

R S JOURNAL

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GEORGIAN BRIGHTON'S BEST?

MARLBOROUGH HOUSE :
A MODEL FOR AN AMBITIOUS CITY?



MARLBOROUGH HOUSE AND AMBITION

Welcome to issue 4 of your Regency Society Journal, in which we delve into one building to extract a sense of our city, then and now.

The image of an archaeologist is of a dig: a little trench cuts deeper and deeper through *millefeuilles*, through the fragile layers of past cultural remains. Today, climate archaeologists do the same: their small bores, deep into a polar icecap, can tell us about the atmosphere of distant past times.

Much more modestly, just looking back at the life of one Brighton building, Marlborough House, through its few generations, can tell us much about the culture and atmosphere surrounding it; of the times in our city, particularly in the late 18th and the first quarter of the 21st centuries.

The top picture reminds us with a shock: we see the ambition to build a completely novel, shimmering image in a little higgledy-piggledy brick town.

Contrast the lack of ambition which has left it empty and now decaying for decades. Hitting rock bottom in 2017 as a vast advertisement for a far more attractive 'elsewhere'.



We look in these pages at how the building came about, and allow you to imagine how Brighton was perceived in the late 18th century. Sue Berry, looking more closely at Robert Adam's engagement with our town, then tells the little-known tale of his hopes as a speculative Royal architect.

We see the fortunes of Marlborough House reflected in our changing 20th century political history – from the educational hub of the Borough of Brighton to surplus to the requirements of the City of Brighton & Hove.

Who noticed that its role as the engine room for great 20th century educational ambitions paralleled its own decaying invisibility as an emblem of Brighton's cultural quality?

Finally, all efforts this century end with the bathos of the current owner being refused permission to spruce up the front – a few weeks after he had already, very publicly, done it.

Are we happy that here is how Brighton's patrimony is perceived in the first quarter of the 21st century?

John McKean, editor, November 2017

THE START : SHERGOLD TO MARLBOROUGH



In the later 18th century, the road from London entered Brighton down the east of the little old town, that rectangle which today we call The Lanes, bounded by the romantically named West Street, North Street, East Street and South Street. The last was already eroded into the waves by the time of this map of 1779. Expansion was starting on the west side of West Street, north of North Street and on the curving east side of East Street, backing onto the enclosed paddock called the Steyne. Here houses were beginning to be built further north, as East Street extended beyond the Castle Inn in the 1770s, backing onto the ponding valley to its east. And, by the late 1780s, buildings were also beginning to rise on the opposite slopes further east (between what became St James' Street and the sea).

So in the 1760s, Samuel Shergold, owner of the fashionable Castle Inn, was investing in houses to rent. He bought land behind East Street, and had a house built facing the other way, to the southeast, overlooking the

fenced land known as The Steyne and beyond it to the sea. As Sue Berry notes, "by that date, demand for accommodation for visitors exceeded supply and so it must have seemed to be a good investment, but Shergold opted for a conservative style of house, typical of the period in Sussex." Its three red-brick storeys (and dormer-lit attic) enabled Shergold to accommodate more fashionable visitors to the



The Steyne (1778) and map (1779) are on the new RS Brighton Prints website



Marlborough House.

Both images are details from the 1778 engraving by P. Mazell after J. Donowell, seen fully on the previous page



seaside resort (left, in the image above) than in his Castle Inn a hundred yards further north (far right, above).

In September 1771, Shergold sold the house to George Spencer, 4th Duke of Marlborough, an early and regular visitor to the resort, who, with his retinue of over 40 staff, brought considerable business to the little town. Further up East Street, between the main road and the open valley, one of the new houses built as fashionable lodgings was the large Grove House. This development by Percy Charles Wyndham, a brother of the Earl of Egremont of Petworth House, was taken by the Prince of Wales when he visited Brighton in 1783.

Three years later, the Prince's local agent arranged a three-year lease on Kemp's lodging house just to its south, and thus began the tale of what, over a long generation, became the Royal Pavilion we know today. So by the 1780s there were distinctive buildings beginning to turn their backs towards entrances off East Street and addressing the Steyne and open

fields to their east.

Marlborough sold his house in 1786, and within a few years concluded negotiations with Wyndham to purchase Grove House for himself. This soon was known by his own name, just as a newly built row of houses facing it across East Street became Marlborough Row (map page 8).

Though no Marlborough ever returned to Shergold's house, by an odd quirk his name has returned to where his earlier house had been - a house which he wouldn't even recognise, as it was shortly to receive its complete makeover under its new owner, W. G. Hamilton, M.P..

Rt. Hon. William Hamilton, a leading politician unfairly known as 'single speech Hamilton', had previously been Chancellor of the Exchequer of Ireland. Stephen Myall, in his notes on the new Regency Society Brighton Prints website, quotes Lord Charlemont in 1792 saying of Hamilton: 'There was a man whose talents were equal to every undertaking, and yet from indolence ... he has done nothing'.



The house Hamilton bought, from Marlborough, (left). This tiny distant view from 1765 is a detail of the panorama by Lambert below. This, from the north-east, may correct the vertical exaggeration in the previous panorama from the south-east.

The house Hamilton built for himself, (right, seen c.1800) replaced that opposite.



HAMILTON'S HOUSE

Not quite nothing. In Brighton, he immediately planned to enlarge this house. He bought a little more land and engaged one of the most fashionable of architects. He wanted the classical appearance of the country houses or the mansions which the gentry were raising in great cities like Bath or Edinburgh. With Italianate pediments, its openings clean and symmetrical, its surfaces smooth and pale, in the little red-brick seaside resort it and its owner would certainly, as Hamilton intended, be noticed. And while its entrance yard remained on East Street, its new façade would face The Steine. His architect was Robert Adam, and the result was what remains today: precisely described by the late Nicholas Antram in his recent Pevsner Guide as "a Palladian great house in miniature."

From 1786, Adam remodelled the house

completely, altering its proportion dramatically; he both lowered it and widened it using the extra land Hamilton had acquired. It must have been built quickly (see the 1787 drawing on page 10), and in 1789 the Prince of Wales came to stay for a few days. Hamilton's health suddenly deteriorated in winter 1791-2, by 1793 he had leave of absence from the House of Commons but probably didn't again leave London. The Prince, however, returned to Hamilton's new Brighton house in 1795, occupying it for some weeks with his legal and publicly recognized wife, Caroline of Brunswick.

From here the Prince could oversee how his own architectural project was developing. Rather in parallel, slightly further up East Street, he had Henry Holland, his architect at Carlton House in London, transforming the lodging house (which he had once leased) into his own, much larger 'Marine Pavilion.' Its classicism was much more French than Adam's Neo-Palladian, yet it paralleled the slightly earlier makeover of

Detail of P. Canot's engraving after James Lambert' 1765 perspective of Brighthelmston as far as the Isle of Wight



Marlborough House in its low and clean lines, its symmetry and smooth surfaces. And, particularly, in turning its back on its entrance on East Street. Holland's drawing clearly names the view to the east, over the marshy pond between Mighella Field and the Steyne, as "principal elevation."

In July 1796, Hamilton died. Suggestions that he had had to restrict his architect's expenditure in Brighton are reinforced when we read it being said at the time that his death was "just in time to save him from absolute poverty." His Brighton house was auctioned for 4,000 guineas (£4,200). The Prince of Wales never revisited it. Four years later, his illegal and not publicly recognised wife, Maria Fitzherbert, bought the house which still stands next door, (pictured on pages 12-13).

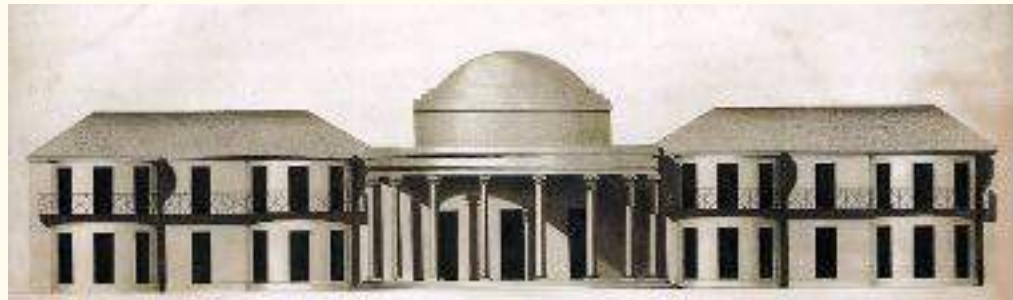
Even today, despite a century of clumsy carelessness under the YMCA, this could - with tender, loving and well-financed care - be returned to the charm William Porden brought to it for Mrs Fitzherbert. Next door, most of Adam's elegant makeover for Hamilton also survives, or did so until very recently. Here too, tender, loving and well-financed care are in desperate need today. But so is public will, and some understanding of what ambition can do to boost a city.

But first, we go back slightly. What did Mr Adam bring to Brighton? His design for Hamilton we will focus on: but that is not the whole story of Robert Adam's relationship with Brighton.

The tale of his second, much less well-known, and much more grand, project for Brighton is now taken up by Sue Berry.

East Brighton, in Budgen's map of 1788 - ten years after that on page 3. The detail (opposite, top) shows, on either side of the Castle Inn, Robert Adam's house for 'W. G. Hamilton Esq. ' and Henry Holland's Marine Pavilion for Prince George.

1796 engraving below is Holland's "Principal Elevation of the Pavilion at Brighton belonging to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales"



ROBERT ADAM AND BRIGHTON

Sue Berry



Robert Adam made Hamilton's house one of the outstanding buildings of Georgian Brighton. Its contemporary rivals were Henry Holland's complete recreation of Kemp's lodging house into the Marine Pavilion, John Crunden's interiors of the Assembly Rooms at the Castle Inn (part of which is now First Base Day Centre on Upper North Street), Robert Golden's Assembly Rooms at the Old Ship (of which one survives) and William Porden's innovative Dome.

We do not know why Hamilton, a London-Scot, chose fellow expat Robert Adam. But Adam had a good reason for wanting such a commission. He longed for patronage from a member of the Royal family, and what better than to catch the eye of the fashion-conscious visitor, George, Prince of Wales. Adam was so keen for the attention of the Prince that he also designed a speculative scheme for a house in Brighton for Mrs Fitzherbert.

"East front towards the Stein [sic] of a house for Mrs Fitzherbert at Brighton"

That is the caption on this undated drawing of the grand facade for a mansion, presumably prepared by Robert Adam in the hope that he be asked to build it alongside her 'illegal' husband's Pavilion.



Robert Adam probably drew up the design for Mrs Fitzherbert while work was progressing on Hamilton's house; perhaps while visiting his Brighton site.

It is not certain where this project was to be built, but it was probably intended for the site of Grove House (*left*). The grand scale of the architectural scheme, and its plan orientation certainly fits that location.

Lettering on the section drawing clearly states that there is new building work attached to reshaped existing building - much as there was, at a more modest scale, for Hamilton, down the road. As was first pointed out by A. T. Bolton in 1922, the east-west section (*top, opposite*) follows the massing of Grove House.

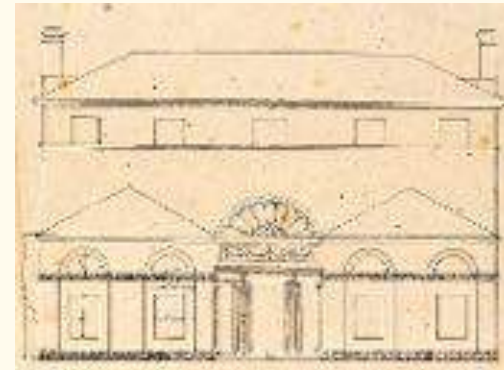
This design was probably prepared in the later 1780s while Grove House was on the market. In those years, before Marlborough clinched his purchase of it in 1790, Grove House was being let out. Mrs Fitzherbert was then living discreetly in a terraced house more or less opposite in Marlborough Row (*map, left*).

If she saw Adam's designs, and understood them to apply to Grove House, she may have realised that, had they been implemented, they would have overwhelmed the Prince's Marine Pavilion. That would not have been a tactful project for her at that time.

Grove House's size and the likely purchase and revamping



"Section from East (left) to West (right) through the old and new Parts of the House for Mrs Fitzherbert at Brighton"



Among the Adam drawings collected by Sir John Soane is this project, still little known in Brighton. The magnificent mansion entitled as for Mrs Fitzherbert has a restrained classical entrance (presumed on East Street) under a vast fan-light, an internal court (with dome to light kitchens below) and, to its east side, vaulted reception rooms and a domed, cylindrical bay partly indoors, partly colonnade under a balcony, to the Steine.

Opposite: Grove House (top) to be replaced, we presume, had Mrs Fitzgerald taken the bait laid by Adam; his main elevation is below.

costs is indicated by its value in the Land Tax for Brighton being among the highest in the town. It would have been a costly project.

Mrs Fitzherbert already owned two houses, one on Pall Mall in London which was being modernised in 1787, the other in Twickenham. Could she have afforded a third? In 1800, she eventually did, buying the one next to Adam's house for Hamilton, and having Porden recreate this for her.

Meanwhile Grove House itself would become subsumed into the Prince's Pavilion, whose footprint extended north when he bought it in 1812 from Marlborough. As *The Brighton Ambulator* (1818) wrote 'In 1814, now connected with the royal edifice, a suite of apartments were added on the north side which had been

much required. It is useless to give a description of this range of building, as it will shortly come down, in order to give place for further improvements to the Pavilion'.

Thus Grove House was buried under Nash and Crace's Music Room. Adam had flown his kite by the seaside, and lost it.

Although Robert Adam failed to gain Royal patronage, his subtle and complete reconstruction of the house we now know as Marlborough House was a minor masterpiece in the promotion of grandeur on a tight site, with a client who was determined to control the budget. And to this we turn our attention.

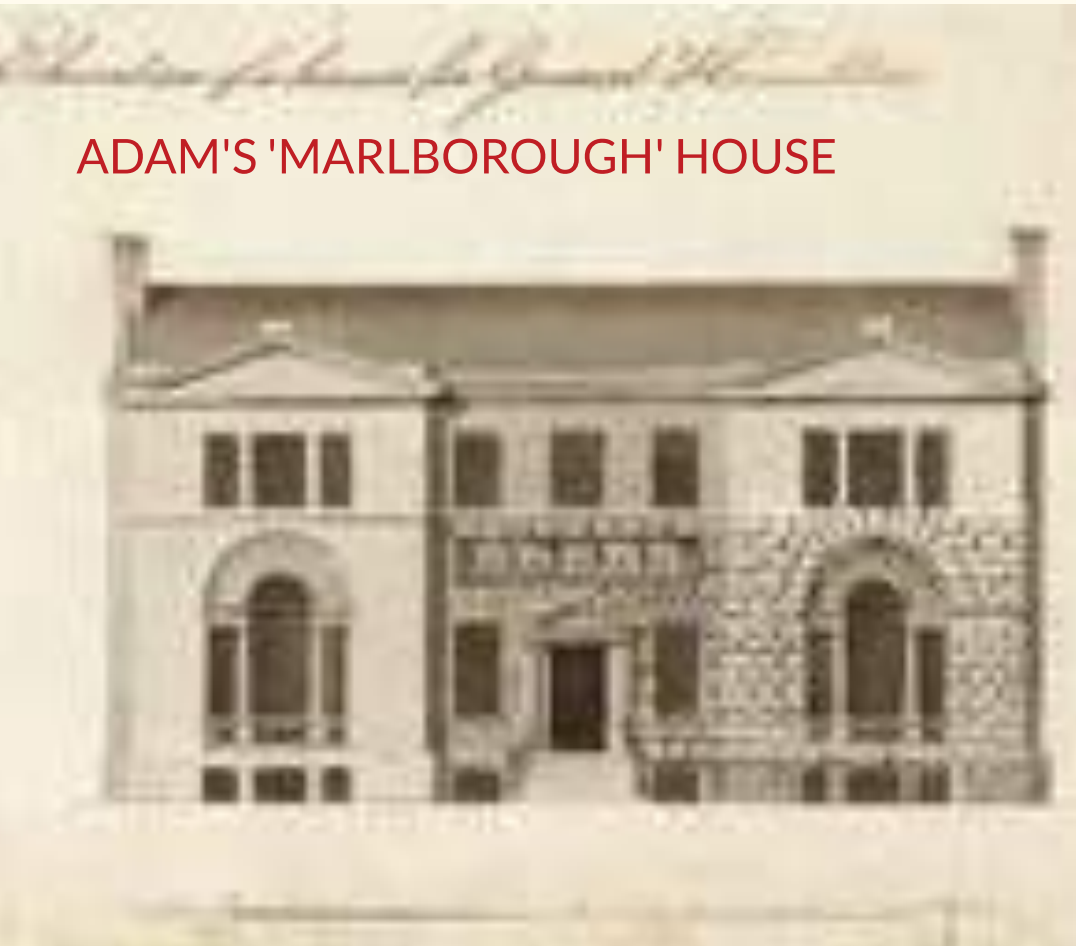
Samuel Hieronymous Grimm's drawing of Hamilton's new house is dated 1787 - the year after Hamilton bought Marlborough House from the 4th Duke. Even though it clearly is unfinished, it shows how speedily Hamilton and Adam acted on their grand design - and that the image is newsworthy even when incomplete.



Painted a decade after Grimm's painting opposite, this charming image shows the house in use (chimney smoking, door open) in 1797, the year after Hamilton's death and the house's sale.

(This is part of a badly torn painting on card in the Royal Pavilion & Museum collection.)

ADAM'S 'MARLBOROUGH' HOUSE



Robert Adam was used to revamping buildings on tight plots. in Sue Berry's words "He used the space well but his approach, confined by Hamilton's tight budget, resulted in changes in ceiling levels which can still be seen on the main, lower floor. Adam removed the house's original east wall, moving out into what had been the earlier forecourt. Here, and extending south on the strip of extra land bought by Hamilton, were the new 'public rooms': the square central hall, the dining room to the right (with its apse end for serving) and the drawing room with its elaborate entablature and cornice to the left. Behind this row of rooms, the ceiling heights reduce; so, for example, that of the octagonal library, in the older building, is lower."

Adam was asked to make the entrance from

Adam's elevation for 'General Hamilton' shows the rather different effects of the stucco surface as plain or heavily rusticated to simulate masonry (discussed on page 13). Note that the (existing) flint-faced base storey was in Adam's original design.

The two paintings above, perhaps miniaturise the next-door house (which Mrs Fitzherbert bought in 1800) to emphasise Hamilton's. Note also that Grimm (top left) omits the incised arches which embrace the two grand Venetian windows.

East Street as impressive as possible as well as accommodating the service buildings. These have been lost but are seen on the plan on page 12. The view from East Street into the yard still shows how tight a space it was, with buildings either side of the entrance as today.

Hamilton's letter to his architect, and the surviving drawings suggest that Adam had to economise on the décor due to Hamilton's concern about the budget. Nevertheless, the decorative interiors are of a high quality and include plasterwork attributed to the well-known Joseph Rose, the son of the Sussex born man who did the best plasterwork in Stanmer House.

Externally, a roof of high-quality Westmorland slate topped the most striking feature: the east façade. Reminiscent of a country house in the Palladian style, this typical Adam design was unlike anyone else's house in this town. Adam manages to fit in a long, two-storey symmetrical façade around an entrance with fluted 'Tuscan' columns. The great windows of the ground floor rooms are Adam's own 'Venetian window,' each set within a round-arched recess. And the whole, impressively wide, façade is framed by the garden area which remains into the Steine today. The Lords of the Manor of Brighton-

Lewes allowed Hamilton to have this land taken from the Steine on condition that it was not built on (*see plot plan, oppsite*).

Button's 1805 directory calls the building "much admired for its great simplicity, fronted with artificial stone." Robert Adam, as he often did, let stuccoed brick simulate the much more expensive stone. Even if not totally convincing as stone, it stood out here, being commented on for its striking texture and pale colour, amongst surroundings mainly of brick, flint and mathematical tiles.

Adam and his brothers were

exclusive licensees of a 'stucco resembling stone' on which a Swiss clergyman, John Liardet was granted a patent in 1773. They had used it on other houses, but it was not always a success. Years before the commission of Marlborough House, Liardet's magic stucco had embroiled the Adam brothers in patent warfare with another architect whose own patented stucco contained serum of blood! But these court cases made very public that the actual quality of Liardet's material was much in doubt. Work in Brighton began in 1786 but, as Frank Kelsall noted 30 years ago, already "by 1780 the deficiencies of the [Liardet] stucco were becoming

apparent. The [Adam] brothers faced a major claim for damages and their agreement with Liardet collapsed in recrimination."

Intriguingly William Adam (boss of the family company, and Robert and John Adam's father) wrote to his sons in 1779 that "the failures very generally [are] in those houses that have had the joints cut to resemble stone" and the stucco received "a considerable check to its



Above: Hamilton's house engraved by Eleanor Lay, published in 1788, dedicated by permission to Mrs Fitzherbert, who in 1800 bought the house on the right. Below: The houses of Lady Anne Murray (left) and Mrs Fitzherbert (right, rebuilt by Porden for her), Thomas Wise engraving of 1806 (it seems with a weather-vane as in the image above) and, bottom, an anonymous aquatint of around 1805.



reputation for durability."

Is the Adam facade drawing on page 10 hedging its bets in showing the stucco on the right resembling blocks of stone, and on the left resembling 'porridge' (a description used by the Chief Justice in the stucco's 1777 first trial)?

Liardet, Kelsall makes clear, was unrealistic and greedy, and the Adams "spent 1780 and 1781 in fruitless attempts to reconcile him to the fact that the stucco was not going to make his

fortune." I spell this out as it has uncomfortable echoes in the house's problems today.

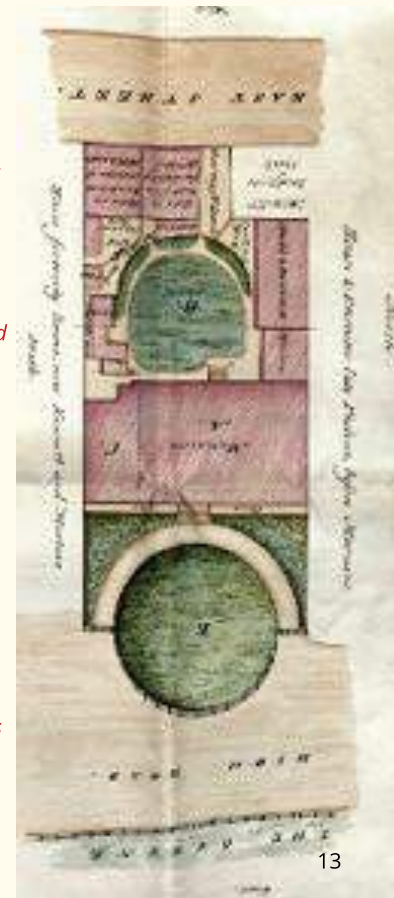
It is nearly a decade later before Adam is designing for Hamilton in Brighton. Sue Berry comments "If 'Liardet's' was used here, then this is a rare example but only testing it will tell that." Nick Tyson, on the Regency Society web-site asserts without citation: "For several decades after Adam's work, this finish [Liardet's cement, a patent oil-render] remained visible."

The plot plan from 1818 (right) shows the reality; the Adam plan (far left) from 1786 shows his sketch for a stylish and appropriate use of the full plot. In both, East Street, i.e. west, is to the top.

So the range of service spaces centred on the sunny, bowed kitchen is to the north; stables and dirty services to the shaded south.

Note the subtle planning of the house. Adam's desired symmetrical facades both for the town entrance (on the footprint of Shergold's - 'Mansion A' on plot plan) and for the wider Steyne facade (incorporating the additional plot 'C') creates an internal asymmetry which the architect skilfully builds into a carefully constructed sequence of rooms on the main, upper ground, floor.

Plot plan from ESRO ACC 8011



TO BECOME EDUCATION POWERHOUSE



It is difficult to find post-Georgian images of our building - which does not bear the name 'Marlborough House' through the 19th and into the 20th century, as it becomes increasingly unnoticed for itself.

Left: a fragment from a panorama looking north-west from the Chain Pier, 1860.

Opposite: as Education Offices in 1890s and 1940s.

Interior when occupied by Brian Eno's sound, as part of the Brighton Festival, 2010

For this fine building, while Brighton expanded and incorporated itself as a borough, the 19th century passed quietly, and for the most part in considerable elegance.

Soon after Hamilton died, the house was purchased by Lady Anne Murray and (in Attree's *Topography of Brighton and picture of the Roads from thence to the Metropolis*, of 1809) the 'The Mansion of Lady Anne Murray [is] justly considered as the first in Brighton'. During occasional summer seasons the Princess of Wales stayed there. Lady Anne Murray ran a popular and fashionable establishment until her death in 1818, when the house passed to her niece, Lady Elizabeth Mary Finch Hatton. Stephen Myall points out that, interestingly, in references 'since Hamilton's day it is not called Marlborough House. Was it really over a century before that name crept back?

By the 1850s it was the family home of Charles Sabine Augustus Thellusson (Commodore of the Royal Victoria Yacht Club) who, when he inherited vast slave-generated wealth, moved to build his own pile, Brodsworth Hall, Doncaster. Later it was bought by Francis Henry Beidenbach, perfumer of Bond Street, who

made it a home for his family. The Beidenbachs were the house's last private residents, and in 1870 it was bought as an investment by John Beal, stationer and publisher in East Street.

Beal used the basement for storage and leased the rest to the United School District of Brighton and Preston for their offices. Two decades later they bought it for £7,000. For a full century, by far its longest unchanged use, it was the local education headquarters. Thus it was that Marlborough House became the engine room of that great display of post-Second World War civic ambition in which education was used as a key driver to transform Brighton.

Gavin Henderson takes up the story: "It was overseen by a very remarkable man, W. G. Stone, Bill Stone. As Director of Education from 1947, for a quarter of a century he was a really incredible figure in terms of turning Brighton round; a real unsung hero. For it was his vision to turn Brighton into somewhere other than a seaside resort."

Stone lobbied endlessly for Brighton to have a university and, following a 1956 meeting in the



Royal Pavilion, he persuaded the UGC to support it and the House of Lords in 1957 to discuss it. In 1958 it was approved, the first of Britain's 'New Universities'. Even before Sussex's first students arrived in 1961, Stone was advising Norwich and other cities keen to follow Brighton's lead.

Henderson continues: "He was a real pioneer. It was he who established the college of education at Falmer, and the college of advanced technology, now all part of the University of Brighton. There was the new college of commerce and catering on Pelham Street. He oversaw the huge expansion of



school building across Brighton, and he always ensured that every school had an auditorium in which an orchestra could assemble."

Gavin Henderson, perhaps Brighton's most important native educationalist but also musician, muses "Stone and his assistant, Peter Sawbridge, were incredible people. Sawbridge also created the Brighton Youth Orchestra which was run from Marlborough House - this building was a real engine of all that vision. For me Marlborough House still symbolizes all those incredible developments of education."

In the 1974 reorganisation of local government, the county took over education. Brighton council was left with this rather tatty old office building, even if in a prime location. It eventually became the headquarters of what Gavin



Henderson calls "the entertainments department." This also involved conferences, and soon these came to dominate civic thinking – the serious development of the conference trade was to become the next great driver for Brighton. The building of the Brighton Centre was overseen by 'resort director' Tony Hewison from Marlborough House. It was not a period noted for its awareness of architectural quality.

Was anyone interested in Marlborough House itself? "No. Not many, really," replies Gavin Henderson when talking about the years he spent there. Until he became its director in 1983, the Brighton Festival had always been run out of a London concert agency office. Henderson began to widen its range from classical music towards today's multi-arts bonanza. He also moved it from London to a base in Marlborough House. The Festival occupied varied, little rooms, half-way up the stair and in the attic. The great dining room was a cluttered open-plan office space; the drawing room was "variously accessible, with brochures and publicity material and so on."

So Marlborough House was Brighton's tourist information centre, perhaps a not inappropriate use. Had we followed resourceful European cities who increasingly built on visitor interest in, and cultural value of, their urban heritage, Marlborough House might have grown up into a 21st century city interpretation centre; even a 'Hub,' as the one (wonderfully converted former church) at the top of Edinburgh's High Street.



But no. This was not Brighton's ambition.

The Festival moved out; the Tourism and Resort Services Department of the Borough Council continued in its not very appropriate and certainly unloved spaces into the 1990s, by which time it seems that Marlborough House was become largely redundant. Finally the dining-room ceiling collapsed and, Nick Tyson (RS trustee) says, the council made no effort to record Adam's lost plaster ornament or replace it to the original pattern.

To a new unitary authority, this rather tatty old warren seemed beyond its sell-by date. Perhaps they felt they'd got a real bargain, finally flogging it off for around half a million pounds in 1999.



Top and left 1947, above: 2010

TODAY:

ANOTHER FINE MESS

In 1999 Anthony Antoniadis became, in the words of *The Argus*, "the multi-millionaire owner of one of Brighton's most prized buildings." He bought it as headquarters for what he hoped his company would become but which, after the 2008 economic crash, it didn't.

At the start however, an enthusiastic programme of restoration works was begun. But it was unresearched and amateurish, according to Nick Tyson. "I was too late to stop the firm he hired from lopping chunks of the original Adam cement from the front of the building, ... [and] the stripping off of much historical fabric that was significant to the building and which could have greatly aided archaeological enquiry."

Later, however, Antoniadis appointed Tyson, indefatigable warrior for Regency architecture, to guide the repairs and, with Neil England (former RS trustee), to restore the façade in line with Robert Adam's designs. "Part of this saw the reinstatement of the front elevation to a Liardet's style of finish," Tyson says, "with permission from English Heritage and Listed Building Consent."

"Unfortunately though, some two years after starting repair works, Antoniadis abandoned all activity and closed-up the building once again, leaving it empty and uncared for," he adds.

Over the subsequent dozen years, Tyson noted a catalogue of concerns:

When Adam's original windows were repaired and restored, the 18th century interior window linings and shutters were removed, labelled and set aside to be reinstalled. Where are they now?

New window sashes were made to match the woods originally used by Adam. For the great 'Venetian' windows, the mahogany's oil-based internal finish left the timber visible, as originally. A few years later, Antoniadis had them painted over.

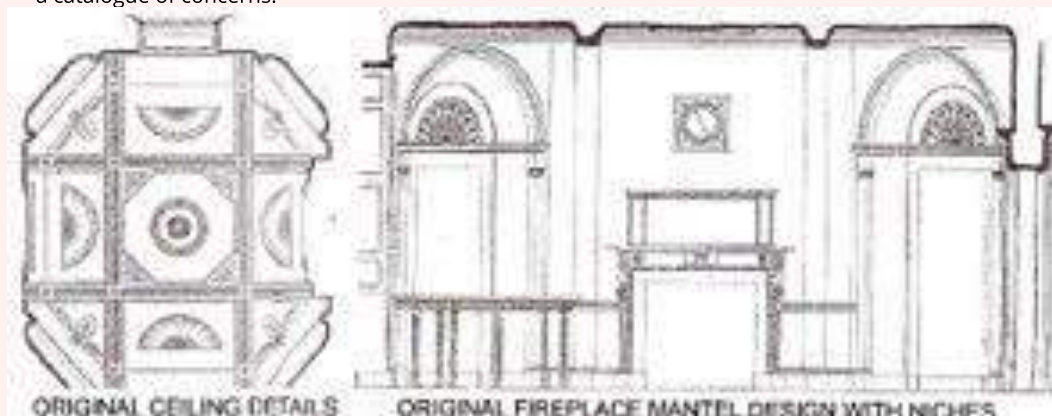
At the time works stopped, there was a very fine, 18th century rear portico. It has vanished (right, photograph November 2017).



Original 18th century dormer windows were trashed and replaced with double-glazed roof lights. The owner was forced to replace them - with a different modern rooflight.

Original building fabric at the back was replaced with concrete block-work, cement render and a concrete floor. The original materials were not only significant historically but allowed the building to breathe which cement-based materials do not.

"All," Tyson adds, "without permission and again no action was taken over this flagrant disregard for planning law."



From *The Architects' Journal*, 4 February, 1931

Roof and gutter areas were left in very poor condition when the works stopped. Rain caused ceiling plaster to fall and structurally dangerous rot to set in. From the empty and insecure building, thieves took the 18th century wind vane off the roof and its associated dial from the library; the tragic loss of a very rare feature. Recently thieves removed original and 19th century door fittings, using such force that original Adam mahogany doors were split.

Finally, adding the warning of the West Pier's story, Nick Tyson says there is no fire detection and control system. A journalist visited in 2015:

"It was a desolate experience. Water has seeped through the roof, the original Adam fireplaces are long gone, destroyed in a fire in a north London warehouse, the suite of rooms on the ground floor, described as "exquisite" by Pevsner, are crammed with broken office furniture and tatty old files, and the walls are covered in graffiti left behind by squatters...."

"Faced with a recalcitrant owner," that article continued, "the authority did the only thing it felt able to: it fired off a stream of letters." There was another flurry of letters in June, July and August 2012; but "at no point did the council seek to compulsorily purchase Marlborough House." (*The Guardian*, 5 August 2015)

In response to a Freedom of Information request, the council insisted that officers have "encouraged" Antoniades to repair the building and to bring it back into use. The council

declared the required works satisfactorily completed by the end of November 2012.

WHY DOES NOTHING CHANGE?

Anthony Antoniades has talked of a high-end restaurant, a private members' club, and then a mansion for a Chinese millionaire. This last floundered with Brexit, it is said. "It seems," to quote *The Guardian*, "that Antoniades quickly tired of his bauble."

He has scuppered numerous plans to restore the property, say critics. Is his hoped-for sale price simply unrealistic? In response, Antoniades blames all on the council's forcing him properly to respect the building. "I have had 15 different approaches since I bought it and I have said yes to everything - but then it comes to planning and they say 'you can't move that piece of wood' even if it's only 50 years old," he told *The Argus* earlier this year.

Though he said "I would want to see it as a commercial building - Its position is not ideal for a single home, " in 2015 he commissioned a tiny, unknown architectural practice to prepare a tasteless, millionaire dwelling. Marlborough House, extraordinarily not in a conservation area (but described as "adjoining 'Old Town'"), had its use changed to 'single dwelling' and this scheme awarded full planning permission.

As *The Argus* drooled: *"It would have a family room, TV room, kitchen, utility, plunge pool, sauna and wine cellar in the basement with a drawing room, dining room, cloak room, gymnasium and*

music room on the ground floor. The first floor would have a master bedroom with en-suite and dressing room, five additional family or guest bedrooms, a family bathroom and a gallery while the second floor would accommodate staff and a games room."

Jim Gowans (former RS trustee), for the Conservation Advisory Group, called for a deferral to allow a full survey to be carried out to check on the conversion's impact on "what is after the Royal Pavilion, the most important historical building in the city of Brighton and Hove". A councillor responded "you talk about a deferral, but with most of these old buildings, the longer you leave them then the worse the deterioration and I don't think we can leave them any longer." Oh, I fear, yes we can.

Clare Charlesworth, Historic England's principal south-east adviser, said (in 2015) "Our hands are tied to some extent if a private owner cannot or will not maintain the building. We are an advisory body. We can help the council with an enforcement notice if the building is being

damaged, but we can also help private owners if they are not sure how to conserve their property."

Nothing happens.

In 2014, Historic England adds Marlborough House to its register of 'buildings at risk.'

In 2015 Tyson tells *The Guardian* " It is trapped between a man with an ego and a council that doesn't have the gumption to demand the work that is required."

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Marlborough House returned to the boil this year when the visiting crowds for the Brighton Festival and Fringe were faced with our one Robert Adam building scaffolded and displaying a vast hoarding for British Airways holiday in the sun. While many objected to the visual outrage, the experts had more serious concerns.

First: had they permission to despoil our town centre at street level in this way?

Second, was the painting already being done on the facade without permission?

Third, importantly, could this work to the facade be carelessly destroying rather than restoring the carefully researched wall covering?

The council contacted the owner, reminding him that Listed Building Consent would be necessary to do what, um, he was clearly already doing to the wall. And it warned that an application for permission to do what he was doing would be likely to fail. The doing continued to completion. An application for retrospective permission was

Three images from the public Facebook page of 'Agora Chartered Architects', opposite: posted on 21 March 2016, left: on 16 February .

In the past few weeks, the company no longer calls itself 'architects' and this Facebook presence has been removed. (See page 24 for detail)



left: 2015 plan of the mansion scheme which got permission.



eventually submitted.

Antoniades' cavalier disregard for procedure and law, but especially for his public duty of custodianship of a civic heritage, is clear in the immensely thorough and professional *Heritage Statement* commissioned from his agents (Agora Chartered Architects) to support the application. I quote it in its entirety:

Have you consulted the East Sussex Historic Environment Record? **No**

Have you sought pre-application heritage advice from the relevant local planning authority? **No**

Have you sought pre-application heritage advice from Historic England? **No**

What is important about the affected heritage assets - Use this space to describe the significance of the heritage assets identified

The aim is the importance of maintaining a Grade 1 listed building in the Robert Adams (sic) style.

How will the proposals impact on the significance of the heritage assets?

The proposed will enhance the significance of the listed building

How has the proposal been designed to conserve the significance of the heritage asset(s)

A restoration message to conserve the heritage

No one who has seen this last reply has been able to suggest what it might mean.

Historic England and everyone else consulted recommended refusal. Unsurprisingly, what had already been completed, was refused

permission to be undertaken.

Regency Society chair Roger Hinton said: "serious action has to be taken. It shows a complete disregard for planning laws. We would like to see its owner behaving properly." A city council spokeswoman told *The Argus*: "The painting of the building without the necessary Listed Building Consent is being investigated and the owner faces possible action."

For this issue of the *RS Journal*, the Principal Planning Officer (Conservation), Tim Jefferies, sent us an authorised statement on behalf of the city council. It says that "the council are very much committed to finding a way of bringing the building back into long term use in a manner that conserves its special interest. ... it is one of our highest priorities. ... In the meantime we have been working with the owner to ensure that the building remains in a good state of repair, both externally and internally. ... We will continue to pursue the necessary action to restore the building to its authorised appearance but we will always seek to achieve this via negotiation wherever possible and as part of a wider approach to securing the long term future of the building."

No parsnips buttered, then, with this platitudinous finery.

Is Marlborough House the second most important Regency building in the city?

No, said Anthony Antoniades in 2015. "There is a lot of kidology about the Royal Pavilion. It's a pile of crap. Marlborough House is the jewel in the crown of Brighton. In *The Argus*, earlier this year he added: "I am not the best man to preserve Marlborough House, I'm just a good

Brighton's 18th century Grade 1 listed building, front (The Argus, May 2017) and back (in November 2017)

Our "most important historical building," says its present owner. Is this also what its previous owner thinks?



custodian waiting for someone to realise their dream." If Antoniades is sadly unrealistic about his own dream, how long are we all going to have to wait?"

"It needs an expert," he said to *The Guardian*. "And that's not me." In which case, he must relinquish control or nothing will happen.

Hinton adds, "It is not for us to say who should own this building but whoever it is should be treating it properly." Finally, for Tyson, "perhaps most worrying of all is not the action of the owners but the actions of BHCC and the other statutory agencies." It is, he concludes, "a shocking testament to the poor level of oversight and concern for the property."

Whenever the City Council seems unwilling to act or there are claims that it cannot afford to, that softly softly is not actually doing nothing, that consultation and agreement is better than enforcement (and anyway, whichever way there would be no change), then it should be immediately reminded of Hastings Pier. The officially designated UK Best Building of 2017, winner of the Stirling Prize a few weeks ago, was resurrected from the ashes of a fire which might resonate with our memories of the West Pier. This has been powered by *Locality* - whose subtitle is "Communities ambitious for change" - working with a group called CADO.

References:

A. T. Bolton, *The Works of Robert & John Adam*, 1922

Frank Kelsall, 'Liardet versus Adam', *Architectural History*, 1984, p. 118

John Keenan, *The Guardian* 'Marlborough House: Architectural gem ignored by its city' 5 August 2015

Neil Vowles, *The Argus* 25th May 2017

Emma Curtin, 'Local control of regeneration agenda,' *The Conversation*, 3 November 2017 (theconversation.com)

In Hastings, as a recent article by Emma Curtin explains, "the pressure for compulsory purchase (CPO) came from the local community. Councils are often risk averse and prefer to avoid confrontational action such as CPOs - which can result in significant legal costs if things don't go according to plan...." A trust was formed and began raising funds, "but the project remained in limbo due to its 'difficult owners'.... The necessary building repairs were identified and [the owner] given an opportunity to carry them out. When this didn't happen, the council was in a position to acquire the pier using a CPO. The pier was then immediately transferred to the trust, in what is known as a 'back-to-back' agreement. The success of this strategy is a credit to the willingness of both parties [council and community] to work hard at developing a constructive relationship and to try a new approach."

CADO, central to the Hastings project, is no quango; its acronym stands for *Community Assets in Difficult Ownership*, its mission being that it "seeks to raise awareness of buildings which are precious to local communities, but which the owners seem to have no interest in sorting out." Brighton could do it too.

But such action, as *Locality's* subtitle suggests, can only come from a community ambitious for change.



To care for Marlborough House, we need to care for Brighton

WHAT DO YOU THINK ?

a future for Marlborough House



Have you thoughts on how best the city might exploit the civic value of this wonderful asset at our core?

Would you like the Regency Society to be active in steering its future?

Have you thoughts or ideas you would like to share with other RS members?

Would you like the RS to discuss it and show how similar situations in other cities have moved forward?

Do tell us! Write, ring or button-hole a committee member at an RS meeting

Do you know the Holborne Museum in Bath?
(outline plan by Robert Adam, today run by a Trust, new Eric Parry extension at the back Heritage Lottery, city and public funded)

Did you try the restaurant in York's historic Assembly Room?

Have you been to the new Hastings pier yet?

Do you know other similar places?

STOP PRESS : Editorial tail

Just as this is off to the printers - we learn that, at a BHCC Tourism, Development and Culture committee on 16 November 2017, Councillor Robert Nemeth (former RS trustee) asked for an update on 'listed building enforcement' requiring removal of the illegal painting, as the notice to Antoniades had expired on 6 November.

The Council's written reply confirmed that nothing had been done:

"Officers are currently liaising with the legal team to ascertain the action that should now be taken."

What should be done is not in doubt. The building should be honoured and respected by the city, a jewel in our crown; and it should be under care and control which ensures that.

Historic England, in its remarkably firm letter to our City Council on 14 August, also notes that:
Specialist advice will be necessary to inform how the pain is removed.

A Freudian slip of great resonance.



The new RS website of Georgian and Victorian prints of Brighton and Hove is now live! At sbpc.regencysociety.org you can explore 450 images, some of them rare, together with texts provided by the Society of Brighton Print Collectors.

ON THE COMMITTEE'S RADAR

Projects update

We usually tell our members when we take a position or express an opinion about a proposal or conservation issue, but we don't always tell you what happens next. Here is an update on some current schemes:

Brighton Waterfront Project: The Council has recently announced that it is involved in legal and commercial discussions to enter into a 'Conditional Land Acquisition Agreement' with a target date of December 2017. We presume these discussions are with Standard Life. As soon as anything further is known we will let our members know.

Brighton Hippodrome: The Grade II* listed Hippodrome was sold in November 2017 by its former owners, Academy Music Group, to another developer who has been named in the press as Aized Sheikh. The new owner's plans are as yet unclear, but rumours include plans for a hotel and flats as well as a concert and theatre venue. We await further news.

Circus Street Development: The former site of the municipal market is earmarked for a major development by the Council in co-operation with Cathedral (U & I plc), SE Dance and Coast to Capital LEP to produce 142 homes, 2,046 square metres of commercial space, student accommodation and a dance studio. The University of Brighton is also a partner but its element of this scheme has been deferred. We objected to the plan on the grounds that it constitutes overdevelopment.

The plan was approved and construction has recently commenced.

Madeira Terraces: The Council's crowd-funding campaign to raise £423,000 to restore the first 3 arches had not reached its deadline as this issue of the RS Journal goes to press. The RS has pledged £10,000 to the campaign.

Preston Barracks and the University of Brighton: The RS supported an application to develop this eyesore of a site for housing, student accommodation, office and retail space and space for the University when it went to the planning committee in September this year. It was approved (subject to further negotiations). Demolition and construction are expected to start soon.

Royal Pavilion Estate: the refurbishment of the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre, the first stage of a plan by the Brighton Dome and Brighton Festival, is now well underway.

Circus Street : clearance of slum streets to make way for the Vegetable Market in the mid 1930s. From the James Gray Photographic Archive



MH : THANKS AND NO THANKS

The editor (former RS trustee), while responsible for all unsigned text, is hugely grateful to **Sue Berry** (former RS trustee), **Gavin Henderson** and **Mary McKean** (former RS chairs) and **Stephen Myall**, the driver of the RS association with the Society of Brighton Print Collectors, for material, assistance and encouragement with this issue. The images and texts which Steve Myall prepared for the newly launched **Regency Society Brighton Prints website**, have been an invaluable treasure, plundered herein and recommended for your browsing enjoyment.
(sbpc.regencysociety.org)

Every effort has been made to engage all stakeholders in the question of Marlborough House. There have been some very resounding silences.

Anthony Antoniadis (and the other owner of the building - not his Eurolink nor Eurofile Pension Fund oft quoted as owner since 2002, but a Liverpool-based company named in the title deeds) and David Squair (who applied for the retrospective painting permit) were each offered space to explain their plans. None has replied.

The designers who gained permission for conversion to a house (2015) and failed with the paint for the façade (2017), 'Agora chartered architects' have not responded to any approaches to any of their three addresses publicly advertised in October 2017. We mentioned to them that without an active RIBA member as director they could not legally be designated 'chartered architects.' Since then they have changed their company name to avoid even calling themselves 'architects.'

(The multi-millionaire owner of this Grade 1 listed building, which he himself calls Brighton's best Georgian building, has, as architectural agent, a one-room company operating out of a residential flat, with one registered architect, aged 70, as director.)

Our City Council would not offer an officer to speak to us but produced the written statement of anodyne generalised hope. It was quoted on page 20.

If there is any stakeholder who feels not contacted, who would like to make views or proposals known or indeed to offer corrections to anything here, we would be only too happy to hear from you and take the debate around Marlborough House forward together.

Images in RSJ4 reproduced by courtesy of

*The Trustees of the Sir John Soane Museum
All Adam drawings; pp1, 7 to 10 and 12
Society of Brighton Print Collectors
pp 2, 3 (both), 4, 5, 12-13, 14 & 22
John McKean
photographs pp 2, 17, 20, 21 & 22
Sue Berry
p4 (top l), p5 (top r), p6 dwg & map, p12-13 (bottom)
Royal Pavilion & Museum Brighton
p8 (top & map), pp11,12-13 (middle)
The British Library
p8 (top)
ESRO (The Keep)
p 13 plot plan
Regency Society James Gray Collection
photographs pp 15, 16 & 23 photographs
Dominic Alves (Creative Commons)
pp15 & 16 colour interior photographs
BHCC website (planning application submission)
p17 drawings, p18 plan
public Facebook page
pp 18 & 19
The Argus . May 2017 p20*

Views expressed by the editor and authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Regency Society of Brighton & Hove. (c) 2017



Do browse www.regencysociety.org
and contact us at news@regencysociety.org

FORTHCOMING SOCIETY EVENTS

10 January 2018: Nicola Wesbury on
Downland Churches

7 February: Nick Hoar on Designing Hospices:
Care for the Dying

7 March : Piers Gough & Gavin Henderson
"The Rigorous Rapture of Blissed-out Brighton" The Antony Dale Memorial Lecture
in the **Royal Pavilion**

11 April: The John Small lecture: Tim Foster
New Theatres for Old

Events are at 7 pm at the College (MET), Pelham Street, apart from March 7 in The Music Room