

# BRLSI Chronological History

This brief history is taken largely from notes compiled by former curator, Diana Smith, with some additions from the re-launch catalogue written by another former curator, Roger Vaughan. An overview can be obtained from "Bath - Some Connections With Science" written by John Williams and Diana Stoddart, Kingsmead Press 1978.

Later additions (1987 onwards) compiled by Jane & John Coates.

## Bob Draper

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- **1777** Society formed for the encouragement of Agriculture, Planting, Manufactures, Commerce, and the Fine Arts...Bath Agricultural Society - library now at Bath University and archives at the Record Office in the Guildhall, Bath.
- **1779** Bath Philosophical Society formed to discuss: "The Arts, Sciences, Natural History, the History of Nations or any Branch of Polite Literature but not Law, Physic, Divinity and Politics" The Society folded in 1787 due to members' deaths and others leaving the neighbourhood.
- **1799** The Society was revived but disbanded again in 1806.
- **1815** Another attempt was made to form a philosophical society; this time it lasted about four years. It led to the establishment of the Mechanics Institute which later became the Athenaeum.
- **1819** Moves made to form an Institution with a library and reading room, a botanic garden, a museum of natural history, a cabinet of antiquities, a cabinet of coins and medals, a hall for lectures and a gallery to exhibit paintings and sculpture.
- **1820** The Lower Assembly Rooms on Terrace Walk were destroyed by fire, with the exception of Wilkins' portico. Earl Manvers agreed to finance a new building and lease it to the Institution.
- **1822** G.A.Underwood - architect and surveyor, drew up plans for a grand new building to include a museum, exhibition room, library, laboratory and lecture room with an entrance on North Parade, reinstating the portico.
- **1824** BATH LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTION ESTABLISHED
- **1825** On 19th January the Museum opened with the Duke of York as Patron, the Marquis of Lansdowne as President - geologist as curator.
- **1830** Received royal patronage from the Duke of Clarence (later William IV)

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- **1837** The prefix "Royal" added to name when Queen Victoria continued patronage.
- **1850** Rev. Leonard Jenyns moved to parish of Southstoke, Bath, from Cambridgeshire.
- **1850** Charles Moore joined the Institution and offered to deposit his already large and important geological collection with the Institution.
- **1855** Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club founded by Leonard Jenyns and Christopher Broome. It operated under the BRLSI and published proceedings up to 1906.
- **1858** The Institution purchased the building.
- **1859** Trust deed drawn up which included the statement that: "...in the case of dissolution of the Institution as above constituted, the property as well as the building shall be vested in the Mayor and the Corporation of Bath....for the advancement of Literature, Science and Art in the City of Bath..."
- **1864** Annual Conference of the British Association for the Advancement of Science held in Bath. Charles Moore was local secretary and the Institution was host to many of the events. Charles Moore's collection and scientific knowledge were acclaimed by many of the visiting scientists.
- **1867** Duncan Memorial fund established. Five hundred pounds invested. It produced twenty four pounds per annum in interest to be devoted to the improvement of the library and Museum.
- **1869** Leonard Jenyns presented his library and herbarium to the BRLSI on condition that a separate room be found for them and that they be kept distinct from other collections, and on dissolution of the BRLSI the items be returned to him or his heirs instead of being disposed of in any other way.
- **1881** Death of Charles Moore. Appeal launched to purchase his collection which was valued at one thousand one hundred pounds. The appeal raised ! £1,207 4s.6d. The balance was used for a commemorative plaque.
- **1883** Rev. H.H.Winwood appointed Honorary Curator.
- **1886** Christopher Broome bequeathed his important scientific library and herbarium to the Institution.
- **1890** Trust Deed altered to permit a mortgage for essential repairs to be made to the building.
- **1893** Death of Leonard Jenyns. His collection bequeathed to Institution.
- **1899** Amalgamated with Bath Athenaeum as their building was due for demolition.
- **1920** Death of H.H.Winwood.

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- **1925** Institution was not in a fit state to hold centenary events. A special fund raised enough money for repair work. Dr F.S.Wallis, curator of Bristol Museum, started to re-catalogue the Moore collection.
- **1932** The Institution moved to 16-18 Queen Square as a road improvement scheme entailed the demolition of the Terrace Walk building. Wallace had to pack up, move and re-display all the collections.
- **1940** The Queen Square premises were requisitioned by the Admiralty. All the displays were dismantled and the collections and the books stored elsewhere in Bath. The books to S.Catherines Court Batheaston and the fossils were taken by Wallis to Bristol Museum and kept in the basement. A great deal of other material was dispersed without record.
- **1959** Premises vacated by Admiralty. However the Institution had ceased to function so it was resolved that: "...the Institution shall be dissolved and that all the property shall be vested in the Corporation for the advancement of Literature Science and Art in the said City of Bath.
- **1960** Collections returned from various wartime stores. Decision taken not to redevelop the Museum but to alter the building for use as a City Reference Library. Ron Pickford, employed as a joiner, and a keen amateur geologist, prevented material from being discarded. A great deal of material was however loaned to other museums, loaned to schools, given away or sold.
- **1964** Bath Reference Library opened to the public.
- **1967** Bath Geological Society founded.
- **1968** BRLSI registered with Charity Commission as an educational charity. Also Ron Pickford formally appointed Curatorial Assistant and a space for displays made available on the second floor. New displays were mounted in consultation with Mr Bob Whitaker of Bath Geological Society. He continued in a consultancy capacity until 1974.
- **1974** With Local Government Reorganisation, Trusteeship transferred to the newly formed Avon County Council (Education Dept.).
- **1978** Trusteeship passed from the Education Dept. to the Community Leisure Dept.
- **1982** Charity Commission prevented Avon County Council moving library administrative offices into Queen Square premises, after representations from the Bath Society and Bath Geological Society.
- **1985** Ron Pickford retired. He was a Fellow of the Geological Society of London and the Geological Curators' Group made a presentation to him in honour of the work he had done in Bath.
- **1986** Diana Smith, previously geologist for Norfolk County Museums Service, appointed Curator.

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- **1987** Discussions continue on the transfer of Trusteeship with a letter from five concerned individuals to the Charity Commission about the transfer of Trusteeship and the state of the collections.
- **1987** This group formed themselves into the BRLSI Steering Group in November to continue to press their concern about the collections. Others sought legal advice on the propriety of events in the light of the terms of the Trusteeship.
- **1988** The Friends of BRLSI was formed in February 1988 to support the general aims and to foster the revival of the Institution itself, and The Bath Society set up its own working group to consider the future of the BRLSI.
- **1992** In April, with the encouragement of the Charity Commission, a body of Interim or Shadow Trustees (3 drawn from Friends of the BRLSI, 3 from The Bath Society Working Party and 3 from the University of Bath) was set up, with the authority of Avon County Council, to work out realistic aims, plans and the financing for a revived BRLSI. In November the Interim Trustees submitted a Forward Plan to Avon County Council.
- **1993** Avon County Council, having already embarked upon setting up a combined lending and reference library in the new Podium building and therefore about to vacate the BRLSI premises at 16-18 Queen Square, approved the Forward Plan and the transfer of its Trusteeship of BRLSI to the Interim Trustees.

A re-launch exhibition was held in the premises in May. The first new Members for 50 years joined the Institution. An agreement was negotiated with Bath City Council for the short term use by it of part of the premises and, with the Area Museums Council for the South West, the Council agreed to fund the employment of a Development Officer for three years.

BRLSI Trustees were incorporated on 27 September 1993 as a company limited by guarantee and, through the Charity Commission, the Institution and the freehold of the premises were transferred to the trusteeship of BRLSI Trustees. A newsletter and a programme of lectures was started, the meetings being held in the nearby premises of the Bath and County Club.

- **1994** The nine Interim Trustees were formed into a Board to superintend activities and exercise the trusteeship. A lease of a large part of the premises for 7 years to Bath Training Services at a reduced rent in return for their refurbishment by the Bath City Council was negotiated in August. A Development Officer was appointed. Discussion Groups were formed.

Refurbishment of the premises began, together with work on a development plan and on a policy for the collections. A Board of Trustees consisting, according to the Articles of Association, dated 27 September 1993, of 11 appointed and 5 elected Trustees was formed on 29 September 1994.

- **1995** In March, refurbishment being complete, the Institution occupied the part of the premises available to it. Subscriptions were set at £15 per annum

for individual Members, £20 for a couple, £5 for a student, £50 for a benefactor and £500 for a Life Member. The programme grew to 70 events a year. The first Annual General Meeting of the Institution was held on 11 October.

- **1996** After occupying its part of the premises for a year, the balance of the Institution's policy was changed towards developing the Institution through its Members' programme of meetings while continuing, as funds allowed, the conservation and cataloguing of the collections with the aim of their use for research and in a virtual museum accessible worldwide on the Internet. The full-time Development Manager resigned and she was replaced by a part-time Curator and a part-time Administrator. Increased numbers of volunteers worked on the collections and archives.
- **1997** The number of discussion groups, generally holding meetings once a month, grew to eight and the Institution continued its drive to build a reputation as a cultural institution, to develop the membership and to maintain a sound if restricted financial base. To that end, rental income was doubled by letting the Moore Room.

Two sponsored exhibitions were mounted and under Paul Elkin, the Curator, a steady team of volunteers worked on the collections, library and archives, while other volunteers organised events, supported the Administrator and contributed to the running of the Institution in a number of ways, thus helping to keep costs within income. The first annual report of the revived Institution was published and the Institution's Internet Website was established.

- **1998** The Institution's programme continued to prosper, with well-attended events of high quality, a day conference, two exhibitions, a public meeting chaired by the Member of Parliament for Bath to discuss a scheme to develop part of the city, and meetings by four kindred Bath societies held on the premises as well as joint meetings with five national scientific and cultural institutes and societies.

Members themselves led nearly half of the Institution's events in subjects in which they were expert or practised. A Strategy Group was formed to consider the longer term future of the Institution.

- **1999** The Proceedings of the Institution for 1998 were published as an annual volume for the first time in place of the previous four-monthly issues. Activities developed with increasing numbers of day conferences, series of lectures on particular themes, and a foreign visit as well as a debate on aspects of the European Union. The programme extended to about 120 events during the year and the Christmas Lecture by a distinguished scientist was instituted.
- **2000** Lunch-time meetings were instituted in response to some reluctance by many Members to come out to attend evening meetings. The number of Trustees elected by Members was increased from six to eight in view of the leading part taken by Members in running the Institution and the Board of Trustees established regulations for the Institution. Voluntary effort towards running the Institution grew to the equivalent of at least 5 full-time staff.

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- **2001** The Millennium Year saw the number of events rise to a total of 237, counting 99 held in the Institution by outside bodies. The conveners of the discussion groups were reconstituted to form the Programme Sub-committee and an Astronomy Group was started with the William Herschel Society of Bath. The Christmas lecture was given by the Astronomer Royal. The Membership rose to 467. Paul Elkin, the Curator, resigned upon moving to East Anglia. He had directed recovery work on the collections for five years with great effect.
- **2002** A new lease for three years from January 2002 was negotiated with the present tenants but at a full rent for educational use.