

THE ROYAL CRESCENT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 56

Spring 2005

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THE SEARCH FOR AN EDITOR

Following the departure from the Crescent of former editor Stephen Conlin, who produced our Newsletter three times a year from 2001 until leaving last year, the Society's Committee is now looking for an editor for future editions, as announced at the AGM last April. The task involves gathering items from both within the Society and elsewhere for inclusion in the Newsletter, liaising with advertisers, and finalising the layout for submission to the printer.

If you would like to help the Society by undertaking this task, even for a short stint, please inform the Chairman, Stephen Little, who will give any computer or other assistance required.

THE SOCIETY'S MARQUEE

This useful shelter from sun and rain is available for hire from the Society for your private event. Please contact any Committee member, some of whom are named below. Terms: £25 hire for three days with a £100 returnable deposit to cover possible damage.

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Ian Woodhouse
Vacant –it could be you!*

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The Society's AGM will again be kindly hosted by the Royal Crescent Hotel, at 6.30 pm on Sunday 24th April. As usual this is open to **all** residents, including non-members, and Friends of the Society. It is your opportunity to participate in the care of the surroundings of your home. Full details accompany this Newsletter.

The Crescent Lawn Company has recently learnt that the review of the Charity Commission's decision to refuse it registration as a charity has confirmed that decision. However from among the reasons given in the review has emerged a possible way forward for the basis of the Lawn Fund, which the CLC board is currently investigating. There follows an article on the past and future of the Lawn Fund, a subject to be debated at the AGM.

Further to the item in the Autumn issue about the University's application to expand into Green Belt land, the University has introduced a further 70-page topic paper. Objectors have been granted an extension to consider the bid for residences for 2000 students and staff. No brown field sites in the B&NES area have been considered suitable for the University's purposes. An inquiry is to be held at the Percy Community Centre, New King Street from 19 - 21 April.

STEPHEN LITTLE (tel: 310180, email: altcar@nildram.co.uk)

The following article is printed here in order to inform RCS Members of two issues to be discussed at the AGM. There has not been time for the RCS Committee to form a considered view, but it will make detailed recommendations at the AGM.

ROYAL CRESCENT LAWN FUND AND RAILINGS & HA-HA RESTORATION FUND

The History of the Lawn Fund

Original deeds to each of the 30 houses in the Royal Crescent contained a clause granting the owner and his successors "the free use of the whole area or space of void ground called or intended to be called the Royall Crescent in Common with other the owners and occupiers for the time being of the Houses building and to be built in the Royall Crescent". Another clause required that the owner and his successors "shall and will pay his and their proportionable share in Common with other the

owners and occupiers of Houses in the Royall Crescent of forming and bounding in with neat Iron Rails or pallisadoes the Grass plott intended to be in front of the said Crescent and of keeping the same in repair for ever afterwards”.

A common fund has existed for such a purpose in one form or another since at least 1825, from when the RCS holds records of a meeting at which Royal Crescent residents combined to pay for the installation of additional gas lamps. Other papers in its archive record the collection and expenditure of funds on behalf of residents, in the absence of a freehold owner of the Lawn, for the maintenance of the Lawn and surrounding railings and ha-ha from 1830 onwards. These funds were augmented by the sale of hay from the Lawn cutting and the granting of grazing rights for horses. As owners and/or residents had been entitled by their title deeds to access to the Lawn since the completion of the Crescent in 1775, it is assumed that some arrangements for maintenance of the Lawn and its boundaries had been in place since then.

At some point, not recorded, the tasks of collection of payments and administering the maintenance were passed to a firm of local Bath solicitors, now known as Thring Townsend, mainly on a goodwill basis. In the 20th Century the tasks were run almost single-handedly by a partner in the firm, Mr R. Forrester, who owned and lived in one of the Crescent houses, No. 25. The passage of time brought problems with further conversions of some of the houses into flats and the difficulties of keeping track of the ever-changing ownerships, as well as the lack of funds for legal action to enforce payments and the lack of any formal corporate structure to set funding levels. But enough residents continued to recognise their responsibilities to fund basic and acceptable standards of maintenance right through until the middle of the 20th Century.

The Royal Crescent Society was formed in 1973, when concerned residents recognised the need to improve the appearance of the Lawn and its boundaries, which in the absence of an owner had been neglected for some time. The Officers of the RCS were then, as now, unpaid volunteers. Annual General Meetings and Committee meetings have been held continuously since 1974, and the RCS has undertaken the administration of the Lawn Fund, separately from its own funds, since that date. This has been used to fund cutting and general maintenance of the grass, litter collection, weeding etc., all sub-contracted to the Council's Parks Department, maintenance of gates and their locks, distribution of keys to residents, erection of notices, effecting insurance of Lawn, railings and ha-ha, and arranging repairs when vehicles have breached the railings.

The Crescent Lawn Company Ltd (CLC)

Throughout this time, ownership of the Lawn was uncertain until the Society applied for title to the Lawn by the Land Registry by virtue of their stewardship over the years. The Land Registry agreed the claim in principle but advised that they could not grant title to the Society as an unincorporated association, so the CLC was created as a not-for-profit company in order to hold the title on behalf, not of the Society, but of Royal Crescent residents, and was granted absolute title in 2003. Its stated object is “to manage and maintain the Royal Crescent lawn its boundary railings and bases and the ha-ha wall structure for the benefit of the general public”.

The Company applied to register as a charity, on the grounds that it was preserving a vista for the benefit of the wider public, in order to make fund-raising easier for the major Railings and Ha-ha Restoration project and to take advantage of tax concessions. However this application was refused, and an appeal was unsuccessful.

The Future of the Lawn Fund

Now that the status of the CLC has been finalised, it is proposed that it would be appropriate for the Company to administer the Lawn Fund. The Company currently has very little money, but as owner and maintainer of the Lawn needs to be able to spend whatever needs to be spent on the Lawn, even though it will continue to be guided by the wishes of the Society when doing so. Collection of contributions would also be on a sounder legal footing. It should be borne in mind that:

- the CLC is a not-for-profit company
- any resident is eligible to become a member by guaranteeing to pay £1 in the event of the Company’s dissolution
- the Articles do not allow the payment of any dividend to members
- the Articles do not allow any director to receive financial or other benefit as a director
- the Society will continue to guide the Company’s actions.

The Railings & Ha-ha Restoration Fund

It is also proposed that the CLC should administer the Appeal Fund, since the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) insisted that it was the CLC, as an incorporated body and owner of the Lawn, rather than the Society which

should be named as the partner with B&NES as recipient of the grant for the Restoration. It will therefore be the CLC which the HLF expects to pay the Crescent's share when the time comes. The Appeal Fund is kept in a separate account and it is not proposed to change that.

SUMMER BARBECUE – SUNDAY AUGUST 14TH, 2005

Following the success of last year's Summer Barbecue, Mr & Mrs Forester have kindly agreed to host a similar event again this year – details will be announced in the next Newsletter.

The Social Committee is also currently considering options for a Summer outing. Any help or suggestions would be most welcome.

THE FESTIVE DINNER

Sunday January 9th 2005

The annual Twelfth Night Festive Dinner, held in early January at the Royal Crescent Hotel, was as always an enjoyable experience. Residents were greeted on arrival with a welcoming glass of wine and conversation flowed. Guests then took their seats in the function room, with a rapid sale of dozens of raffle tickets: some being sold twice! Guests had the pleasure of bringing their own wine, thus helping to reduce the cost of the evening. The meal started with marinated salmon, followed by beef with the grand finale of a dramatic baked alaska.

The drawing for the raffle was then held with many winners, including the Woodhouses winning the first choice prize. Well done! The evening was completed with coffee and petit fours. Three hundred pounds was generated from this delightful event to help fund the Railings & Ha-ha Restoration.

Our thanks are due to the Hotel for hosting the event and to Mrs Jennifer Bereska for organising it.



NEW ANGLE ON FAMOUS CRESCENT VISTA

From The Bath Weekly Chronicle, 2nd May 1957

Royal Crescent is now back in the setting which is loved by Bathonians and visitors to the city – in fact, the setting has been improved to provide an entirely new vista.

Almost a year has passed since the Parks Committee began “Operation Face-lift”, the beauty treatment which saw the “cabbage patch” – as it was often described during the years since the war – disappear. In its place has sprung up the rolling greensward which now provides the Crescent’s frontispiece.

The five acres of grassland which during the war and up to last year, provided valuable food-producing land, now merges into the Royal Victoria Park. The ha-ha (boundary ditch) which separates the park from the Crescent’s front lawn has been retained.

To open up the vista – it is indeed a magnificent view, both from the Crescent and the park ends – the hedge which ran parallel with the park pathway has been removed, the land in its immediate vicinity flattened and grass seeded.

The concrete stanchions and wire fencing on the other side of the pathway are also disappearing. Bathonians will recall that before the war cattle and sheep grazed on this parkland. This feature is not being re-introduced. The idea is that visitors to the park can enjoy this five-acre area.

Public Pressure

The Royal Crescent Field, to give its full title, provided plots for 72 allotmenters during the war. At the end of the war the “temporary” allotments remained and then there was pressure from the general public and from sections of the City Council, for restoration of the green field.

But it was not until 1956, when the Parks Committee assumed responsibility for the allotments in the city, that that it was possible to transfer the allotment holders to the Lower Common site, and others in the city.

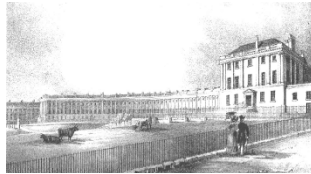
All for £200

During the years there were many critical comments about the retention of the field as a “cabbage plot”, but the former Small-holdings and Allotments

Committee fought hard and successfully to retain the site until it was satisfied that satisfactory alternative allotments were available.

The total cost of restoring the front approaches of the Crescent to its former glory is in the region of £200.

CRESCENT LAWN COMPANY LTD



For the benefit of those of you who will be unable to attend the Royal Crescent Society AGM on Sunday 24th April, I thought a brief resume of the last 12 months' progress might be appreciated.

Charitable Status

I took over from Michelle Little as Company Secretary and attended my first Directors' Meeting on 13 February 2004. This was just prior to the application for Charitable Status. In spite of the Directors' personal visit to the Charity Commissioners offices to explain the complexities of our case, the application was refused the following August. The Directors have appealed against this decision, and the Commission is currently reconsidering its initial rejection.

The Legalities

In August 2004 the Deed of Variation to the original B&NES Contract with Heritage Lottery Fund was completed; the Variation is to include the Crescent Lawn Company. In November the Deed of Indemnity between Crescent Lawn Company and B&NES was completed. This deals with the financial side of the project, and limits the Crescent Lawn Company to a capped amount of £30,000 or 25% of the whole, whichever is the lower amount. B&NES agreed to this in recognition of all the work the Directors have carried out in the past and will carry out in the future. In February 2005 the final document was completed, namely a License between B&NES and the Crescent Lawn Company, laying down the condition by which B&NES'

contractors will be allowed access to the Lawn to carry out the work. This completed the legal documentation and all are now signed.

Change of Directors

Sadly for us Ernest Jowett found it necessary to resign from the Board of Directors. We all owe him a huge debt of gratitude for all his sound help and advice, and we were very sorry to see him go. However, Ian Woodhouse has gamely agreed to join the Board, and his presence is most welcome.

The Restoration

After an absence of 6 months, the Directors were very pleased to welcome back Glenn Humphreys, Conservation and Development Manager for B&NES. He is handling 39 individual projects in the Royal Victoria Park, and to date has completed 13 of them. Restoration of the Royal Crescent Railings is now his top priority. Unfortunately, lack of man-power necessitates that our project of restoring the Railings and Ha-ha be split up into two separate projects. No date could be given as to when the Ha-ha will be tackled.

The Official History

At the insistence of English Heritage, a professional historical architect was asked to provide a History of the Railings and Ha-ha. This Jane Root has now completed and it will be used when Glenn Humphreys' team of Technical Consultant and Conservation Architect are in post and draw up the Work Specification.

Damage to the Railings

You will be aware that both the West and the East end of the railings have been damaged in the last 12 months. The Directors consider that the best way of dealing with these and any further damage prior to full restoration is as follows. Make a temporary repair and ask for a financial donation to the Restoration Fund from the culprit's Insurance Company for the cost of the full repair.

Replacing the Tarmac

The Directors are most anxious that the tarmac path at the base of the railings is replaced with pennant stone at the same time as the railings and stone bases are restored. They have been corresponding and speaking to Sir Elgar Jenkins, Cllr for B&NES, who suggested that a donation towards the

cost should be made. The Directors reluctantly agreed to donate £5,000, but consider that the only realistic way forward was for the Highways Department of B&NES, via a direct and specific request by Sir Elgar, to get a Budget Line into the 2005/6 Budget. However, the Budget has just been published, and disappointingly it make no provision for the pennant stone. The best Sir Elgar seems to be able to do is to offer £8,000 towards the cost. Of course there are many reasons why B&NES alone should carry out the work. The pavement is part of a B&NES highway, the City of Bath is a World Heritage City and therefore standards should be of the highest, John Wood the Younger himself specified pennant stone for the pavement. Need I go on?

You may rest assured that the Directors are doing all they can to resolve the problem of the pennant stone and to forward the railings restoration. So I hope to bring you another positive up-date in the next Newsletter.

JENNY HARDISTY

Secretary to The Crescent Lawn Company Ltd

2005 BATH SPRING FLOWER SHOW

At the Royal Victoria Park, during the Bank Holiday weekend of the **30th April - 2nd May**, Bath & North East Somerset is proud to host the Annual Bath Spring Flower Show for 2005.

- it is open 10.00am - 6.00pm each day
- the entrance charge is £6.50 for adults, £5 for OAP's and all unaccompanied children
- accompanied children under 16 come free

Further details can be found on www.bathnes.gov.uk under Parks & Open Spaces.

BATH INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATIONS

On **Friday 20 May**, join thousands of people for Bath's biggest free family party. The Opening Night of Bath International Music Festival is a highlight of the city's calendar. Come and enjoy a picnic and free party in Royal Victoria Park's wonderful family-friendly atmosphere, with lots of surprises in store, come along and join in the fun.

Fireworks at 10pm - Admission free

Opening Night Procession

From 6pm, watch a vibrant carnival of music and dance as it winds from The Circus to Royal Victoria Park. Young people from local schools and community groups have been working hard to create a blaze of colourful costumes.

Bath Philharmonia

Jason Thornton conducts Bath's own resident professional symphony orchestra, in a programme of popular favourites that will have you waltzing around the Royal Crescent. Bath Philharmonia was formed in 1996. Since turning fully professional in 2000 Bath Philharmonia has become a leading artistic force in the South West, receiving considerable critical acclaim particularly for its performance of Mahler symphonies, and increasing and widening its audience base in Bath and the surrounding area.

Further details can be found on www.bathmusicfest.org.uk

FIRE! FIRE! (DON'T PANIC!)

One sunny Sunday morning during late February, visibility was reduced to almost nil – not by a sudden heat haze, but from smoke billowing out of a chimney at the Royal Crescent Hotel.

Thoughts of a 'mixed cocktail' of burning fuel were soon dispelled when fire appliances and a turntable ladder appeared in the Crescent to attend to the hotel's second chimney fire in recent years.