



Regency Review

CONSIDERING THE PAST... FRAMING THE FUTURE
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE REGENCY SOCIETY

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King Alfred: Which was worse?

Mulling over the King Alfred decision, I have been wondering which was worse. the granting of consent or the way in which it was done.

I cannot believe that those who still champion the proposals as a world class scheme by Frank Gehry have ever examined it in detail. For instance, how can they support the erection of a thirteen storey building within sixty feet of the main windows of St Aubyn's Mansions?

In my day we insisted on a minimum of seventy feet between two storey buildings.

Do they accept that a large number of people living north of the Kingsway will have to suffer many hours of overshadowing?

But as someone steeped in local government practice with its dedication to probity, I am appalled by the way in which the application was handled. These are some of my concerns.

- ❖ Planning officers were bullied to produce a favourable report. To their great credit, they stood firm.
- ❖ When they declined, the report was taken over by the City Planner who had been involved in discussions of the proposals as a land owner's representative.
These two possibly conflicting functions, development control regulation and land ownership, were meant to be kept separate. He presented the report to the committee.
- ❖ The application was brought forward to be dealt with just before the local election.
- ❖ A complaint, which argued that it should be deferred until after the election was rejected.
- ❖ The report was finalised before the end of the consultation period.
- ❖ Later representations, including ours were tabled just before the meeting without giving the members time to absorb their details.
- ❖ No list of background papers was available, as required by law.
- ❖ Major omissions were made in the City Planner's report.
- ❖ At the meeting the public gallery was occupied by an apparently organised clique of supporters.
- ❖ Despite an initial warning, the Chair permitted the supporters to shout throughout the meeting.
- ❖ After the decision the Development Control Manager, the Area Manager and two other development control officers left the Council.
The DCM had served the Council and its predecessor for twenty-two years with great distinction and integrity.
- ❖ The job description of the Development Control Manager was rewritten to make it clear that the achievement of corporate goals was part of her/his remit.
This blatantly sets aside the 'Chinese wall' between the two land owning and regulation functions.
- ❖ Requests for information by the Regency Society were refused or delayed.
- ❖ Even when the Freedom of Information Act was used, the legal deadlines were missed.
- ❖ One of the documents, whose production was delayed, disclosed that the Council's own highly respected consultant described the daylighting assessment of the applicants '... the worst I've ever seen'
- ❖ Following advice from legal counsel, when we presented the new administration with a way to change the decision, it did not have the courage to do so, despite campaigning against the proposal originally.
- ❖ A new planning sub-committee meeting was called and, although the Council had a fully worked up submission by the Society, this was not included with the papers.
- ❖ At the meeting the members were handed our submission together with a draft response from the Council's lawyers.
- ❖ The committee was not informed of our response to that draft which we submitted after taking Counsel's advice.
- ❖ We were refused permission to speak.
- ❖ At this second meeting, members seemed to be about to defer a decision when they went into secret session.
When they returned, they voted to confirm the original stance and the consent was issued on the following day.

Of course, if the scheme is built, then the way in which it was approved will fade from memories so, perhaps, the decision itself was the worse action. But I wonder whether the precedent set might not be equally as damaging. How can a future application be refused for overdevelopment or overshadowing or infringing privacy, when the applicants can point to the King Alfred decision? Come to think of it – even if the King Alfred scheme is never built, this decision will still be used to justify unneighbourly and unsustainable plans. MGIR



AS AN OUTCOME OF THE SOCIETY'S SURVEY of the existing plaques in Brighton and Hove which was carried out by Eileen Hollingdale, (see Plaque Trail brochures 1 to 3 and RR 14), the city council's interest in promoting more plaques is bearing fruit. The first of the 'new' plaques was unveiled by the mayor, Councillor Carol Theobald, on 29 July. It is fixed to the façade of 38-39 Devonshire Place and commemorates David Mocatta (who designed Brighton Station) and converted these buildings to form Brighton's first purpose built synagogue. The entire building has now been transformed into nine compact flats by Sophie Curtis Property Ltd. By coincidence the next plaque, due to be unveiled on 28 September, also commemorates an architect – Charles Augustin Busby, who designed Sussex Square and Lewes Crescent plus its adjoining terraces to form the first buildings in Kemp Town. Later he designed Brunswick Square and Terraces and many other buildings in Brighton & Hove. It will be fixed to the façade of 2 Lansdowne Place, in which Busby lived and worked in the 1820s.

**Reminder: The lecture series starts on October 3 at 7pm .
Venue: The Old Market, Hove.
Speaker: Jonathan Woodham - "Brighton between the Wars"**

Email addresses

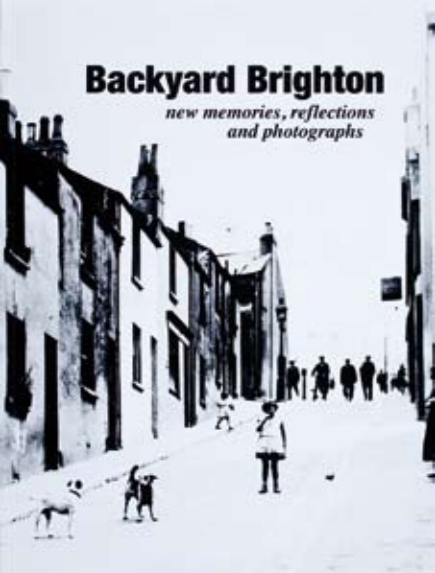
In order to stay in touch with members, and to keep everyone up to date, we hope to be able to contact you by email.

But have we got your current email address? Please take a moment to send a message to: regencysociety@googlemail.com with just your name in the subject line. Nothing else required!

Of course, if you don't wish to be contacted - then don't bother: your details will not be disclosed to anyone else.

Backyard Brighton

new memories, reflections
and photographs



First published in the 1980s, **Backyard Brighton** was a sell-out success and it has now been republished by Brighton Books. This new edition has been completely re-edited, updated and enlarged. It still contains the eyewitness accounts and interviews that bring to life the photographs of Brighton's undistinguished and long-ago demolished urban fabric. Although the blocks of flats that now grace Albion Hill add little to the townscape and architectural heritage of the city, one may, having read about and seen photographs of what they replaced, have some greater sympathy for their creators.

Backyard Brighton. £12.75
Brighton Books: 01273 502209
www.brightonbooks.co.uk

STUDY TOUR 2007 FIVE RIVERS AND A SILK MILL

The City of Salisbury stands at the confluence of five rivers and we were based at the White Hart hotel. This is one of the few remaining coaching inns in the city and boasts a fine Regency portico.

Our first full day was spent in Dorset. Athelhampton House was begun in 1485. It stands in beautiful gardens through which the River Piddle flows. It is still a family home and contains fine furniture and paintings. Our visit coincided with a flower festival which provided additional decoration. After lunch we made for Tolpuddle and the Martyrs' Museum, making a detour to Puddletown where the parish church has managed to hang on to its box pews.

Wednesday was spent in Salisbury. We visited the Mediaeval Hall, where we learned something of the history of the city and enjoyed lunch seated mediaeval-style at three long tables arranged round the hall. Yours Truly, naturally, sat in the most exalted place, the Dean's Chair – quite appropriate, as the cathedral has a woman dean! The afternoon was spent at the cathedral and those who so wished stayed for choral evensong.

Thursday morning was spent at

Wilton House, the home of the Earl of Pembroke. Our guides took us round the house by the route which important visitors would have taken – at present tourists go round the house the wrong way! The Regency aspects of the house were highlighted and we were shown, amongst other things, a table rather like the one on show at the Royal Pavilion which the Society owns. We then move on to Stonehenge, where it rained! We returned to the hotel by the scenic route across Salisbury Plain.

Our tour would not be complete without visiting one industrial site, and there we went on Friday morning. Whitchurch Silk Mill began operations in 1802 and was run by the same family until it closed in 1955. The last family then committed industrial vandalism by making a bonfire of all the business records. Now lovingly restored, it produces very expensive hand-woven fabric to order, including silk for judges' robes. Our last visit was to Mottisfont Abbey to see the Rex Whistler murals and to enjoy the heady scent of the roses in the walled garden.

Once again, our thanks to Tony and Stella Mercer for their excellent arrangements. EH



AT LAST!



GOOD NEWS

The city council has announced that it will undertake the restoration of the bandstand at an estimated cost of £850,000 and with a projected completion date of 2009.

We have long campaigned for remedial action to be taken to secure this iconic structure and congratulate those members of the city council who have, at long last, decided to make good the delapidations of the last thirty years.

The inset photograph above was taken in 1976 before the neglect of successive council administrations, of all political colours, brought us to this very expensive position. The main photograph gives some idea of the tatty, rubbish-strewn appearance of the site at the moment: those responsible for the seafront really should do better.

which seem to be the chosen exemplar for both cafés and loos alike!

We also illustrate a more successful example in Brighton which occupies limited space beside seafront access stairs to use roof-tops of an existing café for additional dining space. JCS



EAST BEACH CAFÉ Littlehampton



Littlehampton

The seafront promenade at Littlehampton has not been noted, hitherto, for its cutting edge architecture. Now a dramatic change has occurred.

The new East Beach Café is certainly an eye-opener and possibly not to everyone's liking. However, there were apparently no objections when it was considered by the local planning committee. Unlike an unexciting previous application for a café on this site which was vigorously and successfully opposed by the entrepreneurial client for the successful alternative proposal.



Hove

The structure of the building is unique. Thomas Heatherwick, its designer, has worked with engineers Adams Kara Taylor and local specialist steel fabricators Littlehampton Welding Ltd. to create a series of dissimilar Corten steel 'ribs' which comprise the roof, walls and base of the structure. They were welded together on site to form the entire building save for a window to the kitchen and a serving counter (for the take-away teas, ice-creams and chips) and continuous folding fully glazed doors that form most of the long, sea-facing side of



Brighton

the building. Inside the rear wall and ceiling is sprayed with an amorphous plaster/foam material, which gives the impression, if you have cause to look away from the sea, of being inside a dense white cloud.

As if this was not enough to make this enterprise a special experience both the food (mainly from the sea, of course) and the service in the restaurant are excellent.

Brighton and Hove has little to compare architecturally. Our recent seafront structures usually ape a row of oversize and poorly detailed beach huts,

NEW ROAD

It's very good to see the completion of the works in New Road, now resurfaced and offering extensive seating. Views may differ over the success of the chosen pattern, but it has cleaned up the area and provided a revitalised link to the new Library Square which seems to be progressing in a most satisfactory way. But as we have managed quite happily without New Road as a through road during its construction, perhaps now is the time to revisit the idea of full pedestrianisation (with, of course, some exemptions for deliveries and disabled access): the concept of joint pedestrian and traffic use being self-regulating is fine on paper, but one doubts if zimmer frames and white vans can truly co-exist. The principal concern is one of confidence - no traffic ensures the pedestrians may relax and enjoy their surroundings; shared use casts a shadow of uncertainty and doubt.



The James Gray Collection

Nine volumes of the Collection, some 1884 photos, have now been archived and may be viewed online at our website: other volumes are in progress. This is due to the generosity and far-sightedness of our sponsors: if you would like to become one, or know of anyone who would, please make contact. Each month the numbers of visitors who view the Collection increases and this clearly offers a commercial opportunity to benefactors in the world of property. Others may wish to assist just because to make this resource available to all is the right thing to do!

On the right: Hodson's Mill in West Hill Road, 1858.





Dr Ian Dunlop

1925 – 2007

Chairman 1988 – 1997

Standing in the biting wind one mid-winter's day in the churchyard of St. Peter's, West Blatchington, Ian and I were attending the interment of ashes of James Gray, whose photographic collection of old Brighton & Hove was later to be purchased by the Society. After the ceremony we walked away together and, as he turned up his coat collar, Ian observed simply 'Cold it was'. Only someone as fastidious in his use of English could have summed up what we both felt with such economy.

It was his love of English literature and poetry that had taken him to Sweden many years earlier where he was invited to set up English-speaking courses for both teachers and for students in Swedish adult education, an initiative which grew rapidly to the point where 10,000 adults were being trained annually. In 1971 he was appointed MBE for "Cultural Services to Sweden". The move to Scandinavia also brought with it the 'greatest stroke of luck' as Ian put it in that, through his new work, he met Ulla, his devoted wife who was also to support him as an invaluable colleague when they returned to Britain and in 1977 they took up posts at the English Language Centre in Hove. The Centre was to keep them fully occupied for the next ten years, or as fully occupied as it was reasonable to expect of someone who followed the game of cricket wherever it was being played with almost religious fervour. But this was hardly surprising in someone so quintessentially British, a description he could easily authenticate by explaining that his mother was English, his father Scottish and he was born in Wales.

Ian had an engaging, impish sense of humour, never better illustrated than on the occasion of the Society's 50th birthday celebrations. The event was graced by the presence of our august President of many years' standing, the Duke of Grafton, a magisterial figure for whom Ian found himself acting as

aide-de-camp for the evening. When it was over Ian half expected him to take his leave by saying: 'Carry on sergeant-major' before being driven away by his chauffeur. Wartime service in the Royal Marines would have made such an order part of every day life in the Forces and, as he remembered that I had followed in a posting to Singapore a couple of years later, he gave me a big fat wink as his Grace departed.

Upon the sudden death of Dr. Rex Binning, Antony Dale the founder of the Regency Society, invited Ian to fill the post which he did energetically and effectively for nearly ten years, taking an increasingly important role during Antony's final illness. One of Ian's many accomplishments was to put the Society on a firmer financial footing by selling various unused artefacts and profitably investing the proceeds. He established the annual Antony Dale Memorial Lecture and led the Society in safeguarding the future of Stanmer House and, later on showed equal concern about Marlborough House. The Society was also fortunate enough to persuade him to give two memorable lectures on Regency English.

Some years back when he was still active, he asked me whether I thought the Frank Gehry King Alfred proposals would ever be realised and I rather unguardedly told him not to worry as they probably wouldn't be built during his lifetime. They weren't, but for all the wrong reasons and I venture to think that he would allow me a wry smile at the way events turned out.

As one would expect with Ian's pedigree, he led from the front and the Society prospered under his leadership. The eulogy at his funeral given by his lifelong friend from Emmanuel College Cambridge, Tony Abrahams, contained the words 'His was a life that mattered and living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident'.

With this we all concur.

*John Wells-Thorpe
Chairman 1998 - 2000*