

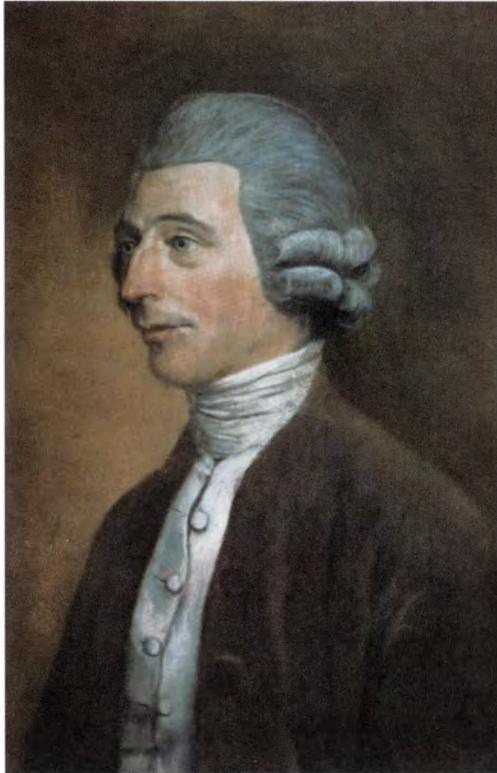
Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution
Millennium Lecture
Monday, 9th October 2000

**The story of the 'Bath and West'
innovation and application**

**Philip Bryant
Susan Bennett
Ted Collins**



Published by the Royal Bath and West of England Society
to mark its 225th Anniversary on 8th September 2002



Edmund Rack

Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institution
Millennium Lecture
Monday, 9 October 2000

The story of the 'Bath and West' innovation and application

Philip Bryant
Susan Bennett
Ted Collins



Published by the Royal Bath and West of England Society
to mark its 225th Anniversary on 8th September 2002

First published in 2002
by the Royal Bath and West of England Society
The Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6QN

Website: www.bathandwest.co.uk

Printed by Wessex Graphics of Gillingham, Dorset

All rights reserved
Copyright Royal Bath and West of England Society © 2002

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be used or reproduced in any form whatsoever without the publisher's prior consent.

ISBN No 0-9544023-0-8

A CIP record of this book
is available from the British Library

NOTES

The Society's changes of name and regional influence

The original field of influence of 'The Society instituted in the City of Bath for the encouragement and improvement of agriculture, arts, manufactures and Commerce', was the Counties of Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Dorset; soon afterwards the City and County of Bristol was added. In September 1778 it was suggested that the County of Hereford should be included in the Society's plan and, within two years, the Society was expressing the hope that the Counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, Devon and Cornwall would be included.

In 1790, the title was altered to the 'Bath and West of England Society'; this was followed in 1868 by amalgamation with the Southern Counties Agricultural Association, which embraced the Counties of Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Sussex, Surrey and Kent. The somewhat top heavy title of the 'Bath and West of England Society and the Southern Counties Agricultural Association' was adopted. In 1890 this was shortened to the 'Bath and West and Southern Counties Society', the name by which the Society was known until 1976 when Her Majesty the Queen was graciously pleased to command that the title 'Royal' be included. In 1989, the Council of the Society decided that the name should revert back to the 'Bath and West of England Society' with the prefix 'Royal'.

Some further reading

Fox, H.S.A. 'Local farmers' associations and the circulation of agricultural information in nineteenth century England', in Fox, H.S.A. and Butlin, R.A. (eds.). *Change in the countryside: essays on rural England 1500-1900*. London: Institute of British Geographers, 1979.

Goddard, Nicholas. 'Agricultural societies', in Mingay, G.E. (ed.). *The Victorian countryside* Vol.1. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. ISBN: 0-7100-07345.

Hudson, D. and Luckhurst, K.W. *The Royal Society of Arts 1754-1954*. London: John Murray, 1954.

Hudson, Kenneth. *Patriotism with profit: British agricultural societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*. London: Hugh Evelyn, 1972. ISBN: 0-238-78982-1.

Hudson, Kenneth. *The Four great men of the Bath and West*. Bath: The Society, 1973

Hudson, Kenneth. *The Bath and West: a bi-centenary history*. Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1976. ISBN:0-239-00156-7.

Murch, Jerome. 'The history and literature of the Bath and West of England Society'. *Journal of the Bath and West and Southern Counties Society*. Vol 10, 1890-91.

FOREWORD

The Royal Bath and West of England Society was honoured to be invited by the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution to take part in its series of Millennium Lectures celebrating various aspects of life in the City of Bath. Few organisations have been more closely linked with the City of Bath than the Royal Bath and West.

On Monday 9 October 2000 three speakers, invited by the Society, assembled at the Institution at Queen Square in Bath to tell the 'Bath and West' story.

The first speaker, Philip Bryant, was the Honorary Librarian of the Society from 1964 to 1990. From a position in front of a portrait of the Society's founder Edmund Rack, Philip Bryant painted a vivid picture of the early days of the Bath and West and the personality and influence of Rack. The energetic Rack also helped to form the first Bath Philosophical Society (the predecessor of the BLRSI) in December 1779 and became its first Secretary.

The next speaker was Susan Bennett, the then Curator of the Royal Society of Arts and Archivist and Librarian from 1973. It was to the Society of Arts, formed in 1754, that Edmund Rack wrote to report the formation of the Society in Bath; our Charters are remarkably similar. Susan Bennett's informative paper showed the role of the Bath Society as far broader than that of a typical Society of the day. From the start the 'Bath and West' was committed to agricultural improvement and the spreading of best practice and techniques to West Country farmers. This imperative remains the main purpose of the Society today.

The final speaker, Ted Collins, Emeritus Professor of Rural History at Reading University entitled his paper 'The Royal Bath and West and Agricultural Progress'. In this he traced the influence of the Society in agricultural developments and its role in education. He described the importance of the Show and the broadening of its appeal under successive Secretaries. This was a fascinating and informed talk from one of the country's leading agricultural historians and a fitting climax to our 'Millennium Lecture'.

As the then Chief Executive of the Society, I was asked to introduce the speakers and, at the end, described the current work of the Royal Bath and West in pursuit of its objectives against a background of declining farm incomes and the restructuring of this vital industry. The Society remained closely linked to Bath and its main task continued to be the support of British agriculture.

I then chaired a vigorous debate covering such subjects as scholarships, increasing need for diversification, and the conflict between intensification and organic methods. In answer to a question on marketing, John Easterbrook, a farm consultant and Council Member of the Society, spoke of the massive revolution in farming and

the vast increases in productivity, but that now the industry must learn to sell its wares and earn more from the urban population. The links with Bath and the way ahead for agricultural societies were also discussed.

A further question on shrinking farm incomes was answered by Ted Collins, who stressed that much of the present crisis was caused by agricultural over-production, a slow-down in population growth and a reduction in consumption per head, particularly of animal products, leading to falling prices at the farm gate and growing surpluses. In these circumstances governments were less prepared to hand out subsidies and there was waning public support. He agreed that the future lay, to some extent, in more focused marketing, both niche and direct marketing by-passing the middlemen. Better and more professionally run 'farmers' markets' was a start. There are limits to the extent to which agriculture can hope to diversify.

This was an enormously successful and enjoyable evening for the members of both the Society and the Institution. The Royal Bath and West of England Society is grateful for this opportunity to have taken part in the BRLSI series of Millennium Lectures.

Simon Firth
(Chief Executive 1992 -2001, Royal Bath and West of England Society)

Part 1: Edmund Rack and the early days of the 'Bath & West'

Philip Bryant, Honorary Librarian to the Society 1964-1990

At a General Meeting of 'The Society instituted in the City of Bath for the encouragement and improvement of agriculture, arts, manufactures and commerce' held on October 9th 1781, Mr Lewis Vaslet presented the Society with "a portrait painting of the Secretary, finely executed in crayons". The portrait shows us a man of integrity with an honest, intelligent face which looks consistent with his Quaker background. A Norfolk man, he had retired early, and being a man of literary interest and some talent had settled in Bath in 1775 at the age of 40. Given that he was a Quaker and a man of integrity it is quite surprising that he allowed himself to be welcomed into at least two groups in Bath which were frequented by many of the gossiping, pleasure seeking persons for which the city was noted. The first was that of Lady Miller of Batheaston Villa and the second that of Mrs Catherine Macaulay at Alfred House in Alfred Street.

Edmund Rack was born at Attleborough in Norfolk in 1735 the son of a labouring weaver and of a mother who was a frequent preacher at the Society of Friends meetings she attended. He left school early, after a very basic education, and was apprenticed to a general shop-keeper in Wymondham. After completing his apprenticeship he went to Bardwell in Suffolk, and became shopman to Agnes Smith, whom he subsequently married. He soon made up for the paucity of his early education and, before he was thirty, he blossomed as a writer with contributions to such publications as *The Monthly Miscellany* and *The Farmer's Magazine* under the nom de plume of Eusebius. John Collinson's *History of Somerset* (1791) contains a survey of the County undertaken by Rack. Collinson had a great regard for Rack, but it is worth noting a prime example of intellectual snobbishness in some wonderfully worded, though highly patronising, comments made by the Revd Mr Polwhele of Kenton near Exeter in an article on Edmund Rack which Collinson included in his book :

"The knowledge of arithmetick was Mr. Rack's highest attainment, when he was removed to Wymondham as an apprentice to a general shopkeeper . . . An employment of this nature must exact that mechanical regularity which . . . is, of all things most insupportable to genius."

It is further observed that, following Rack's marriage to Agnes Smith at Bardwell:

"The servilities of his station were now in some measure done away. Nor were his talents unobserved; for though his employment was in some measure an obstacle to social communication, he had the good fortune to introduce himself to the friendship of a select few, who contributed to cheer the gloom of his obscurity. Nothing more powerfully assists the expansion of the mental

faculties than liberal conversation. To this Mr Rack added the perusal of those English authors that form the taste, but add little to the stores of science . . ."

Bath was a flourishing literary centre and little coteries encouraged budding writers. Almost certainly the most famous of these were those arranged by Lady Miller at Batheaston Villa. She invited all persons of wit and fashion in Bath to meet once a fortnight at her house and they turned up in force: it was definitely a place to be seen! Numerous verses were contributed by persons such as David Garrick, Christopher Anstey, Anna Seward, Edmund Rack himself and Richard Graves of Claverton who noted: "I counted one morning above 50 carriages drawn up in a line from Batheaston towards Lambridge; and was at one time present at it with four duchesses . . ."

A large antique vase that had been purchased in Italy (dug up at Frascati in 1769) was placed on an 'altar' decorated with laurel and each guest was invited to place in this urn an original composition in verse, usually on a theme chosen by the hostess. A committee was appointed to select the best contributions and their authors were then 'crowned' by Lady Miller with wreaths of myrtle. Four volumes of these verses were published (1775-1781) as *Poetical Amusements*, the proceeds being used for the benefit of the City's Pauper Charity.

Sycophancy was rife as is evidenced by this brief extract:

"Miller! Thou name renown'd: the towering muse
In rapture all thy varied glories views,
Learn'd in each polish'd grace that wins mankind,
Letter'd, yet humble; and though deep, refin'd . . ."

However, Fanny Burney, while on a visit to Bath in 1780 wrote: "Nothing here is more tonish than to visit Lady Miller. She is a round, plump, coarse looking dame of about forty, and while all her aim is to appear an elegant woman of fashion, all her success is to seem an ordinary woman in very common life, with fine clothes on".

The second literary group was that assembled by Catherine Macaulay, who had moved to Bath in 1774 and taken up residence in St James Parade. Here she met Dr Thomas Wilson, the non-resident rector of St Stephen's Walbrook in London, who asked her to live at his house in Alfred Street which, with his library and furniture, he put at her full disposal. At Alfred House she attracted many admirers and she regarded Rack as a kindred spirit. She was a 'handsome' lady, who in addition to her literary and republican interests, became vain about her dress and personal appearance. Samuel Johnson said of her that: "it is better that she should be reddening her own cheeks than blackening other people's characters"

Rack obviously possessed significant political and social skills and exploited to the full the social contacts which he had made and the 'Bath and West' was born directly as a result of his initiative. His earlier life in Norfolk had encouraged a keen

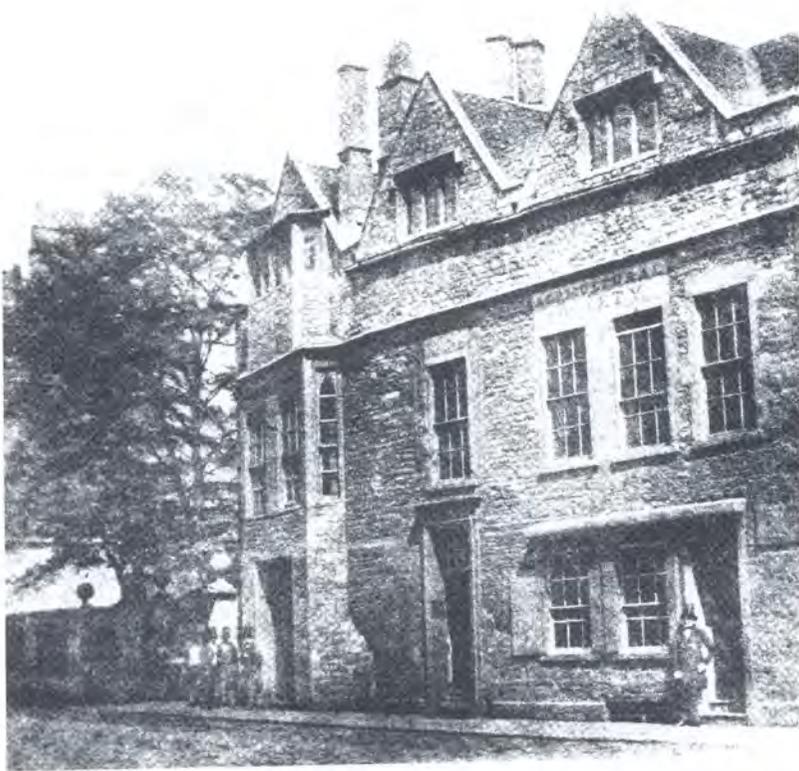
interest in agriculture and when he came to Bath he was soon made aware of the low standards of farming practice in the West Country. He felt strongly that improvements were called for and he contributed letters to the *Bath Chronicle* and to the *The Farmer's Magazine* setting out his ideas for a society to be established in Bath which could devote itself to promulgating the most modern thinking about agricultural methods and encouraging farmers to adopt them. Although the promotion of improved agricultural methods was Rack's primary aim, I am sure that it was his Quakerism which provided him with a much bigger vision as to what the Society's remit should be: "a Society in this City for the encouragement of Agriculture, Planting, Manufactures, Commerce and the Fine Arts" and on 26th August 1777 the *Bath Chronicle* printed the following advertisement from Rack:

"To the Nobility and Gentry in the Counties of Somerset, Gloucester, Wilts, and Dorset in general, and the Cities of Bath and Bristol in particular.

A Proposition having been made for the institution of a Society in this City for the encouragement of Agriculture, Planting, Manufactures, Commerce and the Fine Arts, the Nobility and Gentry are hereby respectfully informed that a Meeting will be held, at York House, on Monday 8th of September next, at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, to take the affair under consideration: And, that the plans on which Societies of this kind in London, Norwich, Manchester, etc, are founded, with some other necessary materials, will then and there be produced; in order that One General Plan may be formed for establishing a Society here on a proper foundation, and a subscription opened for carrying it on with a spirit becoming the dignity of so honourable an institution, and its great importance to the community.

As this institution is intended for the benefit of all the above-named Counties, it is humbly requested that the public-spirited gentlemen residing therein will generally honour it with their countenance and protection."

The York House meeting was duly held on 8th September 1777 and the first minute book records the names of twenty-two persons who attended under the chairmanship of John Ford Esqr. Among those at this inaugural meeting was another Quaker, William Matthews, who became the Society's next Secretary following Rack's death on 22 February 1787 following a long period of asthmatic illness. Rack's home was 5 St James Parade (which was destroyed in the Bath blitz in April 1942), and it was there that he based the Society's office, receiving 50 guineas a year as Secretary and a further £30 per annum to cover his expenses. From the beginning distinguished names became connected with the work of the Society; most notably at the first meeting Dr William Falconer FRS, who was Physician at Bath General Hospital 1784-1819. Within three months Dr Joseph Priestley FRS and Dr Hunter of York had become members of the Society's Committee of Correspondence and Enquiry. Another name soon to be worthy of note was that of Caleb Hillier Parry FRS who was to do so much to promote the Merino breed of sheep in this country.



The Society's first headquarters, Hetling House

The wide interests of the Society - both practical and innovative - are well illustrated by the premiums offered, which ranged from raising improved farm crops and rearing agricultural stock to implement design, spinning methods and the destroying of noxious vapours in coal mines. Rack's own ingenuity and practical bent were well illustrated by his design for an improved hammer for labourers breaking stones on the Turnpike roads. Of particular interest to me is a letter from Thomas Cook of Thorncombe in the Society's very first correspondence book. In 1966, following a visit I had received from Miss J de L. Mann in connection with research for her book *The cloth industry in the West of England from 1640 to 1880* (1971), she sent me a letter in which she wrote:

"When you showed me the archives of the Bath and West Society . . . you pointed out to me a letter. . . from a man [Thomas Cook] who had been experimenting with the spinning jenny. I think you might like to know what has happened about this jenny . . . I sent the description to Mr C. Aspin . . . who has written a book on the jenny, to ask him whether he thought it would work. He was much impressed by it and considered it would work better than

the ordinary jenny. Since then you may have seen a paragraph in *The Times* saying that he had been asked by the American Peace Corps to recommend improved spinning methods to places where the one-thread hand wheel is still used; and he tells me he is recommending this jenny for backward neighbourhoods in Turkey! I wonder what poor old Cook who invented it would have said; he was old, poor and infirm and apparently must have died before he could send in a model to claim the premium . . ."

Further evidence of the practical drive behind the Society's activities was the setting up of what is believed to have been the first experimental farm in the UK in 1780 on 10 acres of a Mr Bethel's land at Weston, the exact site of which is unknown at present.

In addition to establishing the Bath and West, Rack was instrumental with Thomas Curtis in the formation of the first Bath Philosophical Society on 27th December 1779, the ancestor of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, and Rack became its first Secretary. Several founder members of the Bath and West were members of the new society. No fewer than eleven members of the Philosophical Society were Fellows of the Royal Society. Sadly the Society had a short history, coming to an end in 1787 - the year of Rack's death. Unlike the Bath and West, it published no papers or journals.

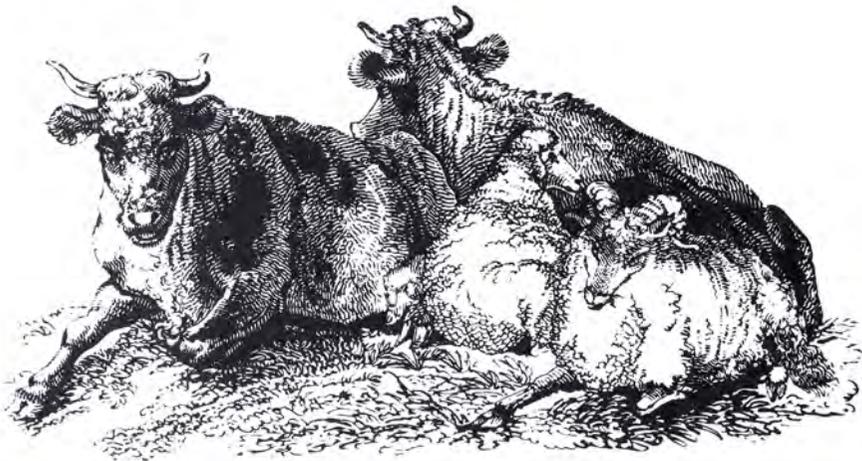
THEATRE-ROYAL, BATH.

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE
MOST NOBLE THE MARQUIS OF LANSDOWNE,
And the BATH and WEST of ENGLAND
AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY.

This present **TUESDAY** Evening, December 8, 1840,
 WILL BE PERFORMED MORTON'S ADMIR'D COMEDY OF

Speed the Plough.

Bob Handy Mr. BENSON		
Sir Abel Handy Mr. JOHNSON		Henry Mr. H. HOLL
Sir Philip Blandford Mr. RANSON		Morrington Mr. GLANVILLE
Farmer Ashfield Mr. WOULD'S		Peter Mr. WILSON
Evergreen Mr. BETHWAY		Gerald Mr. WEBB
Postillion Mr. KIMBER		Bob Handy's Servant Mr. LAWLER
Susan Ashfield Miss LACY		Lady Handy Miss HIBBERD
Miss Blandford Miss MORVIN		Dame Ashfield Mrs. W. H. ANGEL



In conclusion, in spite of the earlier comments quoted from Collinson's *History of Somerset*, Collinson writes:

"In support of this excellent establishment (i.e. the Bath and West), the remaining part of Mr Rack's life was strenuously employed, nor were his labours fruitless; for to this moment (1791) it flourishes and may it flourish, the unperishing memorial of his judgement, his benevolence and his industry."

Edmund Rack's initiative in forming the Bath and West was not a novel one. Agricultural societies already existed in Norfolk, Lancashire and Wales and when the Society of Arts was established in 1754, it initially took agriculture under its wing, and was, I believe, for some years mainly an agricultural society. Rack records the following in the Bath Society's Minutes for 13th December 1777: "It appearing to this Society that considerable service might arise from our having drawings of some of the most useful models and machines now in the possession of the London Society, the Secretary is directed to inspect them and make a list of such as he thinks may be of the greatest utility; and lay it, together with an estimate of the expense of such drawings thereof, before the next meeting of the Society."

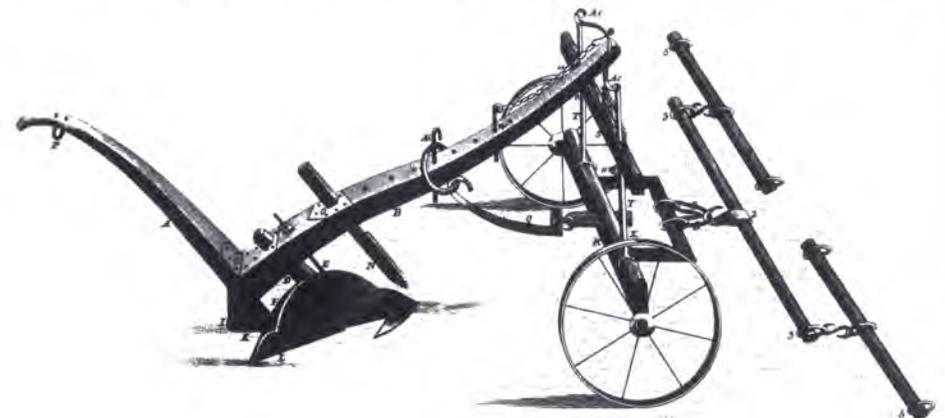
Part 2: 'Those rare individuals – innovators'

Susan Bennett, RSA Curator, Archivist and Librarian 1973-2001

My title is a quote from Kenneth Hudson's lecture *The four great men of the Bath and West*, which he delivered at Bath on 17th October 1973 and which was published by the Society the same year.

I will outline in brief the beginnings of the Society of Arts. It was founded in 1754 to encourage improvements, inventions and productions in arts, manufactures and commerce by the award of money and/or medals for proven submissions to its premium offers. The Society also encouraged the wide diffusion of knowledge and information through its members, including a number of Honorary Corresponding Members around the world. By adapting to changing circumstances the Society was able to identify areas for experiment and improvement in the fields of agriculture, chemistry, manufactures, mechanics, 'polite arts' and colonies and trade. The need for such an institution is reflected through the growth of its membership from 11 at its foundation to about 1,000 five years later and, as a thriving society it bred, attracted and encouraged those rare individuals – innovators.

The Society of Arts took an early interest in improvements in agriculture; for instance, one of the first premiums offered was for growing the plant madder in England. The offers relating to agriculture ranged from planting root and cereal crops to farm machinery, such as chaff and root cutters. Noting that farmers were slicing roots by hand to stop their animals choking on the large roots too big for their gullet, the Society offered an award for a machine to carry out this task. The gold medal was awarded to James Edgill of Frome, Somerset in 1766 for his slicer, which anticipated the first patented slicer by almost forty years. Robert Dossie commented in his *Memoirs of Agriculture and other Oeconomical Arts* that: "this



offer showed how useful the Society was as an initiator of inventions, for until it was published no one had ever thought of designing such a thing". Dossie also commented that: "agriculture is peculiarly important to us, as a commercial nation . . . if agriculture is not a manufacture, it is certainly one of the greatest industries and one of the oldest 'arts' . . . it is closely linked with commerce, and therefore a suitable subject for the Society of Arts".

A member of the Bath Society published 'A Proposal for the further improvement of Agriculture' in 1780, in which he notes that the "advantages arising from that excellent institution [the Society of Arts] excited and established others of a similar nature, in counties remote from the metropolis; each of which hath thrown additional light on the subjects of Agriculture."

The London Society was slow in publishing its *Transactions*. The first volume did not appear until 1783, twenty-nine years after its foundation. Arthur Young, a member of both societies, admonished the Society of Arts: "A Society that does not publish its transactions may be of a partial, limited and confined utility but can never diffuse the knowledge it rewards, nor render the successful individuals the means of general improvement". Young was happy to report in Volume 2 of the Bath Society's *Letters and Papers* that the London Society had now entered upon that essential work at last. The Society of Arts had, however, co-operated with publishers to ensure that important information, particularly relating to agriculture, was made available to a wider audience through publications such as *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale...* 1764-6; *The Complete Farmer, or a general dictionary of husbandry in all its branches...calculated for the use of farmers and country gentlemen...* 1765, and with Robert Dossie, an active member and friend of Dr Samuel Johnson, through the three volumes of his *Memoirs* published in 1768, 1771 and 1782.

In volume three of the *Memoirs* we find published a letter from Edmund Rack, whilst still resident in East Anglia, dated 25th November 1774, writing to the London Society regarding an improved drill plough invented by his friend James Blancher. The Society's Committee of Agriculture met on 12th December 1774 and ordered that a: "letter be written to Mr Rack returning him thanks for his communication informing him that to save the Inventor the Trouble of Attendance the Society desire him to send the Plough thither, that from its Construction and his description they may Judge of its Utility". Initially the committee, particularly Arthur Young, expressed some reservation following trials carried out on the machine. In response, however, to Blancher's letter of March 1775, in which he stated that his machine was not designed for the very rough terrain on which it had been tested, further trials were undertaken and the Society declared that: "this drill delivered the Seed in a more regular manner, than any Plough in their possession". Blancher was entitled to the Gold Medal, or thirty pounds, as advertised in the premium offer. Blancher chose the money to compensate himself for the costs incurred in making the models, and arranging for the machine to be sent to the Society. Rack and Blancher's original correspondence has survived in the RSA archive.

On 8th October 1777 the London Society's Minutes record the receipt of a letter from: 'Mr Rack, Secretary to the Society established at Bath . . . inclosing a paper Setting forth the Intention of that Society and proposing Occasional Correspondence. Ordered that a Book of Premiums, Rules and Orders and List of Subscribers be sent to Mr Rack. That Thanks be given to Mr Rack for his Letter and Plan and that he be informed that this Society wish all success to the Laudable Attempts of that Society of which he is Secretary'

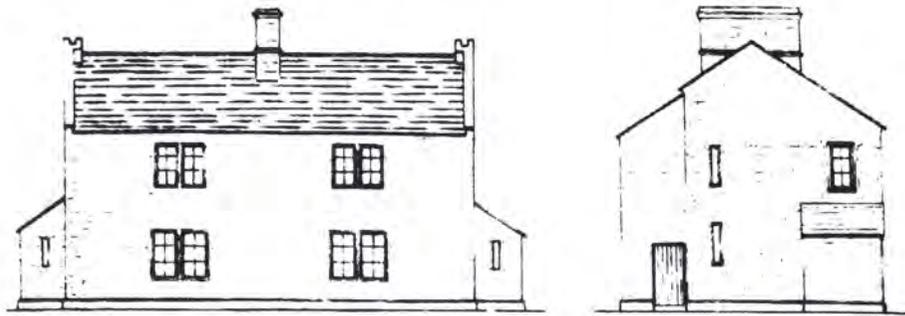
Although Rack's original letter has not survived, it was transcribed by the Secretary into the Letters Received 1771-1778 book and the Society placed the Plan of the Bath Society in its Guard Book, together with that for the Dublin Society (1755), the Edinburgh Society (1758) and the New York Society (1765). I noted with interest that the Plan for the Bath Society states "the principal objects of this Society's attention will be to excite by Premiums a Spirit of Emulation and Improvement...", as this may well be compared with the 1754 mission statement of the Society of Arts: "the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce by bestowing rewards from time to time for such productions, inventions and improvements as tend to the employing the poor and to the increase of trade, and to the riches and honour of this kingdom by promoting industry and emulation".

Another letter from Rack dated 9th December 1778 survives in the London Society's archive in which he writes: "At the Annual General Meeting of the Bath Society held yesterday I was directed to convey the following information to the Society in London...about a disease of sheep called 'goggles'." Rack asked for any information the London Society might have to assist them. He closed his letter: "wishing the promotion and success of the laudable undertaking in which we are respectively and jointly concerned, with Sincere Esteem." The Minutes of the Society of Arts for 16th December 1778 record that Rack's letter was referred to the Committee of Agriculture.

In the summer of 1778 Rack sent to the Society specimens of a grass which was new to him. In his covering letter, which together with the Society's reply survive in the RSA archive in the volume of manuscript Transactions for 1778, Rack said that if the account of its growth is correct it would be the most valuable yet discovered, and worthy of encouragement by the London Society. The Society wrote back asking for seed as well as a perfect specimen of the grass. Grass was a continuing interest of the London Society. As early as December 1760 we find that Dr Benjamin Franklin, an honorary corresponding member of the Society of Arts, gave an account to the Committee of Agriculture of 'a very useful grass which had been lately propagated in several provinces in North America.' In connection with its work on grasses, Arthur Young said that the Society had opened up 'an untrodden field.'

Among survivals in the RSA archive can be found a Bath Society Members and Premium List for 1794. It is interesting to compare the premiums being offered by both institutions. Forty years after its foundation the London Society was still

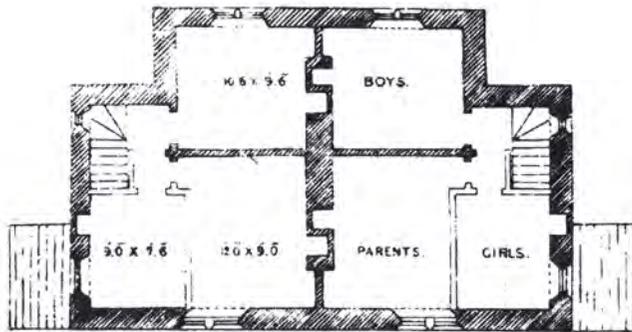
FOR FARM LABOURERS.



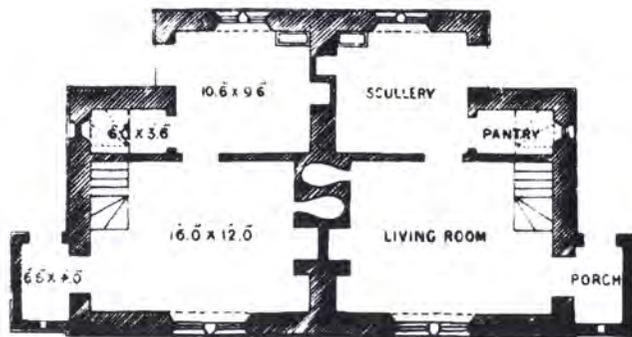
FRONT ELEVATION.

END ELEVATION.

SCALE OF FEET TO ELEVATIONS.



BEDROOM PLAN.



GROUND PLAN.

SCALE OF FEET TO PLANS.

H.W.H:CKES. ARCH

encouraging agricultural improvements, with 152 of its total 226 premiums being offered under the heading 'agriculture', for example; root and cereal crops; agricultural machinery; pest control; improving land and tree planting.

Likewise with Bath, with 82 out of a total 123 premiums offered under the heading 'agriculture'. Some areas of encouragement were common to both institutions, such as: turnep rooted cabbage; potatoes; improvement of land; destroying pests; comparative culture of root and cereal crops; manures; drill husbandry. It is interesting to note however that the Bath Society also offered awards for 'good behaviour in men and women servants'; as well as 'encouraging labourers to bring up their children in the habits of honest industry without resort to the parish for assistance'. The list of members shows a number of Bath Society members were also members of the London Society, including Thomas Horner of Mells and Richard Crawshay.

Among the Bath Society's Honorary and Corresponding Members for 1794 we find nine names which were also to be found in the membership of the Society of Arts, including the London Society's Secretary, Samuel More. Arthur Young was a very active member of the London Society. Apart from chairing the Society of Arts Committee of Agriculture, he was awarded a gold medal for producing a potato fit for the table, instead of use as winter feed for cattle. In 1797 Lord Milford wrote to the London Society asking where he could procure one of Arthur Young's swing ploughs. The Secretary must have passed on this request to Young because, in a surviving letter, Young says he has written to Lord Milford offering to send him a plough. Young adds "we had for three days a very great meeting at Bath; they flourish exceedingly, much arising from many premiums for livestock the rage of the times. Two years ago I proposed some for your Society and every one rejected - you love drilling and moonshine too much." Curiously Rack does not appear in the list of members of the Society of Arts.

It would be interesting to know if Rack ever visited the 'Temple of Health' which Dr James Graham opened in 1779, following the earlier treatment he received from this notorious 'quack'. If so, it is to be hoped that he would have crossed the road to the Society's headquarters building in John Adam Street, which formed part of the Adam brothers grand Adelphi scheme. In its 'Great Room', Rack would, I am sure, have noted with approval the inclusion of William Penn in the 6th painting 'Elysium' of the series 'The Progress of Human Culture and Knowledge' by James Barry. This still decorates their lecture hall today.

To end with a quote from Hudson's 'The four great men of the Bath and West', which I believe applies equally to the Society of Arts:

"genuine progress is achieved by people of exceptional humanity, exceptional energy and exceptional imagination"

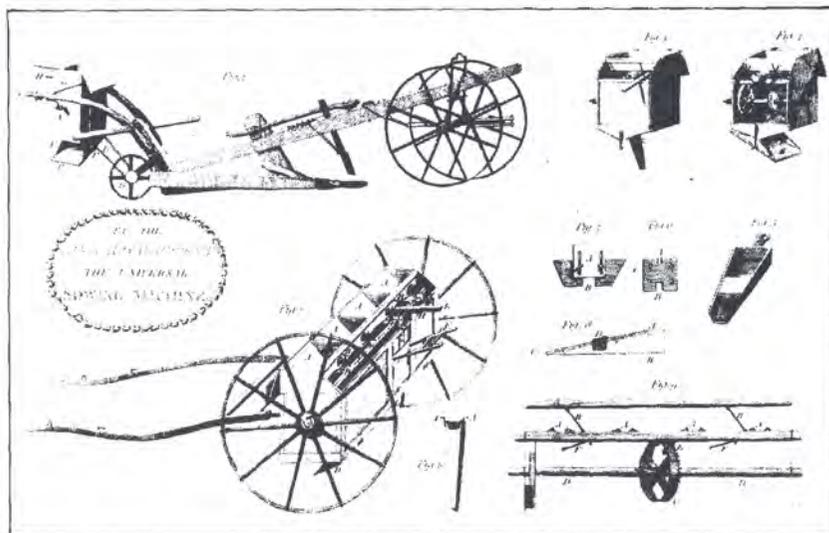
Part 3: The 'Royal Bath and West' and agricultural progress

Ted Collins, Emeritus Professor of Rural History, University of Reading

The first local agricultural society in Britain is reputed to have been the Brecknockshire, founded in 1755. Twenty years later, at least four county associations were active in Wales and six in England. Among these was the Norfolk, formed in 1774, just one year prior to Edmund Rack's departure from Attleborough in that county to Bath. Rack's enthusiasm for Norfolk farming, the then most advanced in England, would no doubt have inspired him to found a similar type of society in his adopted city.

Numbers of agricultural societies in England grew from 25 or so in 1800 to about 600 in the 1870s. They comprised three layers: the national societies - the Smithfield Club and the Royal Agricultural Society; in the middle - a handful of large regional societies such as the Yorkshire and the Bath and West; and, forming the base - the broad mass of county and district societies.

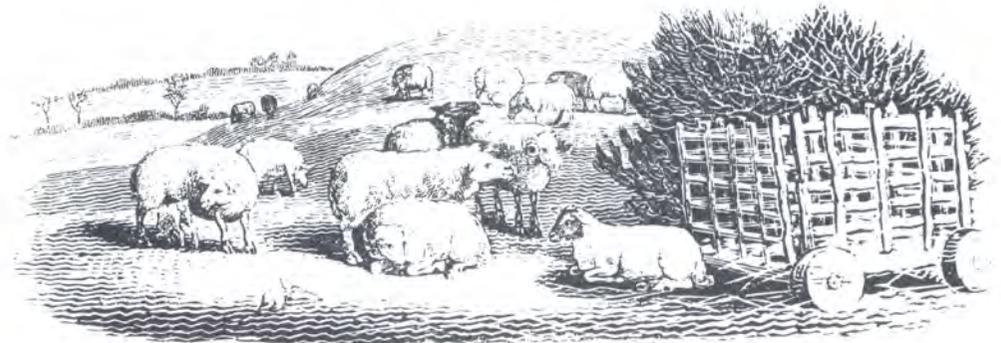
A feature of agricultural societies was their extreme localism. Based on market towns, and often run from estate offices, they were strongly independent. Agricultural societies, until 1927, had no parent body or umbrella organisation as did the Chambers of Agriculture or Farmers' Clubs. By reason of the huge differences in their organisation and objectives, and combinations of activities, it is difficult to compare one with another, or to assess their overall impact. The putting on of an annual show was the one common feature, bringing together the entire



farming community - landowners, farmers, farm-workers, servicing trades and professions. Their greatest contribution to agricultural improvement was indirect, in that together they formed a countrywide network for the dissemination and exchange of ideas and information, and informal contact between improvers. "Without them," stated the Bath and West Society's Secretary, Thomas Plowman, in 1885, "English agriculture would have been many years behind its present position, achieving results which have secured the admiration of the world at last." In that achievement, the Bath and West played an important, at certain points, key role. Though a regional society, the Bath and West made nationally important contributions to the development of the farming industry during the Agricultural Revolution, the High Farming Era (1840 - 80), and the Great Depression of the late nineteenth century. Most successful were its efforts in the fields of agricultural research and education, and propagation of ideas. In the early years, the Bath and West served as a model for other societies, among them the Royal, and was a seminal influence on the first Board of Agriculture, established in 1793 under the Secretaryship of Arthur Young.

From the outset, the horizons of the Bath and West were far broader, both geographically and intellectually, than those of the typical local society, many of which were little more than hunting and drinking clubs. The original aims and orders of 1777 committed the Society to a programme of agricultural improvement: encouraging and directing experiments, promoting best practice through the award of prizes and premiums, and assessing techniques practised in other parts of the country and modifying them to meet West Country conditions.

The following year saw High Sheriffs all over England being requested to circulate questionnaires among farmers in their respective counties and 1780 saw the launch of the Society's first series of publications, *Letters and Papers*, containing reports on all aspects of agriculture, industry and the arts. Enjoying a wide readership, some 14 volumes were issued between 1780 and 1816. The first annual show originated from an exhibition of sheep held at Bath in 1790. In the course of the next decade,



the Society established a laboratory to conduct and promote research in agricultural chemistry, and an experimental farm, among the first of its kind, at Weston near Bath. Merino sheep from the Royal Flock at Windsor were cross-bred with local types to produce a wool to meet the special needs of West Country textile mills. The much celebrated Norfolk 4-course system (wheat, turnips, barley, clover) was popularised within the region.

After twenty years of intense activity all the principal elements of a successful society - a publications series, annual show, research facility, centralised administration under a full-time Secretary supported by an energetic organising committee, regular income, and goodwill and patronage of leading landowners - were in place.

The spirit of improvement herein manifested did not long survive the end of the Napoleonic Wars, however. The collapse in agricultural prices that quickly followed the victory at Waterloo triggered a depression in rents and profits affecting particularly arable farming, which cast a gloom over the industry lasting until the 1830s. The Bath and West continued to hold annual shows, but experimental work became irregular, and, like most other societies, it suffered a decline. Loss of momentum was reflected in a shrinking membership, financial difficulties aggravated by bank failures in Bath and Bristol; and by the discontinuance of *Letters and Papers*, the flagship on which its national reputation had so largely hinged.

The 1840s were a watershed in the history of the Society. How, it was asked, does a regional society like this do useful work without duplicating the efforts of a national one, the Royal, founded in 1839, and a research establishment of the standing of Rothamsted, founded in 1843? After 1880 the question was how British farmers, West Country farmers in particular, could survive the Great Depression, and what role the Society should play in that process?

'Cometh the hour, cometh the man', namely Thomas Acland, later Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, a West Country landowner of nearly 40,000 acres, who in 1847 decided to retire from Parliament and devote himself to agricultural affairs. One of a select band of enlightened aristocrats, he played a decisive role in the development of the Royal and the Bath and West Societies, and of agricultural education. He saw the annual show as a potentially powerful force in publicising the new scientific agriculture among the mass of ordinary farmers. He laid before the Society a scheme for its reorganisation, suggesting that it should be held in a different place each year and award prizes for implements and machinery as well as livestock. The first peripatetic show was held at Taunton in 1852. Acland was also largely responsible for the launching of an annual *Journal* which, next to that of the Royal, became the most influential publication of its kind in England. In his later years, he refocussed his energies on education, and the question as to whether farming was a trade or a profession, and depending on the answer, how it should be taught - in the

school room or on the patrimonial farm? The problem, as Sir Thomas recognised, was that farming was not an exact science but a complicated and uncertain process involving many sciences, combined with practical and managerial skills and commercial acumen. The challenge was to establish a dialogue between farmers, educators and scientific researchers. Urged on by Acland, now in his eighties, the Society pursued a deliberate policy of expending less money on premiums and prizes and more on research and education. A system of practical experiments was set up to assess the relevance to local conditions of the research on manures and fertilizers conducted at Rothamsted and elsewhere.

By this stage it had become clear that the future of West Country farming lay not with corn but with livestock, and most of all with dairying. Liquid milk was unaffected by foreign competition, and demand in the industrial towns was growing rapidly. Cheese and butter were more vulnerable but high quality produce could still hold its own in the best markets. It was in dairy education that the Society made its national mark.

A working dairy became a regular feature at annual shows as early as 1884 and, more crucial, was the establishment in 1888 of the first travelling dairy school in England. Costing 30 shillings for a ten-day course and 5 shillings for a one-day, instruction was provided in butter-making and basic hygiene, mainly to farmers' wives and daughters. This was followed in 1890 by a travelling cheese-school, the first of which was held at Palace Farm, Wells, charging the not unsubstantial fee of 8 guineas for a four-week residential course.

Practical instruction in agricultural subjects grew apace in the aftermath of the Local Taxation Act of 1890. Clever political manoeuvring, orchestrated by A H D Acland, Sir Thomas' son and MP for Rotherham, resulted in the diversion of what had been intended as compensation to publicans for the loss of trade following a change in the licensing laws into a new and unexpected source of income for County Councils, which they were empowered to expend, if they so wished, on technical education. This, the so-called 'Whiskey Money', was the foundation of publicly funded agricultural education in this country. Many County Councils sought help from the Society in setting up and running their own dairy schools. Between 1889 and 1892, Society butter schools were held at 66 separate venues and attended by over 1300 students. The first travelling farriery school was founded in 1895 at Taunton.

In other areas, too, the Society played a pioneering role. For many years it financed F J Lloyd's research on fruit at Buckley, and in 1903 co-founded the National Fruit and Cider Institute at Long Ashton. Some schemes - such as those to establish a dairy training college to serve the West Country, and to create a dairy institution in association with Reading Extension College (later Reading University) - came to nothing.



Stand No. 168, Bath and West of England Show, at Bath, June 4th to 8th inclusive.

THE "BUCKEYE"

FIRST PRIZE
AT
GENEVA,
SWITZERLAND,
OVER
WOOD,
KIRBY,
HORNSBY,
SAMUELSON,
And Others.

FIRST PRIZE
AT
ANNEAU,
DEPT.
Eure-et-Loire,
FRANCE,
June, 1876.



FIRST PRIZE
AT
LUCERNE,
SWITZERLAND,
June 2 and 3,
1876.
OVER
JOHNSTON,
WOOD,
HORNSBY,
SAMUELSON,
KIRBY,
And Others.

Mowers, Self-Delivery Reapers, and Combined Mowers and Manual-Delivery Reapers,
Manufactured by **ADRIANCE, PLATT & Co., New York, U.S.A.**

General Agents for Great Britain,
J. & H. KEYWORTH & CO., 35, TARLETON STREET, LIVERPOOL.

Notwithstanding these successes, the Society's future remained uncertain in the face of the expansion of publicly funded technical education and research and, in the new century, the mushrooming farm institutes and colleges. A national network of research institutes, based on the universities and senior agricultural colleges, was created after 1910 by the newly formed Development Commission. It seemed to even their most enthusiastic proponents that the potential usefulness of voluntary societies such as our own, and gifted amateurs such as Thomas Dyke Acland, was fast waning. Not without good reason, the proposal to establish a dedicated government department, the new Board of Agriculture, in the late 1880s, was objected to by the landed aristocracy on the grounds that it would undermine the work of the great societies! By 1914, responsibility for technical education and scientific research, had very largely passed from the voluntary to the public sector, and from enthusiastic amateurs to qualified professionals.

Thus the show became increasingly the principal activity of the Society. It was, to quote Kenneth Hudson, 'not just as a shop window but ... the *sine qua non* of its existence'. Thomas Plowman, the Society's energetic Secretary, recognised with extraordinary clarity and foresight, that the concept of a rural show just for rural people had little future. Given the then depressed state of agriculture, and diminishing numbers of people living and working in the countryside, solvency, he reasoned, depended on the Show being able to appeal to the townsman, exciting his curiosity about rural affairs and tapping his greater purchasing power. This demanded a different mix of attractions than before, new events and entertainments to draw in the crowds.

Broadening the appeal of the Show was a principal objective of successive Secretaries and Chief Executives - Thomas Plowman, J G Yardley, Lord Darling, John Davis (retired but still very active in the cause of the Society), and most recently, Simon Firth. Between 1947 and 1958 attendance topped 100,000 in eight years, that of the Cardiff Show in 1948 exceeding 160,000. These figures should be compared with the farming membership of the Society which, in 1948, totalled only 2,750, and membership fees which accounted for only 10 per cent of the Society's annual income.

The public is a fickle mistress, and in the post-war period competition between summer events for her attention was intense. She demanded ever more spectacular attractions and opportunities for spending money - on craft goods, knitwear and farm produce, this together with a whiff of the countryside and pinch of traditional rural life. The Showground came more and more to resemble a vast stage. The low standard of public facilities, the high and rising cost of contractors' bills, and the difficulty in finding sites with ample car-parking, persuaded the Society of the need to follow the example of the Royal and the Yorkshire and invest in a permanent showground. The site at Shepton Mallet met most of the criteria, while at the same time providing an administrative headquarters. The first show to be held there in 1965 attracted 60,000 visitors, rising to over 100,000 by the mid-70s, and to 150,000 in 1999 and 153,000 in 2000.

A permanent headquarters helped redress what many members had long regarded as an imbalance between the Society's agricultural and non-agricultural activities, to the neglect of the farmer. The new site allowed specialised agricultural events, demonstrations, seminars and conferences to be held throughout the year. Perhaps more than at any time since the late nineteenth century, the Society was offering a direct service to farmers, and becoming centrally involved in farming issues, such as diversification and animal disease. Since the British Food and Farming Year in 1989, greater interest has been shown in food manufacture and marketing as part of the extended food chain.

For many thousands of people in the West Country and further afield, the Royal Bath and West Show is a meeting place of town and country. For farmers, it remains a traditional occasion on which farming achievements can be viewed and evaluated by peers and the wider public, and old acquaintances renewed. As at its founding over 200 years ago, it remains a uniquely British institution.

The words of the Earl of Lansdowne in his Presidential address at the Centenary Show in 1877 are as relevant today as they were then:

"We, in this association, are in a certain sense both young and old. We are old in having lasted over these 100 years. We are young, as I am convinced we have before us a long future of usefulness and vitality."