



# R S JOURNAL

Issue 3 summer 2017

## NEARLY NEW HERITAGE?

SHOULD WE HAVE  
CARED MORE  
FOR THESE LOST  
MODERN  
BUILDINGS?

THE HISTORY OF VALLEY GARDENS  
REGENCY AND VICTORIAN PRINTS:  
A NEW REGENCY SOCIETY WEBSITE

# IN THIS ISSUE

**Welcome to issue 3 of the R S Journal, in which we have much to say about heritage.**

When does a building become old enough to qualify as "heritage"? David Robson thinks this happens as soon as it is occupied, and that we are too quick to rush to demolish recent buildings of merit (page 8).

There can be no question that the many prints of Brighton and Hove which survive from the Regency and Victorian period are an important part of our heritage. The RS is delighted to be working with the Society of Brighton Prints Collectors on a new website of images from this period to be launched later this year (page 6).

Valley Gardens is, literally, a central part of Brighton's heritage. Robert Edwards recounts its history (opposite).

And finally - don't miss the list of next season's lecture dates on the back cover. We will be sending out the full programme for 2017/18 with our monthly update later in the year.

Thanks are due to the authors and to Robert Edwards, who helped to edit this issue.

The committee hopes you enjoy this issue. We welcome your comments. If you have any suggestions for future articles or comments please email me on [news@regencysociety.org](mailto:news@regencysociety.org).

Mary McKean, Editor.

**The R S Journal** is published by the **Regency Society of Brighton and Hove** free of charge for 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. Most are open to the public and free of charge. To find out more see our website: [www.regencysociety.org](http://www.regencysociety.org).

If you would like to join, see our website or come to an event. For news enquiries contact Mary McKean on [news@regencysociety.org](mailto: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.

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**REGENCY**

**SOCIETY**

*For our evolving city*

# THE VALLEY GARDENS LANDSCAPE

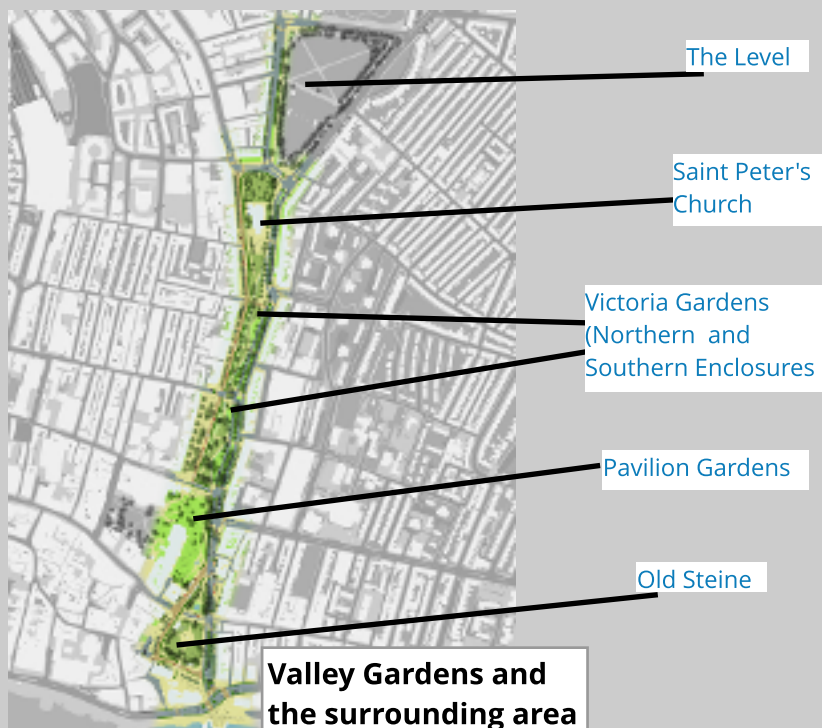
*Valley Gardens runs south from St Peter's Church to Church Street. Bounded by many of the most important buildings of our heritage and subject to repeated delays in plans for its future, it contains 23 acres of gardens and lawns. **Robert Edwards** traces the history of Brighton's main artery.*

## Early descriptions

Aspects common to Georgian depictions of the Brighton area are the soft contours of sweeping downland and the expansive pale green ground as far south as the flat Steine. A contrast between this palpable serenity and the turmoil at the town's shore is described in Defoe's 'Tour thro' the whole island of Britain' published in the 1720s. Riding from Lewes 'in view of the sea, and on a fine carpet ground' to Bright Helmston, the visitor finds 'a poor

fishing town, old built, and on the very edge of the sea. 'The sea is very unkind to this town ... by its continual encroachments'. By the mid-nineteenth century, in the Quarterly Review, 'These breezy downs, with their endless variety of sea view and land view,' are said to 'constitute the great charm of a residence at Brighton'.

The terrain in the Valley Gardens, created by the convergence of the two valleys from north-west and north-east, is



generally agreed to owe its bare openness to the swampy effect of the intermittent Wellsbourne stream and its frequent overflow. Culverted in 1792-3 by a wooden sewer under the Steine and a bricking over of Pool Valley, in 1827-8 the sewer was extended to Preston Circus.

Shelter from the town encouraged the development of the Steine for leisure. Previously in use for drying nets and storing boats, it was used first as a restorative place to take air, then a formal fashionable promenade. In 1773 the newly authorised Town Commissioners took on the management of the Steine as a public space, and within five years the southern part was railed, newly turfed and crossed with footpaths. A panorama of the Steine in 1807 shows a simple low wooden fence enclosure. As the Steine succumbed to more deliberate design and formation from the 1790s, social activity was extending north of the Pavilion, prompting successive incremental terrace building at the foot of the Laines.

### **Prince George arrives**

Local historian Sue Berry has traced the Prince's protracted and tortuous acquisition of land around the Pavilion; for example to the north-west 'the Prince's agents had to buy entire crofts'. Parts of properties he acquired on the west side were already paddocks and gardens, but, as Repton illustrates in an 1808 aquatint, a clump of shrubs and elms were grown, and, as Jessica Rutherford notes, George Canning in 1826 referred to these as 'the only trees for miles around' – hence the perpetual addition of the palace gardens to the overall valley landscape.

Construction of the Royal Albion and Royal

York buildings curtailed the valley's southern extremity, and by the end of the 1820s the entire Steine area was landscaped.

A print of a view of Brighton from the Preston Road in 1819 gives an impression of the drop from a hay harvest on arable upland to the narrowing curvature of the pasture below, fringed on both convex sides by a slender line of buildings towards the busier cliff development at the bay. Parts of the area later to be known as Victoria Gardens were first enclosed by railings in 1810 for private subscribers' use.



*Cricket match in 1849 looking south from The Level with St Peter's Church in the middle distance. by G H Phillips (SBPC)*

### **Saint Peter's Church**

Crucially, in the late 1820s St Peter's Church arose to remain the single major built form imposed on the complexion of the valley ground. At the Level (north of the Church), a formal ground was laid out in the northern part in 1791, cricket having been played there since the mid-eighteenth century. With Union Road's





*"Bird's eye view of Brighton" from the top of 'the New Church' (St Peter's) looking south over what was later to be called Victoria Gardens. John Bruce, 1839 (SBPC)*

construction in the early 1820s, the Level itself was formally laid out by A H Wilds and horticulturist Henry Phillips, while the northernmost part was sold, to be a cricket ground and pleasure garden.

The extent and pace of late Georgian development on the land rising on either side is illustrated in the view from the 'New Church' tower. The southern valley pasture is transformed into a series of spacious tree-lined and railed oval gardens. The character of the Steine was lastingly influenced by planting of trees and the erection of the Victoria Fountain in 1846.

In 1840 shrubbery and clumps were planted in the northern enclosure, which was opened to the public in 1883, the southern in 1896.

## **The Victorian Period**

The Victoria Gardens name was to mark the diamond jubilee. In 1844 avenues of elms were planted at the Level's outer pathway. Victorian architecture and re-frontage accentuated the sense of depth and linearity along the valley. Late Victorian and Edwardian photographs show the gardens with flowerbeds and a continuous mass of billowing trees around the Level.

## **Twentieth Century**

In the 1920s, a thorough re-design of the central valley landscape, from the Level to the Steine, was conducted by B H MacLaren, superintendent of Brighton parks: in association with road widening, the 'Valley Vistas' scheme – entailing lower railings, external pavements and ornamental gardens with

► continued on page 12

# SEEING FURTHER INTO OUR PAST

*The Regency Society's James Gray Photographic archive is well known (and well used). A new RS website will soon make it possible to view hundreds of images from the era before photography.*

The Regency Society will be launching a new website of historic prints of Brighton and Hove later in 2017 in co-operation with the Society of Brighton Print Collectors.

The Society of Brighton Print Collectors was the brainchild of the late Henry Smith, once a trustee of the Regency Society for

town's history and its engravings. SBPC meets twice a year, in spring and autumn. Members bring one or two items of interest and one member might present a short talk on a particular print. In the past SBPC has had a meeting in the Brighton Museum looking at architectural prints/plans of the Pavilion, and members

of the Museum staff often join meetings. The object of the Society is to increase our collective knowledge of the subject and simply enjoy the prints.

The SBPC is making available up to 500 digital images from their collections for the new RS website, some of which are rare. They date from the 1780s to the 1890s and show fascinating images of Brighton seen through the eyes of artists of the period.

There are sites you might expect, (several of the Royal Pavilion and the Chain Pier), and much less well known sites including several buildings no longer in existence.

Work on developing the new website is being led by Mary McKean with a team of voluntary helpers, all RS members. Steve Myall from the SBPC, who many will remember from his lecture in 2015 on the



many years and an expert on Brighton and Hove's history, and a great collector of the town's antique prints. He never managed to start the project before he died, so in honour of his name several old collector-friends of his decided to complete what he had in mind.

Membership is by having a collection and having a continuing interest in the



**Images:** Opposite: 1823 aquatint by William Daniell of Thomas Read Kemp's new house in Brighton, the Temple, (now on Montpelier Road, and part of Brighton and Hove High School). In the foreground is the trackway which became Clifton Hill. Shoreham Harbour is in the distance.

Above: The Crown and Anchor at Preston (1831, aquatint). This image shows a crowd gathered for a coroner's inquest following a grisly murder. The Crown and Anchor survives today.

Right: The Prince and Princess of Wales visiting the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital: wood engraving from 1881.

committee's pleasure in honouring his contribution to our understanding of Brighton and Hove's heritage through our partnership with the SBPC in this project.

The new website is scheduled to be launched in November 2017.



prints, is masterminding the provision of the images and providing delightful and informative explanatory text.

The RS is delighted to be working with the SBPC. Many members will remember Henry Smith and will share the



# AMEX HOUSE AND HOVE TOWN HALL

## The Heritage of the Almost New and Not-Quite Old

**David Robson** considers the heritage value of two twentieth century buildings which have been lost or substantially changed recently

### **We tend to think of heritage assets as the survivors of a distant past.**

Buildings of historic interest are generally assumed to be at least a hundred years old, and more recent buildings are rarely considered worthy of official listing. When the Regency Society was founded in 1946 its sphere of interest was defined as ending in 1840 and it was only much later, following the death of Antony Dale, that its focus widened to include Victorian and twentieth century architecture.

It is possible to argue, however, that buildings become part of our heritage from the moment they are finished and occupied. Whether they qualify to be cherished and preserved should be decided not simply on the grounds of their age, but by taking into account their quality, significance and uniqueness. We should try to determine, as objectively as possible, the extent to which they are representative of the age in which they were built and the extent to which they contribute to their setting, and we should try not to be influenced by changes in taste or fashion.

During the past twelve months our city has lost two important examples of twentieth century architecture, both less than fifty years old, both demolished at the behest of the City Council, which has

acted furtively, with little if any publicity or public consultation.

The first of these is **Amex House**, a purpose-built office building in Edward Street, designed by Gollins, Melvin and Ward (GMW), leading modern architects of their day, and completed in 1977.

The design was carefully articulated in a





way which neatly camouflaged its nine-storey height – its lower three floors were set behind detached columns in a neo-classical manner, its top floor was recessed and its facades were carefully banded with neatly proportioned white horizontal panels. The overall effect seemed totally appropriate to its Brighton setting and it came to be known affectionately by some locals as ‘The Wedding Cake’.

The building was set back behind a pleasing south-facing piazza. In Edward Street – that horrid canyon that was bulldozed out by the Council in the 1960s – building and piazza together formed the most attractive feature between the Steine and Brighton College. The Regency Society

*Amex House before demolition began*



consistently praised the quality of its visual design.

As well as its nine floors above street level, Amex House also had several basement levels. A total of 100,000 tons of chalk were removed during its construction while 45,000 tons of concrete and 4,000 tons of steel were used in its superstructure. All of this represented a huge amount of embedded energy – energy that was simply wiped out when it was demolished.

Amex House was only thirty-nine years old and was still in good basic condition. Yes, the time had come to modernise its interiors, to upgrade its energy performance, to update its IT services; and yes, there was a problem of asbestos that needed to be resolved. But it had a floor area of some 30,000 square metres – the equivalent of 400 new homes or 200 small offices. It could surely have been used to house part of the University of Brighton or of the Royal Sussex County Hospital, or been divided into lettable office space for small businesses.

In demolishing this building the Council has not only removed from our city a unique example of good modern design – it has thrown away a valuable piece of real estate and squandered a huge investment of energy and effort.

The second demolition is that of the interior of **Hove Town Hall**. The Town Hall was built during the early 1970s by the architects Wells-Thorpe and Suppel to replace an earlier building by Alfred Waterhouse (*see page 13*) that had burned down in 1966. It is one of the few surviving representative and significant examples of post-war modern architecture to be found in the city. Less monumental than its

predecessor, its designers managed to navigate cleverly between the creation of an assertive civic icon and the need to harmonise with the surroundings. Its clock tower, though modest in height and in girth, is neatly placed to be clearly visible from afar, functioning admirably as a beacon and a marker for the centre of Hove. The choice of ribbed concrete chimed well with the light-coloured brickwork of the surrounding terraces, as well as with its large areas of glass creating an interior that was filled with light.

It was one of the very first of a new breed of town hall that sought to be more open, more transparent and more democratic, and it was remarkable in offering full wheelchair accessibility. Sadly, the building has not been well cared for and, over the years, has lost many of its original features including a Japanese garden and an open

loggia facing Church Road.

The interiors were perhaps of greater interest than the outside. They were developed from a careful evaluation of



*The former ceiling of the Great Hall, Hove Town Hall*

functional requirements which produced an articulated and legible system of circulation and a consistent language of detailing. The circulation spaces were generous, providing many opportunities for casual encounters, small exhibitions and the like, and the triple height entrance with its fully glazed grand staircase was very effective. But the Great Hall, with its faceted timber ceiling, its clerestory lighting and its careful detailing, was the *pièce-de-resistance* and was singled out for praise in the recent Pevsner Architectural Guide to Brighton and Hove.

As part of the effort to cut costs and reduce its estate, the council decided in 2015 to sell Kings House and shoe-horn its staff into this Town Hall. The building had local listing but, in





*The Great Hall, Hove Town Hall*

spite of efforts by the Twentieth Century Society, supported by the Regency Society of Brighton and Hove, it did not benefit from national listing. In such cases the council acts both as poacher and game-keeper. Although it was required to obtain planning permission for alterations to the exterior – mainly replacement of the patent glazing and the puncturing of new windows into the east elevation – it was not required to publish plans of intended changes to the interior and the Regency Society failed to obtain any details of what was being proposed. The Regency Society alone raised any active objection to the desecration that followed, other societies showing varying degrees of indifference or support.

The Great Hall and the Banqueting Suite have now gone – converted into three floors of cellular offices. The spacious

entrance hall has also disappeared, and the building, once open to the public and full of light, a symbol of transparent local democracy, is now an inaccessible warren of sometimes windowless cellular offices and hot-desks.

The Great Hall was the only substantial civic space in Hove – popular for concerts, public meetings and private functions. Its loss is symbolic of the colonisation of Hove by Brighton. Now all the city's major public spaces are to be found within the so-called 'cultural quarter' around the Royal Pavilion. The destruction of this important civic interior is an act of cultural vandalism that cannot be justified by simply repeating the depressing mantra that it is 'surplus to current requirements'. Hove has lost a modern interior of real quality as well as an important communal good.



elaborate bedding – altered the valley's character permanently. Some of the mid-twentieth century photography suggests that the gardens gradually lost a lot of floral content while maturing broadleaved trees gave substantial shielding in summer from the then relatively light traffic, and extensive transparency to the vistas in winter.

A colour photograph from 1951 of the south Victoria Gardens has several colourful large circular beds among the many mature deciduous trees; another from the same year, of the nocturnal Steine, recalls the coloured lights that glowed in the crowns of some of its trees. Numerous trees were lost in the 1987 storm, though considerable numbers have since been planted.

In the twenty-first century the reconfiguration and renewal of the Level is the most detailed development in the Valley Gardens for many years.

The council's conservation area character study (1995) describes the area's



*Tramlines under construction in Marlborough Place in 1901 - note the high fence around Victoria Gardens.  
(JGC)*

fundamental character as 'a "green corridor" of open space in the urban centre', and observes of the south Victoria Gardens, their 'simple bold appearance ... is enhanced by the line of mature trees encircling them'. This faintly undulating field of grass, crossed by artless earth paths, beside its glorious elms, possesses mysteriously rural quality. The incursions of roads into the valley landscape requires its own historical study.



*Queen Victoria in her gardens today*

## Current plans for Valley Gardens

The Council decided in November 2016 to commission technical design work for a project which has been in the making for some time to improve traffic flow in the Valley Gardens area. The intention is to simplify traffic by creating a two way system on the East side of the Gardens, for all traffic except buses and taxis (and access to the North Laine), thus allowing the West side to connect better with the rest of the city and make the gardens more usable by pedestrians and cyclists.

However, concerns remain about the impact of the scheme for buses in particular. Despite the fact that Government money has been secured for the scheme, we're not expecting progress in the immediate future.





## Hove Town Hall in earlier years

Hove Town Hall has a history of trouble with fire. The current building was damaged by a fire in 2015, believed to have originated in wiring to solar panels on the roof.

But the previous building, designed by Alfred Waterhouse (designer of the Natural History Museum and the Brighton Metropole Hotel) in red brick gothic style and opened in 1882, was devastated by a fire in 1966. It had a 2,000 seat Great Hall containing a fine organ. The bell tower contained a 12 bell carillon.

### *Images:*

above: photographic print 1885 (SBPC).

below: photograph in 1906 (JGC)

below: an aerial view after the fire in 1966.  
(Royal Pavilion and Museums Brighton and Hove)



# ON THE COMMITTEE'S RADAR

Background and a historic note on an important current issue

## The 'Waterfront Project'



*Black Rock today with Arundel Terrace in the background.*

The RS committee will be giving special consideration to the Council's proposal to strike a deal with Standard Life Investments to enable Churchill Square shopping centre to be enlarged by demolishing the Brighton Centre and the Kingswest. A new 10,000 seat conference and events centre at Black Rock is an integral part of the plan.

### Background

In its City Plan (part 1) published last year, the Council laid out its 30 year plan for expanding Churchill Square with an additional 20,000 square metres of retail space, possibly to include a cinema and other leisure facilities. The idea is to create

the centre of Brighton as a 'Primary Regional Shopping Centre for the South East'. The new centre would have a pedestrian 'gateway link' to the seafront, improved public transport provision and a better junction with the Clock Tower and Western Road. The Brighton Centre and Kingswest would be demolished.

At the same time, there is a plan to construct a new 25,000 square metre world class state of the art conference centre at Black Rock, capable of housing events for up to 10,000 people.

There is little in the way of flesh on the bones of this outline planning since the publication of the City Plan. The Council has

announced that it is working with Standard Life Investments on this project and that an initial £12m of government funding was allocated earlier this year. Planning permission will probably be sought during 2019.

Further details are thin on the ground - the Council says its negotiations with Standard Life Investments means that much needs to remain confidential at the moment.

### **The Regency Society and the Waterfront Project**

The committee has decided to pay particular attention to this scheme as it could have far reaching implications both for the City Centre and for the area around Black Rock and the Marina - including the Kemptown Estate. We're keeping a close eye on developments and will communicate with members through our monthly updates and on the website as more news emerges - including any comments we may make.

### **Black Rock: a historical note**

Black Rock marked the Eastern boundary of Brighton until 1928. The area was subject to regular erosion. The Abergavenny Arms (and other buildings) stood on the cliff above until they had to be demolished in the 1930s. Below the cliff, on the planned conference centre site, there was a lido from 1936 until 1978. Since then it has stood empty whilst plans for its use have come and gone, including a sports arena and ice rink (these plans were abandoned in 2012).

### **About 'On the committee's radar'**

*This column will form a regular feature in future issues, bringing background to a topical issue.*

*The best place to find out about the committee's views on current issues is the monthly members' email or our website: [regencysociety.org](http://regencysociety.org).*



*top: Black rock in the 1890s, with buildings perched precariously on the cliff top (JGC).  
middle: Black Rock Lido (JGC).  
bottom: Edwardian postcard of Black Rock*







## We had some fun - and learned a lot - in 2016 - 2017

### Lecture Series 2017-18

**27 September:** Timothy Mowl on Jane Austen and the Regency landscape

**8 November:** John Phibbs on Capability Brown

**6 December:** Kate Jordan on Post-Modernism

**10 January:** Nicola Wesbury on Downland Churches

**7 February:** Nick Hoar on Designing

Hospices: Care for the Dying

**7 March :** (Antony Dale Memorial **Lecture at the Royal Pavilion**) : Piers Gough (with Gavin Henderson) on the Rigorous Rapture of Blissed out Brighton

**11 April:** (John Small lecture) Tim Foster on New Theatres for Old.

All events are at 7 pm at City College, Pelham Street unless otherwise stated

Further details (and more events) to follow in members' email updates

*Views expressed by individual authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Regency Society.*

*Images in this issue of R S Journal are reproduced as follows:*

*Pages 5, 6 and 7: The Society of Brighton Prints Collectors. (SBPC). Pages 10 and 11: The 20th Century Society. Page 3 (Map) Brighton and Hove City Council. Top left on this page: Timothy Mowl. All other photographs are by members of the Regency Society.*

*Pages 12, 13 and 15 James Gray Photographic Archive (JGC).*

*Front cover: Amex House during demolition in March 2017.*