 The following summaries reflect the latest position at the time of writing and where appropriate further updates will be given orally at the meeting.

1 ROYAL CRESCENT, BATH (DIVISION: BATH CENTRAL)

2.2 This matter was last considered by this Sub-Committee on 28th March 1995 (Minute No. 217 refers) and by Planning, Highways and Transport Committee on 11th April 1995 when it was resolved:-

that Bath City Council be asked to expedite as a matter of urgency the arrangements for further local consultation with "interested local bodies" as set out in the report.

2.3 Arrangements were made by Bath City Council for consultation meetings to be held last December and January, these being held with Bath Preservation Trust, the Royal Crescent Society, the Royal Crescent Hotel and Marlborough Lane and Buildings Residents Association. Your officer was in attendance at the meetings.

2.4 The Bath Preservation Trust and the Royal Crescent Society were in favour of the closure of Royal Crescent to through traffic. The Preservation Trust also suggested that full or partial pedestrianisation should be investigated.

This could include the removal of all parking, thus opening up an uncluttered vista of Royal Crescent. These matters would require investigation.

2.5 The Royal Crescent Hotel, while not opposing the principle of the closure were concerned that access and turning facilities for vehicles serving the hotel would be maintained. They also drew attention to the fact that some of their guests arrive as coach parties and thus facilities for those coaches would also need to be maintained.

2.6 The Marlborough Lane and Buildings Residents Association opposed the closure of Royal Crescent to through traffic as this would cause increased problems at the northern end of Marlborough Buildings and at the substandard junction with Weston Road. They considered that no action should be taken on the closure until a comprehensive study of traffic movements in the area has been undertaken.

2.7 Arising from the consultation meeting, there is clearly further work to be undertaken before the closure of Royal Crescent can be formally advertised, particularly in respect of further environmental measures on Royal Crescent and the effect on surrounding roads. It will not be possible to complete this within the lifetime of this Council, given existing commitments and staff resources. Consequently it is proposed that the closure to through traffic of Royal Crescent be recommended to Bath and North East Somerset Council together with investigation of other environmental measures.

Comment

Paragraph 2.4 seemed at odds with the Trust's earlier report back to us. When asked to comment, the Trust was very angry and absolutely clear that it had never made such a suggestion, knowing the idea to be wholly impracticable. Michael Briggs, Chairman of the Trust and Sir Christopher Curwen, both of whom were at the meeting with officials, kindly gave permission, in the short time to take action before the Avon Committee Meeting, for their names to be used as authority to have the sentence refuted. Paragraph 2.5 was also phrased in a more negative way than necessary and the matters raised by Marlborough Lane RA could, with good will, easily have been thrashed through - or put to a practical test through a pilot scheme etc. in the time otherwise wasted by officials. No minutes of any of the consultation meetings have been produced by David McLaughlin, despite hastening.

The "Report" also fails to mention the work officials actually did manage to do. That is, the detailed legislative and design work and their assertion to the Trust that the cost of the proposal would be almost insignificant compared to that of other measures, especially that of a Public Inquiry.

Thus, because of this inaccurate, incomplete and negative, approach, Councillors are being asked to pass on to the B&NES not a simple, well-researched, costed scheme, for implementation as their resources permit (something we could have lived with), but a complicated, apparently embryo idea which requires all sorts of ill-defined "further work" and "investigation".

In the virtually few hours remaining before the Report is taken at the Avon Committee Meeting, our redoubtable Councillor Mrs Wheadon had promised to do all she can to correct the matters in this article as highlighted in the last few paragraphs. A further report will be made by Chairman at the AGM.

Loose Ends

In the last Newsletter we mentioned that we were seeking clarification of Avon's mention to Don Foster MP of a Weight Restriction on the Crescent as a means of stopping the buses. After 4 months, Avon's Director has answered

saying that "this has not proved to be a feasible option due to the low tare weight of an open top double decker bus".

Last time we were also still awaiting Bath City Council's (new) Head of Paid Services' formal reply to our Formal Complaint of October last year about lack of action by Council employees. Despite hastening he has not replied. At other times this would clearly be matter for the Local Government Ombudsman, but there seems little point in such action given the short remaining life of the Council and its officials. From conversation with Councillors and others the blight of re-organisation is affecting all aspects of Council business and the staff might as well be playing golf for the constructive work that they are achieving. □

Anatomy of an Incident

On almost the stroke of the hour 365 days after the railings at the East end of the Crescent were last burst asunder by a speeding motorist out of control, it happened again, in exactly the same place. A most unwelcome Anniversary celebration!

Once again Residents awoke on the morning of Friday 9th February to see the Lawn decorated with an abandoned and damaged car and the railings torn open and curled apart. Once again the culprit had been racing to escape from pursuing police cars and had driven straight at the railings. This time he had also been involved in an assault in the centre of Bath and this has complicated pursuit of the matter.

Regrettably, your Actg. Treasurer was away ski-ing and your Chairman had no access to the Society's Insurance records. So, his Diary of the necessary action reads rather like an episode by Samuel Pepys:

9 Feb. 0900: Looked out of sitting room window and saw sad spectacle of car on Lawn, etc.. Groaned.
0915: Got wet feet on Lawn obtaining details of car etc.
0920: Called former Treasurer in case he remembered details of insurers. Bingo - he remembered their name and might have the Policy number on an old uncleared PC file; he would call

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- 0945: Found Insurers number and called; they were able to find policy number from our name, recorded incident and promised to send Claim Form. "Essential to have Accident Report Number from Police, must be quoted on Claim Form."
- 1000: Called usual railing repair contractor "Oh yes, we thought you might call, we'll send an Estimate ASAP".
- 1015: Former Treasurer called back with Policy Number.
- 1030: Called Police. Extremely polite and very helpful PC Speakman. He knew all about the matter: the driver had bought the car only the previous day and may not have comprehensive insurance cover, however the police would be seeking compensation in the Court proceedings. They had also instructed Hinton's to remove the car from the Lawn. The owner would then have it removed from the road. Driver involved in series of related incidents which would come to Court in March. PC Speakman going on leave for two weeks and would hand over to PC Parker. Essential Accident Report Number should be available from Staple Hill Accident Dept by Tuesday 13/2
- 1045: Car removed from Lawn. Japanese tourists take approx. 957 photographs of operation.
- 1130: Car removed from Crescent,
- 13 Feb. 0930: Called Police at Staple Hill: Accident Report Number not on computer yet.
- 1030: Called Insurers to explain delay.
- 15 Feb. 0930: Called Police at Staple Hill. Number still not on computer. Accident Clerk Jeannette Smith will chase PC Parker on 16th Feb. and call me back. (She didn't).
- 22 Feb. 0930: Called Staple Hill. Still no record of number and no record of promise to chase PC Parker - couldn't be done anyway. Jeannette Smith not available. Because of assault, etc., Report may not have been sent to Accident Dept., but dealt with as a crime. Only PC Parker can help: suggest call Control Room to trace him.
- 1000: Reach Control Room. More helpfulness: provided numbers of Front Office and Parade Room at Manvers Street Police Station Bath, so as to reach PC Parker.
- 1015: Called Insurers to explain further delay.

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- 1020: Called Bath Front Office: PC Parker is out on duty, but call the Parade Room and they will get him to call you back.
- 1025: Called Parade Room: PC Parker is not on duty, he's out sick until at least Monday 26th, suggest you call again then.
- 26 Feb. 0930: Called Parade Room: PC Parker still out sick. I suggested the Chap who dealt with it on the day (PC Speakman) should now be back from his fortnight's leave. Very helpful PC Phelps undertook to investigate and call me back.....
- 1430: PC Phelps called back (!). The matter has been assigned a "Temporary Reference Number" and here it is. Hooray!
- 1500: Completed Insurance Claim Form and posted it.

Was this the end of the story? Hardly. On 7th March Chairman received a letter from Bath City Council, saying that the Police had asked them to "attend and erect temporary protection over the gap in the railings"; Council employees had done this and the Council now sought our agreement, as owners of the railings, to accepting liability for the cost of the work - at £89,000!! Actg. Treasurer is now back from skiing and fully fit to send the Council a suitable reply! ☐

Treasurer

Your Committee was delighted that last Newsletter's report of the need for a Treasurer brought forth a volunteer! Mr Steven Little kindly came forward at the Annual Dinner and agreed to "try on" the post for an initial year. He is now learning the ropes from Vice Chairman/Acting Treasurer Tim Forester.

Over the years the post of Treasurer has accreted a number of other tasks, custody/issue of Lawn Gate Keys, Insurance Claims, Maintenance contracts, etc. It is planned to hive off these to another Committee Member during the coming year. Your Committee also has thoughts about the preparation of its accounts and how this might be better organised in the future, so as to leave the Treasurer post more open to non-professionals and to acquire a more executive role. This will be pursued and presented to Members in due course. ☐

Festive Dinner

Another very jolly Festive Dinner was enjoyed by Members and Guests at the Royal Crescent Hotel in early January. Attendance topped all previous records with a total of 64 "revellers" partaking. We were delighted that our guests Sir Christopher and Lady Curwen and Mr & Mrs Thomas Sheppard were able to come, and that the (relatively) new General manager Ross Stevenson and his wife also joined us.

As usual the setting was charmingly decorated and Members were appreciative of the excellent "deal" offered by the Hotel, which of course also benefits from such a large event in the fairly quiet post-Christmas period. Some lessons regarding menu descriptions and uniformity of course, delivery need to be learned for any future occasion and are being taken to heart. Overall, though, another delightful evening of good company, wine and food. Civilisation is alive and well! ☐

Ha Ha - Huh!

After 2 months of delay "because the papers were wrongly filed", the Heritage Lottery Fund refused our application for funds to restore the Ha Ha, on the grounds that "the Society is not a charity and is unlikely to become one because its constitution indicates that it provides benefits primarily to the residents of the Crescent rather than the public.

There is no published condition that funds are restricted to Charities and the interpretation of our constitution is an extremely narrow one, ignoring the very public nature of the Ha Ha project. Indeed the visual benefits of its restoration would be enjoyed exclusively by the public and invisible to residents. So your Committee is returning to the charge on these and several other grounds.

Prior Park Visit

There are still some places left to make up the numbers exclusive Private Visit to the restored Prior Park (for d Newsletter). If you would like to take advantage of this before the multitudes descend, contact Bill Oswald at No. 2 421790. □

Neighbourhood Watch

Following the last Newsletter, all known residents on our members of the Society or not) were circularised in order interest in a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme could be gauged.

The initial response from those residents who replied was and, in some cases, very enthusiastic. It is hoped that we proceed further but, to be certain of so doing, we need positive a few more residents. Would any interested residents who kindly contact Ian Woodhouse on Bath 337380. □

Don't Forget your Candles

The opening night of the Bath International Music Festival is this year, and once again we will be provided with candles and them in our windows at dusk to enhance the otherwise dark str

Details of the event are sketchy as yet, but there is likely procession through the Crescent at some point followed by ev Park. We anticipate the same arrangements for Residents car through the street-closure barriers, etc. More details will be the time. □

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Want to spoil yourself or your friends? Don't waste money going to the shops make some fudge. It's fun to do on a cold early spring weekend afternoon.

Take:-

1 lb. granulated sugar,
1/4 pint milk,
5 oz butter,
2 tablespoons golden syrup

add 1 and a half tablespoons of instant coffee dissolved in a tablespoon warm water (for Coffee Fudge)

OR

2 tablespoons of cocoa mixed with milk and stirred into the other ingredient (for Chocolate Fudge)

Put all the ingredients into a heavy based 5 pint saucepan. Stir over low heat until all sugar is dissolved. Bring to the boil and continue to do so until reaches 240°F (soft ball stage). Remove from heat. Stand pan on cool surface for 5 minutes and then beat until thick and creamy.

Pour into buttered tin (small roasting tin size) and cut when cool. It is easier you have a sugar thermometer - available from Kitchens, Quiet Street.

Redoubtable Ladies

Redoubtable ladies have always abounded in the Crescent, right up to the present day. Indeed, I can immediately think of more than one, until recently associated with the committee of the Royal Crescent Society, who would admirably fit Dr. Samuel Johnson's description, that she displayed "such powers of ratiocination, such radiations of intellectual eminence, as are amazing."

In fact, Dr. Johnson was talking about Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, friend of Horace Walpole and others, defiant defender of Shakespeare against the virulence of Voltaire and, most importantly (as we are informed by Edith Sitwell) a visitor to Bath in June, 1779. What did she think of us?

"I should dislike Bath much less, if the houses were larger. I always take the largest that can be got in the Circus or Crescent. On the outside it appears a good stone edifice; in the inside, it is a nest of boxes, in which one should be stifled, if the masonry were not so bad as to admit winds at many places. The society and mode of life are infinitely preferable to what one can find in any other country town, but much less agreeable than London. ... I should use it as a kind of purgatory to which I should send those who had not the taste or qualifications to be put into the capital city....."

For myself, I would send to London those who had not the taste or qualifications to live in Bath. One has to admit that Mrs. M. was dead right about the ventilation, though. Not so sure about the nest of boxes; perhaps Mrs. M. didn't realise that she should get out of her Sedan chair.

Notes from the Editor

Spring has finally emerged in the Crescent and the Conversations will be back on the pavement after the Winter hibernation.

This time we have a fudge recipe and would welcome more such recipes for the future.

On a serious note the bus problem continues and does not unravel - instead it becomes more complex.

The Annual General Meeting will be with us next month and we look forward to your participation.

We welcome Miss Sonya Westlake to No. 5 and hope she will enjoy living in this lovely ambience.

Dr. Monica Baly has informed us that Mr & Mrs Bourdon Smith (Members of the R.C.S.) gave an exhibition of paintings, drawings and decorative objects at the Gallery, 74 South Audley Street, London W1 in early December, which was well received.

Please send any contributions for the Summer Newsletter by the end of June.

Matters moved swiftly and beneficially in the 24hrs after this edition of the Newsletter went to press.

Briefed by Chairman, our indefatigable Avon Councillor Mrs Maureen Wheadon worked hard in the very short time available before the Avon Committee Meeting. Helped by Councillor Brian Pascoe she persuaded all other Councillors and officials to "bend" Committee rules so that Chairman could address the meeting without giving the required advance notice.

Chairman did so, using the sense of the arguments under "Comment" on page 8 of this Newsletter, to urge Councillors to drop the Recommendation for further investigation and other work.

We are glad to report that this worked. Councillors heeded Chairman's words and threw out the complicating Recommendation. B&NES will therefore be presented with the simple Recommendation;

"That the closure of Royal Crescent at its Western end, initially on an experimental basis, be recommended to B&NES Council as the only practical way of reducing through traffic."

This is as much as we could have hoped for and a major improvement on the state of play when the Newsletter went to press. There is of course still a long way to go but the course is now clearer than it might have been.

