

THE ROYAL BATH AND WEST CENTENARY SHOW 1877

The Society could not have chosen any other location than Bath for its centenary Show in 1877. Heavy rains during the setting up of the Showground gave way to a week of fine weather for the Show, which lasted for a full six days, Monday to Saturday, contributing to what was then judged one of the most extensive and successful Shows to date. The only cloud over events was the disaster of the Widcombe footbridge collapse, killing a number of Show visitors. This is well documented and this article will concentrate on the truly 'Bath' events of the landmark Show, drawing largely on the *Bath Chronicle* reports of the week.

The Monday morning opening is described in the *Chronicle's* own style of the day: lyrical prose with a smattering of hard fact:

The Exhibition was opened on Monday under the most favourable circumstances. The weather was as fine as could be desired and consequently large numbers of people attended the Show, which in some departments was the largest ever held by the Society. The implements on the ground are equal in quantity to those shown at Bristol (in 1874) and Falmouth (in 1868) together, and the entries of livestock are also remarkably good. In connection with the latter part of the Show, it is pleasing to be able to record that the animals are of a superior character, there being scarcely anything which is not fit to come into a Showyard.

The fields, parts of which two days before were like rivers of mud, had become nearly dry, and as it had been rolled into something like a level condition, it was impossible to conjecture what it had been so short a time before.

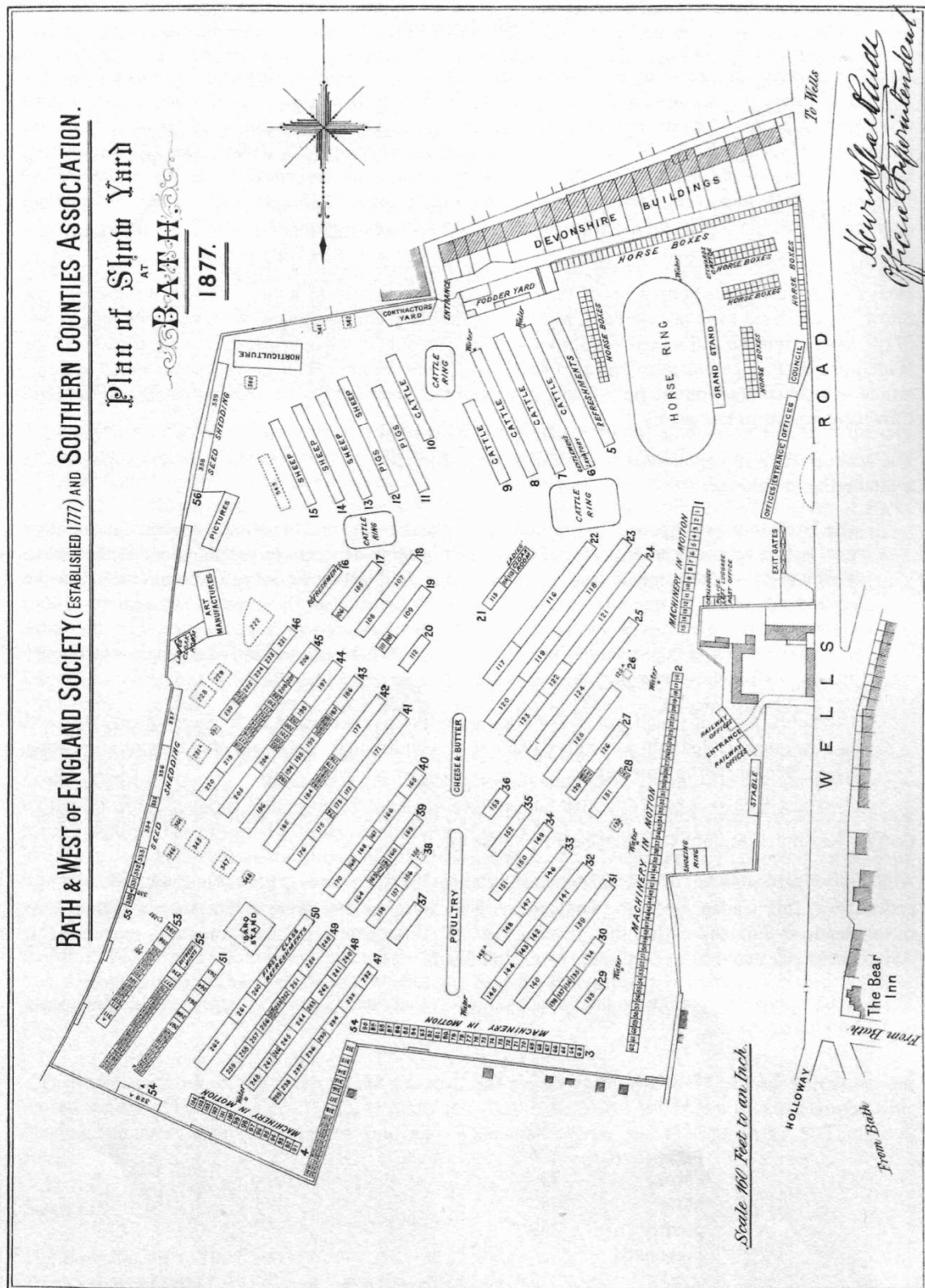
The site chosen was at Bear Flat, then open fields, but today covered with the housing of Poets' Corner (Kipling, Longfellow, Shakespeare Avenue etc.).

Although widely reported as one of the Society's biggest Shows ever, from the number of exhibits and entries, this centenary Show would have been even greater were it not for an outbreak of cattle-plague in England earlier that year so that the consequent restrictions on cattle movement in certain areas prevented some exhibitors from attending.

The Society's Secretary, in presenting his annual report that week, listed the record-breaking elements of the Show's success:

cattle entries	325
sheep	221
horses	163
pigs	106
cheese	79
butter	48
poultry	339
pigeons	81
[TOTAL = 1,362]	

Exhibitors of implements and other goods = 289.



The plan of the layout of the showground published by the Society

In addition to the horse-shoeing competition, there was a competition for Honiton lace, and a very large art competition. This was supplemented by a loan exhibition of fine art from local owners, and manufactured goods such as fine china, furniture and horse-drawn carriages from manufacturers and retailers.

It is no surprise that in that age of mechanisation of agriculture, the exhibition and demonstration of farm implements occupied by far the greatest space on the Showground. Almost all the manufacturers were from elsewhere in the UK, a long distance from Bath.

The evidence seems to show that whichever town was chosen for the Show in the 19th and 20th centuries, the Society believed in 'showcasing' local manufacturers and retailers, giving them the opportunity to exhibit the best of their goods to a local audience. We can therefore highlight the Bath content of the 1877 Show. From the *Chronicle*:

Mr. Samuel Griffin, of the Kingston Iron Works Bath, exhibits at stand 96 several [steam] engines, two of which of vertical shape are newly designed by the maker. The intention of the designer has been to produce a greater simplicity in combination with efficiency, and the noticeable feature about them is that the bearings are closed up, and consequently free from dust and dirt. These engines will moreover, run for a whole day without requiring a second application of oil.



Samuel Griffin, who started his business in Bath in 1869, later became well-known as an inventive designer of internal combustion engines, as can be seen from the letterhead above. One of his engines is preserved in the Bristol Industrial Museum, bearing the nameplate shown above.

The *Chronicle* demonstrates that people were cooking with gas as early as 1877:

Mr. Charles Hall, of 39 Broad Street, Bath, exhibits specimens of his atmospheric gas-cooking stoves, one of which presents some new features, viz. an oven on one side for baking and another opposite for roasting, with a broiler in the centre which can be converted into a cheerful fire. It has a boiler for hot water, and seems well capable of securing what its designer claims for it - a maximum amount of heat at a minimum cost of gas.

Digressing from Bath manufacturers, another item on a domestic theme catches our attention:

Stand 145. The visitor, particularly of the softer sex, will be tempted to linger over the articles of household utility exhibited by Messrs. Bradford and Co. of the Crescent Iron Works, Manchester. The washing machines of this firm are so well known as to scarcely need any description in these columns, but we may briefly refer to two which come under the category of new implements. The first is their patent 'Shuttle' machine, the operative principle of which, as the name implies, is that of a shuttle or shuttle-dash, which upon the slightest oscillation of the lever handle (almost without an effort) is self-acting, the user standing in the easiest possible upright position operating at will either in the gentlest manner upon the most delicate and costly lace, or - according to the angle of working and the increased momentum of the shuttle-dash - upon the heaviest fabric, with, as the makers affirm, certain cleansing effect, while the advancing wave of suds follows up the stroke of the dash, and the receding or returning wave constantly changes the position of the clothes.

In an effort to outshine its competitors, another exhibitor even offered to wash your clothes for you, as a demonstration:

At Stand 305, the exhibitors are Messrs. Wolstencroft and Co. of Ludgate Hill, London, who have on view a washing and wringing machine, with which they offer to cleanse all the dirty clothes which may be brought to them at the Show. The washer consists of a couple of corrugated and two smooth carrying rollers placed on a tub, and these work together and act upon the clothes in the same way as the knuckles in the 'old' plan of washing. An 'endless cloth' around the lower rollers prevents the clothes from becoming entangled, and supplies the soap. The makers claim for their wringer that it turns with half the labour of other machines of a similar character.

Particular prominence is given to Bath manufacturers in describing exhibitors of horse-drawn carriages; five local makers are listed:

Messrs. S. & A. Fuller of Kingsmead Street displayed 30 different models including landaus and phaetons; Messrs. E. & H. Vezey of Milsom Street and Long Acre, London Road, showed a number of phaetons with various novelty refinements;

Also exhibiting were: - J. Swaffield of Walcot Street and F. B. Smith of Green Street.

Greatest space was reserved for the firm of B.T. Newnham of Broad Street, whose novelty of the year was a landau with removable front-facing glass windows, 'The Mimosa Patent Glass-Front Landau'.

The *Chronicle* reports:

They have constructed the front part of this landau of glass instead of leather, in such a manner as to avoid the slightest difficulty in folding up; and, without trouble, the coachman by rising and lifting slightly his seat, can lower the entire upper part of the landau into a horizontal position underneath his seat.

When closed, the charms of a glass-fronted carriage are found to be very great - from affording not only a good light but an admirable view of surrounding objects.

138 POST OFFICE BATH

BENJAMIN NEWNHAM & SON
COACH MAKERS
BLADUD BUILDINGS & SPRING GARDENS,
BATH.

INVENTORS AND PATENTEES OF THE
"MIMOSA" WAGONETTE,
WITH FOLDING HEAD.



By this perfect invention the entire Head is lowered beneath the Coachman's seat, so simple are the Automatic Fittings, which are inserted under the trimmings, that a lady may open and close the Head, and the roof will carry luggage without any fear of derangement. Light and handsome character.

The Patent **"COMBINETTE" LANDAU**, with new French Glass Frame Holders, which enable the occupants to open the doors without lowering the glasses. Three cwt. lighter and wheels 20 inches closer than the ordinary Landau. The **"REWSDEN"** Phaeton (Registered), a newly designed light and elegant driving phaeton of immense utility for road, park, or station work. This new Carriage will supersede all Stanhope Phaetons. Built in three sizes

<p><i>Patented Inventions.</i></p> <p>The "Mimosa" Glass-front Landalette,</p> <p>The "Ladies' Step,"</p> <p>The "Signal" Phaeton,</p> <p>The "Combinette" Landau,</p>	<p><i>Registered Inventions.</i></p> <p>The "Gadolette,"</p> <p>The "Sulkette,"</p> <p>The "Rewsden,"</p> <p>The "Gadabout."</p>
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The comparative weights of various models of carriages were clearly a concern, and lightness was evidently a selling point:

While not discarding old and approved models, Messrs. Newnham have the boldness to introduce improvements where their experience and taste shows them to be needed, and by employing hickory wheels and mild steel in lieu of iron, they have been able to bring out some of the lightest works to be found in the market.

You would of course expect a major manufacturer of Bath such as Stothert & Pitt to feature somewhere in this showcase of industry, and it appears with a surprising product, indicative of the firm's wide-ranging interests at that period. This quote comes from the Society's *Annual Report*, with an article by Joseph Darby on implements and machinery exhibited:

Messrs. Stothert & Pitt exhibited an interesting set of photographs of machinery constructed at their works in Bath for making large blocks of Portland-cement concrete, and building with them breakwaters, sea-walls, and harbour-work. These massive machines travel upon rails laid on the finished work as it advances, and will deposit a block of 40 tons weight at 50 feet in advance; being self-propelled, they steam back inland on the approach of heavy weather. This plan, first introduced by Mr. Parkes at Kurrachee, and recently at Madras, has been adopted by Sir John Coode at East London Harbour in Africa, at Colombo, and at Jersey. It has entirely superseded the old expensive mode of timber staging, which was constantly being destroyed by the sea.

Messrs. Stothert & Pitt also exhibited the 'MESSENT'S PATENT CONCRETE MIXER', used for making the blocks, and the travelling steam-crane used for quarrying the stone; also a piece of rivetted work cut through the middle to show the perfection of steam-rivetting; and a boiler of 'Siemen's steel', flanged and twisted in every direction.

The flower-tent is always the most dazzling display at today's Bath and West Shows, and it is likely to have been equally true in 1877, although priority seems to have been given the Victorians' love of palm-trees and ferns. The *Chronicle* reported:

The horticultural tent, which was opened at 2 o'clock on Monday, is generally one of the most popular departments of the Show, and the display this year is no exception to the rule. The number of plants is not great, not so large as one may at least have expected, the exhibition lacking the tempting inducement of money-prizes, but some grand plants are stored, and make a very imposing display. The centre of the tent is occupied by some splendid palms and tree-ferns, the former from the houses of Mr. Pilgrim of Cheltenham, who carried off the premier honours at the Bath Show last month. [The Bath Flower Show, still nowadays held in May.]

Besides the palms already mentioned, he sends 3 large and handsome trees, which grace the upper end of the tent. They are the fan-palm, the *Cycas revoluta* or King Sago Palm (a magnificent specimen in bloom, measuring some 12 feet across, and the *Cycas circinalis* or Queen Sago palm, almost equally large.

Picking out local names from the exhibitors, we have:

Mr. H. W. Tugwell of Crowe Hall (and his gardener William Carmichael), contributes a superb collection of the favourite Clematis, several very fine heaths, a very pretty Pimelia and a striking Hederoma ...

Mr. R. B. Cater staged several stands of choice roses. On Tuesday, a small, but excellent collection of tea-roses was added; for amateurs' prize, Sir Frederick Bathurst of Clarendon Park, Salisbury, and Mr. Richard B. Cater of Bath were the competitors, the former being awarded the cup. Mr. Cater's show, though considered by the judges to be inferior to that of Lord Bathurst [sic], did the exhibition great credit.

Interestingly, the latter's gardener is also listed, getting the credit he undoubtedly deserved. He is Joseph Hann.

The Art competition was heavily over-subscribed, and from near 600 pictures submitted, the Art Committee nevertheless found room to hang 176 oils and 198 watercolours.

More interesting to study is the report on the loan-exhibition of fine-art from local owners; who were the local art-collectors, and what calibre of art were they willing to lend, for exhibition in a shed, in a field, for a week?

Looking through the list, there are works by artists famous today: a Zoffany, Benjamin and Thomas Barker, and Herring. John Stone, Town Clerk of Bath, lent a Breughel. The mayor, Jerom Murch, lent a picture by Henry Murch (clearly a relative). The Shum family lent works, as did Mr. J. T. Rainey, auctioneer, who clearly had his own private art collection (as well as advertising the fact that one picture on display would later be sold by him on behalf of the Rev. Wm. F. Shaw of Beechen Cliff Villa).

The shed housing 'Art Manufactures' gave local retailers the opportunity to display high quality artistic wares. These would appear to comprise mainly fine furniture and china, but it is an insight into Victorian shopping to see what the few selected Bath retailers were exhibiting. The *Chronicle* reports:

The Art Manufactures are arranged in a commodious building at the far end of the Showground, and though it is as distant from the entrance as possible, it is one of those portions of the exhibition which are best patronized.

One of the most striking stands in it is that belonging to Mr. Carey of Northgate Street, where persons who have a love for art in pottery can pass a very pleasant half-hour ... there are charming specimens of the work of some of our best painters on china ... Worcester-ware, and Minton.

Mr. Carey ... has another stand ... where are displayed some of the finest specimens of majolica sent out by our present manufacturers, notably perhaps fountains, and life-size representations of deer, dogs, etc., many of which were modelled from creatures which had a history. For instance, a fox-hound is described as a facsimile of a favourite dog belonging to the Duke of Sutherland, and a stag and deer are copies of majolica presented by the Marchioness of Ely as a birthday gift to her Majesty the Queen.

Also exhibiting were:

Messrs. Knight and Son, of Milsom Street: 'Some fine cabinets, with Wedgwood medallions, and a Queen Anne chimney-piece, show the excellent taste and cleverness of design which characterize the work of this firm, which produces articles noted for solidity as well as beauty'.

Mr. Kendall, of Milsom Street: ' ... had on show a handsome fire-grate of electric plate and ormolu, set in a beautiful white marble chimney-piece. The gas chandeliers, too, are worthy of notice.'

On the stand of Mr. W. B. Bartrum of Milsom Street is a nice collection of furniture, including a fine ormolu cabinet bearing plaques by Minton.

Messrs. Milsom and Son exhibit a number of improved pianos and American Organs, on which performances are given morning and evening by Mr. H. M. Higgs of London.

Messrs. Jolly and Son of Milsom Street, who are widely and justly celebrated for their black silks, show the mode of manufacture with a loom, at which a workman is producing the fabric for which this firm is so famous.

A collection of silver plate, including the trophies given at the Bath and West meeting, is exhibited by Messrs. Payne & Company of Milsom Street.

As one can picture, this part of the Showground was almost a Milsom Street in miniature, with the additional entertainment of performances on the American Organ, and the Silk weaver in action. As one of the most crowded and popular venues, the noise must have been at times unbearable.

Not only was the Showground at Bear Flat packed with displays to be viewed, for those of a more serious agricultural interest there were trials of machinery and implements on fields nearby. The *Chronicle* reports:

The reaping and mowing commenced on Monday, the former in a 20-acre field of rye at Southstoke (near the Cross Keys public house), in the occupation of Mr. Andrews. 19 Makers intimated their intention of engaging in friendly rivalry, but two of them did not put in an appearance, and another collapsed. [The machine, presumably, not the exhibitor.] Otherwise the trials were highly successful, and some most excellent work was performed.

The mowing took place in a couple of adjoining fields in the occupation of Mr. Tucker of Englishcombe Lane, consisting of 28 acres. The same firms who engaged in the reaping trials

were represented in the mowing [17 in number.] Both trials were well attended by agriculturalists, and much interest appeared to be taken in the contests.

There were fewer present to watch the trials of the steam-ploughs on Mr. Wason's land, doubtless owing to its being at such a great distance from the Showground [Inglesbatch], nearly 3 miles. Two firms only were represented.

On Tuesday the trials of implements were continued, no less than four different contests taking place. The mowing began at 10 o'clock in the adjacent fields in Englishcombe Lane of Mr. H. Spackman and Mrs. Tucker. The crops of grass in both instances were perhaps the best that have been grown for many years for these trials.

With 11 mowing-machines, and 8 hay-makers, even the horses used to power these were hired locally and their owners credited in the press: Mr. Gibbons of Tunley Farm; Mr. Mason of Englishcombe; Mr. Keeling of Priston; Mr. Hooper of Wellow; Mr. Corner of Englishcombe; and Mr. Hedges of Southstoke.

The *Chronicle* provides lengthy descriptions of how nearly every street displayed bunting and lights for the visitors to the Show, and although one may have seen 19th century postcards or photographs of the Guildhall lit up for royal anniversaries, the newspaper reports reveal a much bigger picture of how tradesmen and householders all entered into the spirit of decorating the city for the Bath and West's centenary. On 5 June 1877 the *Chronicle* wrote:

Under the superintendence of the Decoration Committee, the city has during the past few days been rapidly assuming a gay and festive appearance. Each of the streets radiating from the centre of the city seems to strive not to be behindhand in giving a hearty welcome to the great Society which started here, and, still bearing the city's name, has come back more vigorous than ever to spend its centenary.

The damp weather of the past week greatly retarded the progress of the decorations. Cartloads of evergreens have been deposited in the streets, and the attention of passengers for the past few days has been attracted by the somewhat difficult work of raising the arches which now span our principal streets. Though fears were expressed that they would be unable to withstand the heavy currents of wind, yet we have heard of only one instance, that in Charles Street, in which the elements had the victory, the storm on Thursday night bringing the arch to the ground with a crash.

Standing at the foot of the Wells Road on Saturday evening, we noticed a circular arch decorated with evergreens and flags, with a shield at its apex, whilst a similar arch was thrown across the bottom of Holloway. In Southgate Street, three circular arches cross the street, bearing shields and flags of various devices, each arch having underneath a row of gas-jets well calculated to illuminate it at night.

A very fair show of bunting has also been made by the private residents both in Southgate and Stall Streets. A similar display is made on the Broad Quay. Avon Street has gone ahead in the matter of arches and evergreens. Many a time have the inhabitants of this street been heard to refer to it as 'one of the leading streets of the town', and in this instance at least the boast proves in some degree correct. Most of the arches in the other streets, while very imposing from their broad and lofty span, are similar in construction, but the four erections in Avon Street are each of a different design, of two and even three stages, and illuminated in different ways. This warm-hearted colony, whatever may be its defects in other ways, has certainly done even more than its share to the general display, and is quite proud of it.

But 'the arch of the period' is most undoubtedly the one erected at the Saw Close, and known as 'The Marble Arch', and 'Mr. Butcher's Arch', each description being not quite in accordance with fact. It is however a most substantial-looking structure of three arches, two narrow ones for footways, and a broad one for the road. It is of woodwork coloured white, the arches being outlined with evergreens, and trophies of flags very tastily arranged over each of the side arches. In front of the parapet over the central arch are placed gas-jets, the motto on one side being 'Success to Agriculture' and on the other, '1877 centenary', while a plough is most fitly placed on the top. The gas-jets facing the Sawclose were lit on Saturday evening and attracted a large crowd of persons, who were unanimous in their expression of approval of the result of the cooperation of businessmen of that locality.

At the Grand Hotel jets of gas were placed round the principal entrance, above which were the Prince of Wales plumes. In the High Street, we notice preparations to illuminate the facade of the Guildhall, Municipal Offices, and Markets.

The Christopher opposite was capitolly lighted with the letters 'V.R.' and a crown, and other devices.

The *Chronicle* also wrote:

Over Pulteney Bridge, the chief attraction in this direction is, the fountain in Laura Place designed by Mr. C. E. Davis. Remembering that, although Bath is a city of waters, it has been by no means successful in trying its hand with fountains, we were rather dubious about the result. Mr. Davis has however produced a circular basin some 24 feet in diameter, the edge being composed of Portland cement, coloured, & with a margin of turf. A jet of water will rise from the surface, and it is intended to illuminate it with gas-jets. There can be no doubt that there is ample room in Laura Place for some such structure to be placed permanently there.

The original version of the fountain we have today was installed a couple of years after the Show by public subscription to mark the centenary.

To continue the *Chronicle*:

In our walk through the city we noticed that the good wishes of the inhabitants for the success of agriculture and trade were well-developed. But no rule holds well without an exception, and we noticed that some misguided individual in Morford Street had the bad taste to hang out a flag bearing the 3 ostrich plumes with a picture of a puppy, and the words 'Here I am' underneath.

This 'bad taste' was a slight to the Prince of Wales who had declined an invitation to the centenary Show, despite his having held the position of Patron for many years. Official records make several references to the non-appearance of the Prince on such an auspicious occasion, and it is clear this absence was resented by some.



SHOW YARD
OF THE BATH, WEST OF ENGLAND, & SOUTHERN COUNTIES SOCIETY'S
CENTENARY MEETING.
HELD AT BATH, JUNE 1877.

During Show week, a centenary banquet for 200 was hosted by Mayor Jerom Murch at the Guildhall, and the guest-list and toasts, proposed and replied to, are reported in great detail. Meanwhile the speech given by the Society's President that year, the Marquis of Lansdown, with its insight into pressing concerns of the day typifies the outward-looking stance of the Society, still in evidence today.

After recounting notable achievements of the Society during its first hundred years, the Marquis turned his attention on current concerns which demanded action, and which he felt the Society should engage with: cattle plague; sewage; and the education of children. To quote from the Society's *Annual Report*, and the President's keynote speech:

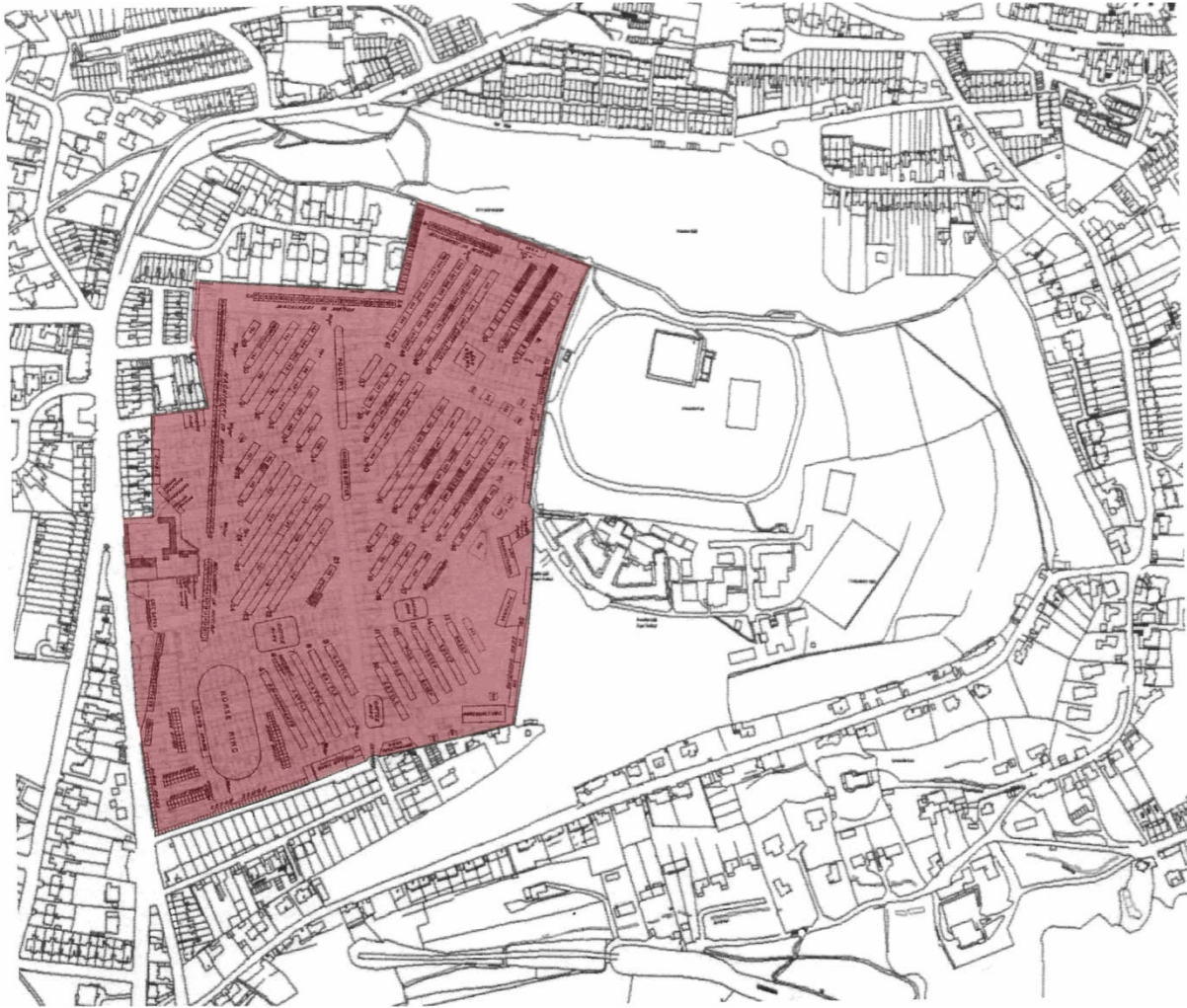
1. I venture, however to observe that if a great deal of work has already been done through the agency of the Society, there is not a little that remains yet to be accomplished. There are one or two points which are very fair subjects for the consideration of a Society such as this. The Show on this occasion has been very nearly jeopardised by an outbreak of cattle-disease, and I believe scientific men cannot have a more useful subject to occupy their minds than the consideration of the best means of limiting the area, and preventing the spread, of that unfortunate disease, and also mitigating its virulence on occasions of outbreak.

2. Let us take, again, the application of agricultural chemistry to the great question of dealing with sewage. Recent Acts of Parliament have excited in most of us a very considerable amount of interest on the subject. There are towns in your close neighbourhood which have been in the habit for a long time past of sending their sewage into the adjacent river, but Parliament will not allow that to be done, while at the same time proprietors do not like much to have sewage on their land.

3. There is one other subject on which I would say a word before I leave off. I mean the subject of education, and chiefly the education of farmers' sons. Manufacturers live together in towns, and probably have schools within easy access; farmers, on the other hand, are scattered over the country in rural districts, and experience in too many instances the greatest difficulty in finding an education for their sons. If you come to reflect over the work which a farmer's son has to do in the course of his life, while attending to his pursuits, I think you will find that what we may call versatility of accomplishments is more necessary to him than to many men who are engaged in other and perhaps more ambitious occupations. He must have a fair general education ... reading, writing and arithmetic; he must also be a little bit of a chemist (or he will not understand the properties of those fertilizing agents which he will be obliged to use); he ought to have some knowledge of geology (to judge the various kinds of soils that will come under his attention); he should know something of natural history (to understand the nature of the animals which he has to breed and to select).

The farmer's son requires a great amount of information, and he gets but little. In many cases his education is limited to what he can pick up about his father's homestead. If the discussions which take place in connection with this Society result in throwing some light on this question, it will deserve, and will receive, the thanks of the public at large.

The Marquis's choice of areas for continuing research by the Society as it faced its next one hundred years is an illustration of the relevance to society (the agricultural world, and society at large) which the Bath and West has always held, a role it continues today.



The Showground superimposed onto present-day details.

This article, which originally appeared in The Survey of Old Bath and District No. 26 (2011), is based on part of a talk given to the History of Bath Research Group on Thursday 17 March 2011. The speaker did not offer a consecutive history of the Bath and West, since this had already been done elsewhere, such as in Kenneth Hudson's volume published in 1977 (also in Helena Lim's article covering the Society from 1777 to 1851, in Bath History Volume VI, 1996). The talk began with details of some of the outstanding members of the Society, as described in the Newsletter of the History of Bath Research Group (Issue 63, Spring/Summer 2011). As well as being Principal Archivist of B&NES, Colin Johnston is Honorary Archivist of the Royal Bath and West Society.

Author: Colin Johnston, Principal Archivist, Bath Record Office
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