



Regency Review

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

ISSUE 20

FEBRUARY 2008

WHITHER BRIGHTON & HOVE?

There is general agreement among enthusiasts for Brighton and Hove that the implementation of the Jubilee Street Redevelopment Plan has been a great success. But has it? The Brighton Central Library, a thoroughly modern building in the midst of the central historical core of the city (Cultural Quarter?) has been almost overwhelmed with praise. This is not undeserved; it is a comfortable building, in scale with its surroundings, and which succeeds in this context despite (or, perhaps, because of) its uncompromising design. It is efficient to use and has excellent energy-saving credentials. Its interior architecture is pared down but stylish in its expression of both the structure and the planning of the building. The way that daylight from above plays on the timber-clad interior walls is particularly magical, changing as the sun moves around the building or as clouds obscure it. It gives genuine pleasure. For the user, *aka reader*, it is less successful; there is no reference library and books available within minutes at the old library, are now kept off site.

The hotel is (slowly) progressing towards completion on the south side of the adjoining new small square. This is effectively closed on its eastern side by a pizza restaurant, the transparency of which exposes a lively interior while effectively obscuring the now somewhat tawdry architecture of the Prince Regent swimming pool behind it.

But is the development a commercial success? Not yet, it seems. The flats are all let or sold – but this is hardly surprising considering their position and the quality of the development, notwithstanding their bland appearance, which, nevertheless is a successful foil to the more dramatic architecture of the Library. But, apart from restaurants, the shopping units are largely unlet, particularly in North Road. (Where is the major chemist almost promised by the developer?)

However, the Jubilee Street development is literally streets ahead compared with the New England Quarter (where the architecture has very little character sympathetic to this once

vibrant area and the detailing will result in rapid deterioration unless very high standards of maintenance prevail.)

What of other developments in the pipeline in Brighton and Hove? The Brighton Marina seems likely to be effectively swamped by massive new housing developments before rising sea levels do so. (Actually, the harbour wall is set to be raised, in due course, to prevent the latter from happening.)

The redevelopment of the former Preston Barracks site, the Circus Street Market site and, most importantly, the Brighton Centre seem to be shrouded in indecision or uncertainty, or both.

Why is none of these important and potentially beneficial development proposals properly in the public domain? Rumours and possibly incorrect information regularly pop-up in the press but no substantial details are yet available publicly.

How can we achieve successful new buildings of these important central city sites?

Conservationists are popularly believed always to say “No! Not this! Not here!” (and some very frequently do so.) But building developments in Brighton and Hove have been taking place almost continuously for at least two hundred years, as any historical survey proves. True, there have been some lulls during wars and periods of economic depression.

Perhaps a possible forthcoming economic slow-down will allow us a breathing space to take stock and consider how to achieve the best possible way to develop these important sites.

A forum of experts and enthusiasts could encourage the City Council to publicise all these proposals in a permanent exhibition space where discussions between the developers and the rest of us can take place in a fully informed, constructive and continuing exchange of views.

Then, may Brighton and Hove live and flourish! Vivat Brighton! Floreat Hova!



High maintenance required for the New England Quarter, and, above, reflective pizzas in the Jubilee piazza

Why not join in with one of the UK's largest heritage events?

In 1994, The Civic Trust established 'Heritage Open Days' as England's contribution to the 'European Heritage Days', a continent-wide initiative to bring people closer to their cultural heritage.

Each September, during 'Heritage Open Days', England celebrates its architectural legacy by providing visitors with free access to interesting properties that are either not usually open, or would normally charge an entrance fee.

The national participation and attendance figures for the event are fairly staggering with over 3,000 buildings being opened and approximately 1,000,000 people attending these venues.

In Brighton and Hove by contrast, the local contribution to 'Heritage Open Days' has sometimes been rather poor, often with just a handful of locations opening. For example, in 2006 less than half-a-dozen local properties were listed as participants. However, periodically, since the event's inception, The Regency Town House Heritage Centre in Brunswick Square has staged 'Brighton & Hove Open Door' as a part of the Open Days and on these occasions over 30 local buildings have been opened.

'Open Door' was last held in 2007 and amongst the mix of venues participating was, The Sussex Masonic Centre, Embassy Court, Brighton College, and the BBC and Argus offices. Overall, nearly 2,000 people visitors attended at these and the other locations.

'So far, so good', one might say, but during this year's 'Open Door', planned for 11-14 September, it is hoped to stage an even larger event, building on the list of participants from last year.

Open Door coordinator Leigh Rush says:

"In 2008, we want to make 'Open Door' bigger and better than ever before – something offering the extensive range of properties seen in the popular 'London Open House' event. We already have fantastic buildings lined up to open for visitors but, next year, we are keen to offer far more private residences in the list of venues."

The big challenge to overcome in developing the event is undoubtedly encouraging ordinary people to open their historic homes to the public. The city has a magnificent architectural heritage and one that generates great interest but there simply are not enough local people sharing with others the history of their homes and, perhaps, the streets in which they are located.

Whether you live in a small terraced house, part of a large Victorian gothic, or perhaps one of the grand homes along the seafront or in the Dyke Road area your property is of interest to the Open Door organisers - so why not contact them and join in with the 2008 event?

Some local residents have already signed up. Here are the concerns they had about opening their homes and the solutions that convinced them it was a safe and enjoyable idea.

Many were worried that their houses would have to be open for all four days of the event but, this is not the case. Participants can specify the number of days or even just hours that they want to be open. Furthermore participants can choose whether to open to all-comers or only to pre-booked visitors attending 'fully guided' tours. If the latter are chosen, The Regency Town House can assist by providing participants with a free-to-use booking service.

Some residents raise concerns as to whether their property and possessions are likely to be safe when the public are visiting.

Nick Tyson, Curator at The Regency Town House, says:

"There are several steps we suggest taking in regard to security. First, remember that you are in control. You will only show those pieces of the house you chose to make available. So, you can remove any items from your 'tour route' that you think might represent a security issue. Second, remember that you can control group size. If you are worried about security, you can also arrange to take only a small number of people on an individual tour. That way you are able to monitor their behaviour closely."

"It is our experience that visitors respect the hospitality being offered to them during Open Door and those who have collaborated with us to open their properties during past events have also reported this to be so."

The success of this year's 'Open Door' event will depend heavily upon local participation.

Leigh Rush says:

"If others will match the enthusiasm and commitment of our Dyke Road and Marine Parade residents, we are sure 'Open Door' 2008 will be a great success. Do please contact us and obtain further information about this exciting event."

Full details for Open Door 2008 are available from Leigh Rush by email at opendoor@rth.org.uk, or via the address and telephone contacts provided below.

Brighton & Hove Open Door 2008

The Regency Town House

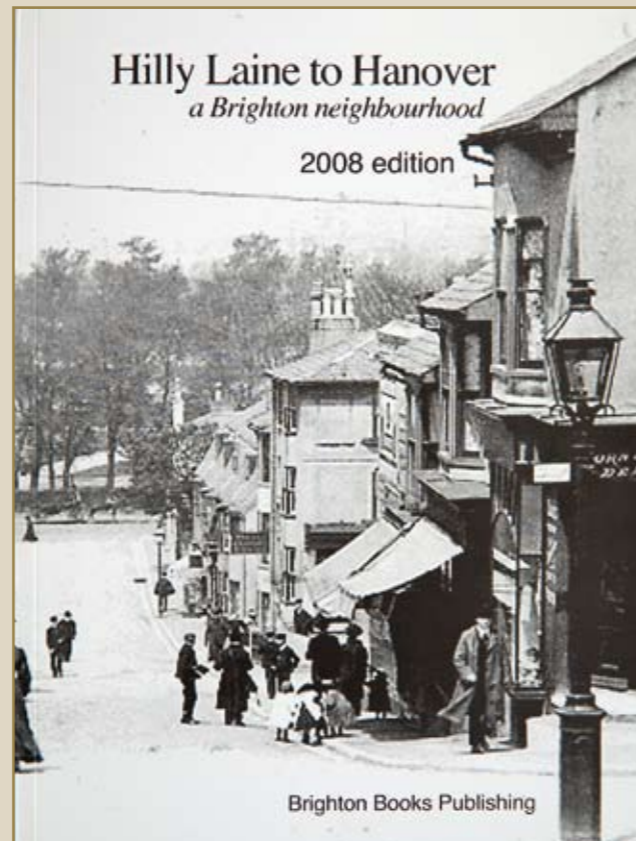
13 Brunswick Square

Hove, BN3 1EH

01 273 206306

www.rth.org.uk

Now that the dust is settling, albeit temporarily perhaps, on the saga of the King Alfred redevelopment, it is time to thank those committee members who worked so hard on the Society's behalf. Carolyn Oxenbury, Michael Ray, and Hazel McKay all laboured to present the rational case that in the end could not overturn the council's decision. As a mark of our thanks, and as a contribution towards her expenses, the committee decided to make Hazel McKay an ex gratia payment of £2000.



Hilly Laine to Hanover a Brighton neighbourhood.

This volume, another by Brighton Books, charts the passage of the Hanover district from the Hilly Laine field system, through chaotic Victorian development and its usage through two World Wars to the present.

Lavender Jones and Jacqueline Pollard have skilfully woven interviews with residents together with historical research to produce a very readable account of life in central Brighton. Illustrated by contemporary photographs, many from The James Gray Collection, it is a very welcome addition to our understanding of local history. Strongly recommended.

Hilly Laine to Hanover.

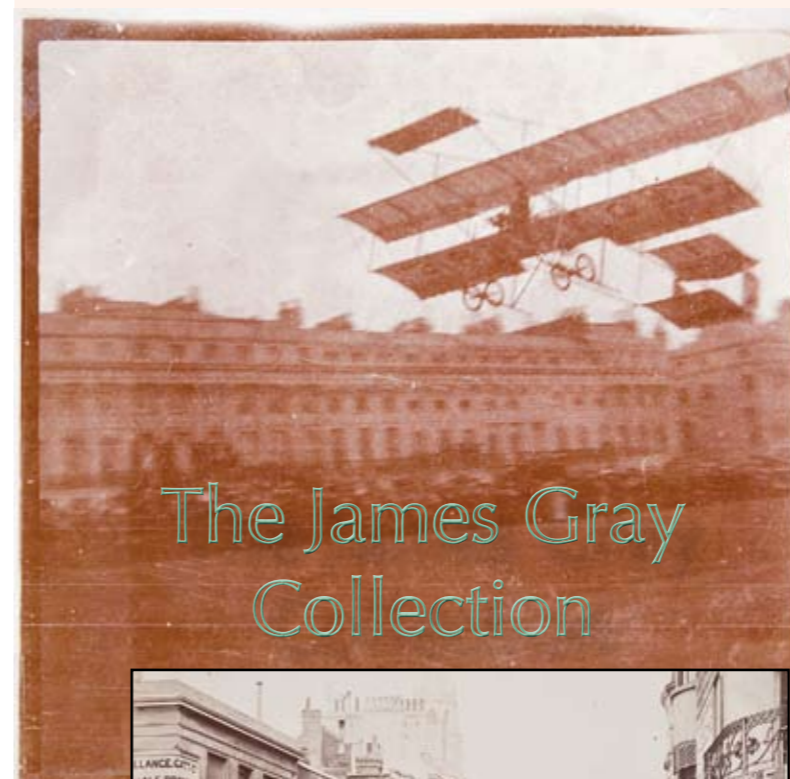
£9.99

Brighton Books Publishing,

10 Clermont Road,

Brighton. BN1 5SG

www.brightonbooks.co.uk



Architecture—and much, much more ...

VISIT TO CHICHESTER: Pallant House and Bach's St. John Passion performed by The Hanover Band
Good Friday, 21 March 2008
Departing by coach from Palmeira Square, Hove 2.15 pm

'Pallant House Gallery now has the finest collection of British Art outside of the Tate' (Daily Telegraph).

IN 2007, THE GALLERY WON THE PRESTIGIOUS GULBENKIAN PRIZE FOR MUSEUMS and Art Galleries. The core of the collection is Modern British Art. The founding bequest was Dean Walter Hussey's gift, which includes works by Henry Moore, John Piper, Ceri Richards and Graham Sutherland. Hussey's collection centres around the outstanding artistic commissions he instigated at Chichester Cathedral where he was Dean (1955 – 1977). His tenet was that "Whenever anything new was required in the first seven hundred years of the history of the cathedral, it was put in the contemporary style."

Sir Colin St John Wilson, another major benefactor to Pallant House Gallery, gave important works by Sickert and exceptional examples of British Pop art and post-war figurative art. This has enabled the Gallery to present an almost comprehensive overview of 20th century British art.

Optional guided tours of Pallant House have been arranged for our group and also supper if required, after which there is an opportunity to enjoy the artworks in the Cathedral, before the concert.

The St. John Passion, by Johann Sebastian Bach, a dramatic setting of the Easter story, is one of the greatest pieces in the choral repertoire. It was first presented in 1724, in Leipzig, on Good Friday – the day in the calendar most appropriate for the performance of this work. The words and music derive from a number of sources: the Gospel of St. John, 18th century poems and earlier chorales. The narrative and imagery are relayed vividly through arias, recitatives, choruses and congregational hymns.

Chichester Cathedral is a fine example of Norman architecture with splendid Gothic additions. It is famous for its collection of 20th century art, commissioned by Dean Hussey, including the magnificent tapestry by John Piper, a vibrant stained glass window by Marc Chagall and works by other artists such as Graham Sutherland. It also contains some wonderful

SPECIAL LECTURE
BRIGHTON & HOVE'S MOST
SIGNIFICANT COLLECTION OF
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS
WEDNESDAY 5 MARCH AT 7.00PM

In an interview with 'The Brighton Herald' in 1953, James Gray is reported as having close on 500 photographs of Old Brighton. The article goes on to quote him as saying "... I intend to hand over the entire record to the town or to an institution where it will be properly displayed and available to all."

Little could he have suspected that 44 years would elapse before that event would take place, and that there would be 39 large volumes of photographs involved. For many years he was the source of the very popular feature in *The Brighton Herald* 'DO YOU KNOW YOUR BRIGHTON?', where an old photograph was juxtaposed with its modern counterpart. He was also a frequent voice on local radio and became THE local historian.

The Regency Society bought the Collection in June 1997, and it was installed in a new home at the Royal Pavilion. This maintained its security, but a consequence was that access was difficult, since one requirement of viewing was that a member of the museum's staff had to supervise visitors. The advent of digital technology has made the collection available to all. Since last March, when sections of the digitised collection were placed on a new server, there have been over 100,000 pages viewed—an unimaginable number for the James Gray of 1953.

On Wednesday 5 March, the Regency Society is presenting a very special evening on the subject of historical photographs and James Gray's phenomenal collection.

An invitation is enclosed and members and guests should reply as soon as possible to ensure their places. We expect a strong demand for tickets. With over 3000 photographs from the collection now digitised and online, there could be some architectural, and other, surprises!

early objects including 12th century carved stone reliefs of the story of Lazarus and sumptuous paintings on wood, by Lambert Barnard.

The internationally renowned Hanover Band has been called 'one of the finest period-instrument orchestras worldwide'. It is famous for its performances of 17th, 18th and 19th century music, played on original period instruments and fine replicas. These instruments require specialist knowledge from the players as they are constructed differently from their modern counterparts – and they make a different sound.

In this concert, a contemporary audience will have a wonderful opportunity to hear the same sound as audiences in the time of Bach. The musicians will play the instruments required by Bach's original score: organ, two flutes, two oboes, two solo violas d'amore, viola da gamba, lute and strings.

During his lifetime, Bach was a celebrated organist, but was relatively unknown as a composer. Andrew Arthur, who directs this concert from the organ, is the new Associate Director of The Hanover Band. An acknowledged specialist in the music of the Baroque and Classical periods, he has a reputation throughout the world as a musician of exceptional versatility.

The Hanover Band Chorus is made up of the UK's top young professional singers, who specialise in early music. It has been formed for this occasion. The award winning soloists are Simon Wall: *Evangelist*, Thomas Guthrie: *Christ*, Eamonn Dougan: *Pilate*, Angharad Gruffydd Jones: *Soprano*, Daniel Collins: *Counter Tenor* and Thomas Hobbs: *Tenor*. Baroque music sounds best when performed in period buildings, and Chichester Cathedral is the perfect setting for the St. John Passion.

Please see enclosed booking sheet for timings and prices. We hope that you will join us.



Here also lies the body...

Amon Henry Wilds' (1785-1857) obituary in the Brighton Herald only briefly records the fact that he practised as an architect, and that he "displayed great taste and judgement in laying out grounds", mentioning that the trees on the Level and the elms in Elm Grove were planted by him. There was no mention of his huge legacy of building - not only in Brighton, but also in other parts of the country. By 1852 he had moved from his extraordinary house, Western Pavilion to a small cottage beside the railway line in Shoreham. Perhaps by then his family had made so many financial demands on him that his money had run out; by the time he retired he was quite out of favour - hence his seemingly low key obituary. A need to find out why led me to discover a story of poverty, a possible poisoning and a suicide.

In Wilds' grave in Shoreham, lay, as well as his wife, his daughter, Sarah Ann Sellon (1818-1866) - his only child, born in Lewes. In February 1840 she married Edward Sellon, a wine merchant, and son of a Secretary in the War Office, at St. Nicholas Church, Brighton. They were married from 8 Western Terrace, Brighton and for a while lived at Woodbine Cottage, Uckfield. Their first child, Guillemina Constance Sellon was born September 1842, baptised at the Chapel Royal but died in December of that year. The Sellons rented several houses during this time, in West Hill Road, Western Road and Montpelier Terrace.

By 1851 Sarah Ann was back (without her husband) with her parents at 9 Western Terrace, 7 & 8 now let as a private school. At this time her husband was lodging in Peter's Hill, St Marylebone, his age given as 33, occupation, "gentleman". There were now two small children living with their mother and grandparents - Edward aged 4 who was born 7 years after their marriage, and William Loftus Sellon aged 4 months. Despite apparent estrangement a third child, another son, Marmaduke St. John, was born in 1855.

Meanwhile by 1852 Amon Henry Wilds had moved to Shoreham, having built a small cottage beneath the embankment of the Horsham & Shoreham railway Line. The cottage was one storey and had four rooms and a canopy around, in the railway style. Built on the bend of the Old Shoreham Road it would have had fine views of the River Adur.

Amon H. Wilds died in 1857 - his wife then moved to Lewes, where she lived until her death in 1871.

At some point after her son Marmaduke was born, Sarah A. Sellon also moved to Shoreham.

She lived in New Road, New Shoreham. Her husband by this time was not in gainful employment, though had spent some time in the Indian army. Sarah Ann Sellon died on 15 April 1866 in New Shoreham, aged 48. The shocking details of her death certificate gave the cause of death as "vomiting a week, convulsions 3 days, coma 12 hours". A local nurse, Charlotte Pullin made her X, being present at the death. By 1871 the older children had left home and Marmaduke, aged 16, was, after his parents' death, lodging in John Street, New Shoreham, with a Surveyor for the Ordnance Survey, and his family.

Edward Sellon was elusive, moving about London without permanent occupation. The only person I could find who fitted his dates was a writer of some rather questionable literature, of what can only be described as Victorian pornography. Amongst the titles were "The Ups and Downs of Life", "The New Ladies' Tickler" and "Annotations on the Sacred Writings of the Hindus Illustrating their Priapic Rites & Phallic Principles". Some of these are still for sale today.

His death was in the same year as his wife's, two days after hers on the 17 April 1866. Also aged 48, he was described as having "no occupation, formerly in the Madras Army. Cause of death: Pistol shot in the side, suicide when insane, found dead". The Coroner's report said that Sellon booked himself into 220 Piccadilly, [London] a small hotel called Webb's (now the Criterion). On the previous afternoon, it was said he appeared calm and quiet. Later the next day staff found him dead on the floor, a suicide note in his own hand beside him, based on the speech from Hamlet "to die to sleep". His body was taken to the dead house at St James' Workhouse, Poland Street. One of the witnesses at the Inquest was Marmaduke Hornidge, a first cousin of Sellons. Written in the clerks scrawl and shorthand, was this statement "I saw much of him at times, I last saw him in February 28th - last day I saw him. He was a hot headed, uncontrollable man".

But what of Sarah Ann? Could her death have been caused by poison? The symptoms seem to indicate this was a possibility. Was Sellon so distraught by her death or so consumed with guilt for his actions that he shot himself, whilst his mind was disturbed?

And now what of the children? William Loftus Sellon became a Landscape Artist, Royal Academician, and Teacher of Art. Ernest Littlehayes Sellon, (possibly wrongly named Edward in the 1851 census) was a Lecturer in Botany, in London. Marmaduke St. John Sellon became a Roman Catholic priest, and was first priest in charge of the parish of St Albans, Bedfordshire. Ernest Sellon was the only one to marry and have children. His son Reginald died at the age of 12 and their daughter, Evelyn Augusta Mabel Sellon married Arthur Samuel Hoskins in 1904. There are relations through the extended family in America, one in particular who has been most helpful with research.

Amon Henry Wilds died, possibly in reduced circumstances, and, apart from his brief obituary, in obscurity. Considering the considerable architectural legacy he left, his grave in Shoreham is neglected and unadorned, unlike his father's in St Nicholas Churchyard, Brighton with its decorative mouldings. His daughter Sarah Ann is buried with him, and who, like him seems to have had a troubled life. This coupled with the tragic circumstances of her death and subsequent suicide of her husband leaves us with a number of questions. It was in seeking answers to these I began this research.

Lavender Jones

References: Census, General Register Office, and Westminster Archives.

Photographs: top - The Western Pavilion today. Western Terrace, east elevation, 1897; inset - Western Pavilion, north elevation, 1910. Both from The James Gray Collection