

The background image shows the interior of the Brighton Hippodrome, a large, ornate building with a high ceiling and decorative elements. The floor is covered in a blue and red patterned carpet. A metal fence and scaffolding are visible in the foreground, indicating ongoing work or renovation. A red and white traffic cone is also present in the lower right corner.

RS JOURNAL

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BRIGHTON HIPPODROME *PAST - AND FUTURE?*

INNOVATION ON DIFFICULT SITES FOR COUNCIL HOMES

THE STORY OF MADEIRA DRIVE

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome to the R S Journal, produced by the Regency Society of Brighton and Hove. We hope you enjoy it. A first issue appeared in 2011. We hope to publish rather more frequently from now on.

The Journal plans to put a bit of flesh on the bones of our monthly news updates to members, and to provide in depth coverage of current issues of interest to the Society.

Understanding the historical significance of places we are concerned about enriches our ability to think about them and to imagine their futures. This issue contains two historical pieces by members of the RS committee with a passion for their subject. David Fisher tells the story of the Hippodrome's colourful chequered past (page 4), and Robert Edwards' story of Madeira Drive (page 3) traces the significant role this area has played in Brighton's development as the unique place it now is. Both of these sites are very much in the news at the moment, and both are very much at risk.

The R S is not just concerned about the past. We want to contribute to the future too and help ensure that whatever is

built here is of the best quality to meet our City's changing needs. Like much of the South East, Brighton and Hove has an acute housing shortage, especially for social housing. Schemes like the RIBA competition as part of the Council's New Homes for Neighbourhoods Programme (page 6) are an interesting attempt by our City to bring innovative design to difficult sites to help meet this need.

The R S is a charity; no member has been paid for their contribution to this issue and no member pays to receive it.

We want the R S Journal to belong to members. If you have an idea for an article or would like to contribute to a future issue, or if you would like to talk to us more generally about the Journal contact me at news@regencysociety.org.

The R S Journal is not just for members. It showcases our interests and we hope it will encourage new members. If you would like to become a member or learn more about us, contact Suzanne Hinton (details below). We would very much like to hear from you.

Mary McKean, Editor.

The R S Journal is published by the **Regency Society of Brighton and Hove** free of charge to members. If you care about our heritage and if our city's future matters to you, you are welcome at Regency Society lectures, discussions, tours and social events, which are open to the public and most are free of charge. To find out more see our website: www.regencysociety.org.

If you would like to join, download a membership form from our website or contact Suzanne Hinton: s@hinton.clara.net. For news enquiries contact Mary McKean on news@regencysociety.org. If you would prefer to send a letter write to The Regency Society at 12 Abbots, 129 Kings Road, Brighton BN1 2FA.

The Regency Society is the oldest amenity and conservation society in Brighton and Hove and a registered charity: no 210194.

www.regencysociety.org

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Page 3: The Society of Brighton Prints Collectors

Page 4: Frontage image : Frank Matcham Society, theatre box: Ian Grundy/the Theatres Trust

Page 6: John McKean and the Regency Society's photographic archive, the James Gray Collection (www.regencysociety-jamesgray.com)

Page 7: Brighton and Hove City Council.

REGENCY SOCIETY
For our evolving city



I'm very pleased to welcome you to this issue of the Regency Society Journal. From now on it will appear in addition to our monthly news update for members. It will give us a chance to publish fuller discussions of issues that the Society has taken an interest in.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed, and particularly to Mary McKean who has taken on the job of editor.

Please let me know what you think of the first issue, or any other views you have about the society's activities (email: Chairregencysoc@gmail.com).

Roger Hinton, Chair of the Regency Society

MADEIRA DRIVE

by Robert Edwards

Madeira Drive and the Eastern seaside in Brighton are set to change considerably if current proposals by Brighton and Hove City Council are realised. This account of its past demonstrates its key role in the development of the City over 200 years.



Brighton and Pier from Kempton, aquatint by Dean Wolstonholme Jnr (1830s) and Marine Parade, aquatint by George Jones, c. 1827

The seaside east of the town is pictured in 1785 as a grass bank sloping from undeveloped land to a broad pale carriageway and narrow grass cliff edge dropping straight to the sea. Brighthelmstone was not favoured as picturesque material by authorities like William Gilpin, who in 1774 complained that the sea was 'adorned with no rocky shore, no winding coast ... Nature, contrary to her usual practice, has here laid out the coast by a straight line.'

In an 1820s image, the eastern cliff face appears concave and uneven. To alleviate storm depletion of the foreshore, timber

groynes, the first in 1723, gave rise to the presence of shingle beaches along the straight mile. In the 1830s the majority of the cliff was transformed, fabricated into an angled flat cement wall. Kemp's adaptation of slopes further east (see page 7)) overlooked the adjacent bare green mound and the bathing huts and fishing boats at the spacious shore. At the western end, the Chain Pier construction in 1823 involved a short broad curved lane from the Steine for access and services. Following Turner and Constable, imagery of the east seafront in art then photography is dominated by the Chain Pier for most of the nineteenth century.

BRIGHTON HIPPODROME

'One of the most handsome places of amusement'

The Brighton Hippodrome is very much in the news recently as plans for its rescue as a performance venue have caught the public imagination. **David Fisher** recounts its history

In 1900 R Ellis and Humphrey Bramall had to find a new use for the large building they owned in Middle Street, Brighton. The Real Ice Skating Rink, that architect Lewis Karslake had designed for them in 1897, had closed in March. The reality was that indoor ice skating no longer appealed. Ellis and Bramall thought a 98ft (30 m) diameter circular arena would make a good indoor circus, so they commissioned another architect, Frank Matcham, to reconfigure the building.

Frank Matcham (1854-1920) was already far and away the leading theatre architect of his era. He had already built two theatres in Brighton: the Alhambra Opera House and Music Hall on King's Road (1888), which later became the Palladium Cinema, and the Grand Theatre in North Road (1894). He also designed circuses, the first being Hengler's Grand Cirque in Glasgow (1885) and at the time of Bramall's commission his London Hippodrome was newly built.

Matcham retained the tent-like structure of the auditorium: a segmented dome supported on 16 pillars, beneath which two tiers of seats formed a horseshoe shape around a 42ft (13m) diameter performance ring opposite the foyer, with a stage framed by a proscenium on the side. On either side of the proscenium were curtained animal entrances. An equestrian ramp (still there) led in from the stables to the north of the site. Kerslake's façade remained largely unaltered—Matcham's principal interest was in creating



magnificent interiors—apart from the addition of the new
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name HIPPODROME in large relief letters between the two towers.

The Brighton Hippodrome Theatre and Circus opened on 28 August 1901. However, the circus business survived for only one week short of a year and the mortgagees foreclosed. 'One of the most handsome places of amusement' was offered at auction on 7 October 1902. The lot also included a 'commodious double-fronted residence' at no.52 Middle Street and a small cottage at no 50. The buyer was Thomas Barrasford, a Jarrow man who had built up a chain of music halls in the north of England, pioneering twice-nightly variety. He brought Matcham back to turn the circus into a theatre by widening the proscenium, replacing the circus ring with a raked floor and seats in the stalls area, stage boxes where the animal entrances had been and an orchestra pit.

The Hippodrome Theatre of Varieties re-opened on 22 December 1902. Tom Barrasford and his wife Maud moved into the 'commodious residence'. Maud was in business in her own right. In 1902 the Barrasfords bought

the Empire Theatre of Varieties in New Road, Brighton, which became the Court Cinema under Maud's management. In 1906 she bought the Devil's Dyke pleasure grounds. Tom Barrasford became seriously ill and died on 1 February 1910. Soon after, the Hippodrome was acquired by Variety Theatres Controlling Company (VTCC), a company set up by two theatrical entrepreneurs, Sir Alfred Butt and Walter de Frece, for this purpose.



In 1915 alterations were made to the auditorium by the theatre architect J Emblin Walker. This involved enlarging the stage and improving the three floors of dressing rooms in the stage house. In the following year Walker oversaw further revision of the seating arrangement, on both occasions with no apparent interruption in operations. Although seating capacity overall was increased, the front eight rows in the stalls were fitted with 'special fauteuils', as the sign of the door from the foyer still attests. The stage house was rebuilt in 1955/56 by the architect E M Lawson.

Many names, illustrious and forgotten, appeared in the bill over the coming years, mostly twice nightly shows for six nights a week, matinees, 51 weeks a year (the other week was for panto rehearsals). In the late 1950s variety was changing. Television (Sunday Night at the London Palladium) satisfied much of the remaining demand and by 1961 pop stars regularly topped the bill.

Intermittent closures for one or two weeks, were an ominous sign, increasing in frequency from the beginning of 1964. One-night pop shows on Sundays attracted audiences but by the autumn of that year were almost the

only events in the once busy hall. The curtain finally came down at the end of Chuck Berry's performance on Sunday 22 November 1964.

Brighton County Borough Council considered buying up the Hippodrome to save it (or, according to one account, to replace it with a multi-storey car park). That would have been a far-sighted and pioneering move if it had been carried out. But it wasn't and in 1965 E M Lawson was brought back to convert the auditorium into a film and television studio with a flat floor installed over the stalls. Little use seems to have been made of it and in 1967 the Mecca Organisation took over to create one of the most beautiful bingo halls in the country. It was that move that saved the Hippodrome for the next 40 years. It was also about that time that demolition of two properties in Ship Street created an open space that was added to the Hippodrome site as a car park.

'House' was last called on 8 August 2006. In the decade since then, Academy Music Group (AMG) took a lease on the site and spent several years developing a plan to create a music venue to join the Academy O2 chain. That had to be scrapped because of late-night licensing issues.

A planning application to convert the building into an eight-screen cinema and four restaurants emerged in 2013, provoking the formation of a campaign to resist that idea in favour of restoration as a live performance venue. As soon as consent was given the site was put on the market. It was bought by the leaseholders, AMG, who offered the campaigners six months to develop plans for the theatre.

Plans have been developed and prospects for carrying them out are favourable. The first stage is to carry out the many urgent repairs, then to restore the building and open it at an interim stage on the way to creating a full lyric theatre. A restored Hippodrome will bring the buzz of theatrical life back to Middle Street that will spread throughout the Old Town.





Concrete groynes banking the shingle enabled land to be reclaimed. Then, when the Aquarium was built at the Chain Pier road in 1872, a promenade and carriage drive were laid on a new sea-wall flooring the cliff wall. This was extended east in 1895 up to Marine Parade at Duke's Mound. The choice of name, Madeira Road, typified fashionable references to foreign resorts; for, as Frank Gray records, 'By the mid-nineteenth century esteem for the glories of the sea view was deeply embedded in wider society's consciousness'. Moreover, 'municipal authorities increasingly judged and determined the architecture of the seaside ... particularly the important mood-creating and tone-setting seafront promenade'.

Volk's Railway, opening in 1883, accentuated the linear topography of the setting, while the distinctive geometry of the wall steps' wooden railings was remodelled in iron and teak. In 1889 Madeira Lawns were formed near the Banjo Groyne, opposite the new Lift. As the Palace Pier succeeded the storm-wrecked Chain Pier, the town's decorative cast iron seafront

was widely augmented, here most dramatically by Lockwood's gem the Madeira Walk and Terrace. The road name was altered to Madeira Drive a decade after the first speed trials in 1905 sparked an annual motor event. Other events joined a calendar of regular attractions of the kind that flourish in the present century, including climactic finales of London-to-Brighton runs.

Uneventful, lengthy stretches and spells of tranquillity are nevertheless cherished. Change occurs occasionally: the lawns a playground; recast profiles of the aquarium terraces and bastion opposite; overlay of the shingle vista by volleyball sand courts; developments for the railway; a naturist beach; a kayak club. Meanwhile, exemplary and emblematic, the longsuffering decorative infrastructure marks time, conceivably in due course to be preserved intact and even furthered – modern in facilities, continuous in style.



The opening of the Volks Electric Railway (1883) speed trials (1932) and (top) Madeira Drive and lift today

TIGHT SPOTS

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has been working with Brighton and Hove City Council to encourage innovative design for council homes on difficult sites.

Brighton and Hove City Council's 'New Homes for Neighbourhoods' programme aims to build 500 homes on Council owned land. With 23,000 households wanting to rent a council or housing association home the need is urgent. This programme focuses on small infill sites as well as regenerating existing estates.

As part of this, the Council has been working with the Royal Institute of British Architects on a design competition for new council homes on difficult sites in 4 locations. Entries have come from practices throughout the UK.

Sutherland Hussey Harris and Innes Associates have been chosen to design homes on 'challenging' sites in Brighton. The two practices were picked from a 20-strong longlist which was announced earlier this year.



Launched in March 2015, the Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC)-backed contest sought proposals for four urban plots constrained by their 'size, context, overlooking issues and/or restricted access'.

These sites include former garages

Images show Sutherland Hussey Harris proposal for Natal Road (above) and Hinton Close (above centre) Innes Associates' proposal for Frederick Street (below centre) and Rotherfield Crescent (right)

and car parks at Hinton Close, Rotherfield Crescent and Natal Road. A car park in Frederick Street was also included. Innes Associates has been chosen for Frederick Street and Rotherfield Crescent, while Sutherland Hussey Harris has won the Hinton Close and Natal Road projects.

The preferred schemes for each site were selected earlier this year



with the two studios invited to further develop their designs ahead of a presentation to judges in March. Judges included BHCC representatives alongside Grant Shepherd from the University of Brighton and Simon Barker of Barker Shorten Architects.

Councillor Anne Meadows – chair of BHCC's Estate Regeneration Members Board and Housing &



New Homes Committee – said: 'The competition has generated some really exciting designs for some of our most challenging sites within the New Homes for Neighbourhoods Programme.'

'The winning architectural practices impressed us with their creative designs which successfully address the constraints of the different sites and respond well to their existing context.'

She continued: 'The winners have also demonstrated that their designs are deliverable within the budget set aside for the competition.'

Jo Thompson from the Council's Estate Regeneration team told me recently that having RIBA holding the council's hand really helped as their experience in running competitions suitable for small architectural practices is very



limited. Smaller practices are perfectly suited to coming up with cutting edge quality for these tiny sites.

She would like to see this as a pilot for similar schemes in the future. The plans for Natal Road and Hinton Close will be presented as proposals for planning permission in Spring 2017, with those for Rotherfield Crescent and Frederick Street likely to follow later in the year.

Mary McKean

Parts of this article are published with kind permission from *The Architects Journal* (www.architectsjournal.co.uk) where they were first published in May 2016

WITH REFERENCE TO BRIGHTON AND HOVE

Robert Edwards browses recent books of local interest

Among the eclectic choice of titles released so far in 2016 regarding the city, one that is likely to be of interest to many Regency Society members is **Brighton and Hove in 50 Buildings** (by Kevin Newman, published by Amberley, paperback, 96 pages), whose opening sentence asserts that the city is 'defined' by its buildings. The fifty selected are mostly individual, many detached, a few more composite (Dome complex, Marina) or attenuated (Rastrick's Viaduct, i360); deliberately, no classic estates or terraced groups feature. The majority are in the city centre, especially along and close to King's Road, and most are prominent and locally well known. The order is alphabetical (from Amex Stadium to West Pier). All are illustrated, many in colour, in a range of images as mixed as the subjects, and all receive at least nearly half a page of text describing their origin, development, status and social or cultural associations.

While Newman's list contains four pubs, forty-five are taken in by **Brighton Pubs** (David Muggleton, paperback, 96 pages, also published by Amberley). They are informatively and consecutively celebrated in a set of walks through five areas of Brighton. The selection criteria, explained in a personal and autobiographical foreword by the author, are (to paraphrase): architecture, human incidents, landlords and customers, current trading, and fitting into a walk. Physical descriptions tend to focus on interiors, while interiors and/or exteriors are illustrated in clear, colourful photography by the author. Some historical images are included, and the James Gray collection is credited in the acknowledgments and included, via the Regency Society, in the bibliography's website list.

Amply illustrated in colour and black and white, **The North Laine Book** (paperback, published by Brighton Town Press, 102 pages – in close collaboration with the North Laine Community Association) records the history of the area and celebrates the creation and character of the conservation area. Local historians contribute introductions to the themed chapters, as do several very local historians who also add short commentaries for the many reminiscences of residents. Some of the material originated in editions of the North Laine Runner.

A benign account of high life in late Georgian Brighton is offered in the **Sketches of Brighton 1827** by a French Nobleman (published by Belle Vue Books, paperback, 322 pages). "It is to London what Versailles was to Paris" (p.84). The meticulous chronicler of his own visit was the travel writer Le Comte Auguste de la Garde; the translator is Suzanne Hinton (our membership secretary) whose extensive introduction sets the biographical context and broader local scene. Illustrations, annotation and index cast extra light on the text, which was originally published in Paris in 1834. As some of our members are well aware, copies of the original are rare.

Judy Middleton's **Hove and Portslade** published two years ago by Pen & Sword Books in a series 'Your Towns and Cities in the Great War' is now joined in 2016 by Douglas d'Enno's **Brighton in the Great War** (paperback, 272 pages). Within its account of the conflict's involvement of and impact on the town's community and institutions, the narrative frequently dwells on buildings, development, vistas and scenarios; and the numerous illustrations (black and white) are widely varied in subject, style and provenance.

A little less weighty, **The Sussex Colouring Book** is a landscape-format paperback (published by the History Press, 96 pages) offering forty-six black outline drawings on white paper by Chris West, of which five represent subjects located in the city: Hove County Cricket Ground, Hove beach huts, the Royal Pavilion (also filling the front cover, partially coloured), the Lanes, and Deckchairs on Brighton beach. Whether a pastime of colouring images of the Lanes and Pavilion might encourage concern for conservation or inspire the lurid coating of sensitive townscape, who can tell?

To date, very few of the established travel guides have issued a revised Britain, England or local-regional edition in 2016. However, in their Great Breaks series, Insight Guides have this year produced a first edition of **Brighton, Sussex and the South Downs** (published by DK/Penguin, 128 pages, gloss paperback), of which more than a quarter is devoted to Brighton and Hove, and is as much absorbed in the city's multi-faceted visual character as in its practical tourist offer.