

# The Camerton Archive

---

## More Early Days

### Margaret Nuth and Owen Dicker

**T**he archive of past Camertonias is nearing completion. Once ready it will be added on to the menu bar of the revamped BACAS website and information will, it is intended, be accessible via a menu choice of Name, Place and Time Period. Before that happy day, here are a few more gleanings from the past.

Bill Wedlake and the BACAS Committee battled over many years for an improvement in the facilities for the storage and display of antiquities in Bath. The following gives an idea of why the finds from the Camerton and Nettleton sites are in the Museum in Bristol and not in Bath.

In December 1954 (Issue 3, Part 2) Bill Wedlake writes *'It is now more than 15 years since the material from the Museum at the Literary and Scientific Institute in Queen's Square was boxed up and taken to St Catherine's Court. This means that many children and many people ... have never had the opportunity of seeing these antiquities. A further alarming prospect is the state of preservation of these important remains after having been in storage for such a long length of time. We therefore feel most strongly that these relics of Bath's past should at the earliest possible opportunity be brought to the light of day and made available for inspection and instruction in Bath'*.

At the same time, while offering some congratulations on the improvements in the Baths Museum, he says *'we feel that much more is necessary in order to put these valuable remains'* into a situation comparable *'to those in the custody of the Ancient Monuments Board of the Ministry of Works. The recent attention given by Professor Ian Richmond to the possible arrangement of the Baths...is particularly welcome'*. He goes on to hope that the Professor *'will be enabled to continue with his investigations'*.

Despite this, eleven years later in 1965 (Issue 11, Part 1), he once again laments over the contents of the former Bath Museum. *'It is disgraceful that this interesting collection has now been in storage for over thirty five years. This collection was built up during the 19th and early 20th Centuries and is the result of many years of ardent interest by local antiquaries and archaeologists. Is it reasonable to expect local Societies to even consider lodging their collections in the care of the City when we see such treatment of this valued collection? This Society has in the past offered to assist to set up the collection but this has only received a bare acknowledgement and nothing has been done'*.

In the following Issue it would seem that his worst fears were confirmed. *'Your Committee has recently been concerned to learn of the theft of the priceless Head of Minerva from the Roman Baths Museum. Some years ago this Society decided that the Baths Museum was an unsuitable place to house the antiquities recovered from the Camerton site and that until Bath had a suitable Museum to house its antiquities it could not offer its collection for display. The Bath Museum is not only unsuitable from the apparently easy means of access but also from the atmospheric conditions prevailing; the continuous damp steam from the Hot Springs is not conducive to the preservation of antiquities'*.

In 1980 (Issue 19), he records that consequent to the City Council having raised the rent on the Society's Headquarters premises in Gay Street, *'despite talks with their representatives'* the search was on for alternative accommodation. As a result, members were packing up the Camerton and Nettleton finds from the years 1925 to 1971 for movement to Bristol City Museum. *'It is sad'* he says *'to reflect that despite our efforts, Bath has failed to make satisfying provision for the Camerton collection and continues its squirrel like attitude towards its own collections'*. He offers thanks to the staff of Bristol Museum for help.

A visit to Bristol Museum in 2005 (Issue 43) confirmed that the collections are still safely held there. Perhaps a Society outing sometime to view the finds?

Finally and in a lighter mood, over the years Bill Wedlake congratulated many members on their engagements or coming marriages. *'It is amazing'* he said, *'what a cup of tea and little pot washing can do'*.