



# Regency Review

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

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## CHINESE WHISPERS: Chinoiserie in Britain 1650 -1930

This sumptuous exhibition, at Brighton Museum, to which the Regency Society gave 'generous support', is an event not to be missed and, to this end,

we have been offered our own exclusive viewing evening on **Wednesday, 22 October 2008 between 6.00pm and 9.00pm.**

We hope that many of our members will attend.

Members may bring a friend provided that they let them know that they will be expected to join the Society at the event!

(Membership cards required.)

David Beevers, who curated the exhibition, will give us a guided tour and will tell us about the lengths to which he and his team went in order to secure the loan of many of the precious objects that are on show, some of which are in private collections which are not normally on public view. Several items which were originally made for the Royal Pavilion are on special loan from

HM The Queen for the duration of the exhibition, and are displayed in their original setting.

There will be a cash bar.

"You won't see a prettier show this year"

wrote Richard Dorment in the Daily Telegraph.

"Sumptuous stuff"

was a concise comment from Rhoda Koenig in The Independent.

COME!

And enjoy!



## The King Alfred - a chance to rethink?

The credit crunch is terrifying but some good might come out of it. ING, the main financial backer of the King Alfred, has withdrawn its support in the present, very difficult, economic period. Karis, the developer, has been reported as saying that it will now negotiate with other possible financiers before the November 2008 "deadline" which was included in the original agreement with the City Council.

As has been suspected for some time, Karis has also confirmed, that Frank Gehry has walked away from the proposed development. A clause of the Section 106 agreement required 'the continued involvement of Gehry and Partners ... as integral members of the design team'. This was because the setting aside of major constraints in the planning brief and Local Plan was partly

justified on the basis of Gehry's world class reputation; 'the first development in England to be designed by a team led by Frank Gehry, one of the world's top architects'. Karis has stated that it will try to get Gehry back on board, but there can be no certainty.

The City Council might have to wait until the November deadline but the Regency Society has the right to expect that the administration, which opposed the proposals at the time of the local election, will give no further leeway to the present proposals.

Instead the opportunity should be taken to secure a less damaging development by not insisting on so many public benefits such as 40% affordable housing whilst requiring a more neighbourly set of buildings. And is there such a thing as a free Leisure Centre?

Photo: Frank Gehry's Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2008.



## THE STUDY TOUR, JUNE 9-14 2008

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS, STAYED HERE – AND SO DID WE!

The Old Hall Hotel in Buxton has its origins as a building used to house Mary, Queen of Scots, while she was the 'guest' of the Earl of Shrewsbury. He was the fourth, and last, husband of Bess of Hardwick and this year we celebrate the 400th anniversary of her death. Tony and Stella Mercer had arranged a programme of visits to include places associated with her.

We began on Tuesday morning with a guided tour of Kedleston Hall. Designed by Robert Adam, it is one of the grandest and most beautiful houses in Derbyshire. We then travelled to Derby to see the cathedral. Founded as a mediaeval parish church, it was rebuilt in the 1720s by James Gibbs. We then walked to the Chapel-on-the-Bridge before ending the afternoon at St. Mary's RC church, one of Pugin's early commissions.

Wednesday was 'Bess' Day. We began at Stainsby watermill, on the Hardwick Estate before visiting Hardwick Old Hall. Bess was born here. The house is now a ruin but some of the embellishments she made to her birthplace may still be seen. Over the road is Hardwick (New) Hall, the status symbol of her wealthy old age. A trip to the Stone Centre completed the visit.

Thursday was spent at Chatsworth, the house built by Bess's Cavendish descendents. It came as a pleasant surprise to be allowed to take photographs in the house and we managed to arrive in the State Bedchamber in time to witness the ceremonial lighting of the perfume burner – performed by a member of staff picked, our guide assured us, for his photogenic qualities! We worked off lunch by exploring the gardens and I managed to find the serpent mosaic made from pebbles taken from Eastbourne beach.

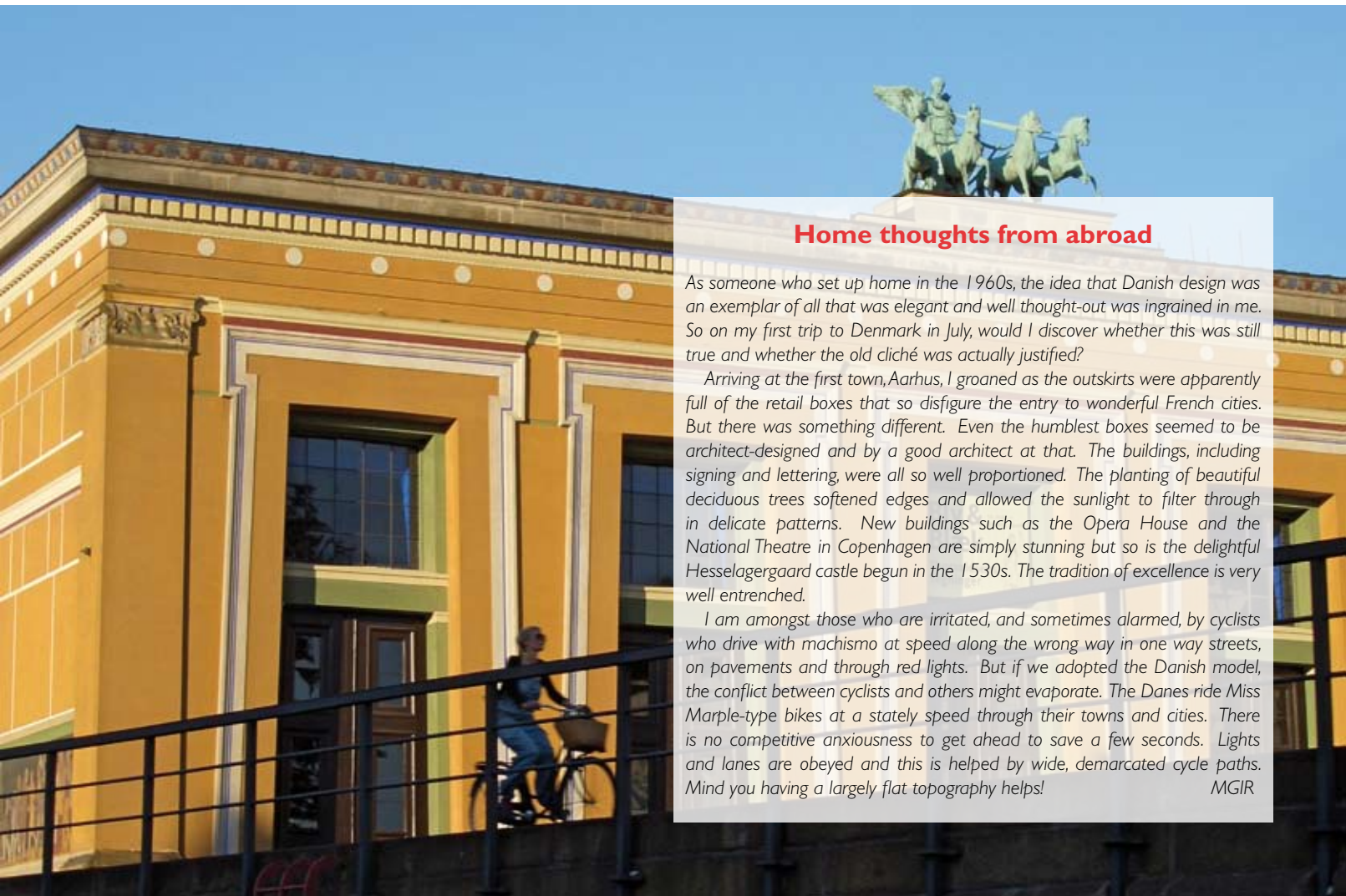
Friday saw us at Renishaw Hall, home of the Sitwells. It is a delightful house, very livable-in, full of quirky objects, like



the statue in the hall sporting a pair of specs, just in case the guest who left them behind should ever come back for them.

We returned to Buxton via Tideswell so that we could see the parish church, known as the Cathedral of the Peak.

Our thanks once more to Tony and Stella for their arrangements. They are already thinking about next year. How does Far East Kent sound? Watch for announcements. EH



### Home thoughts from abroad

As someone who set up home in the 1960s, the idea that Danish design was an exemplar of all that was elegant and well thought-out was ingrained in me. So on my first trip to Denmark in July, would I discover whether this was still true and whether the old cliché was actually justified?

Arriving at the first town, Aarhus, I groaned as the outskirts were apparently full of the retail boxes that so disfigure the entry to wonderful French cities. But there was something different. Even the humblest boxes seemed to be architect-designed and by a good architect at that. The buildings, including signing and lettering, were all so well proportioned. The planting of beautiful deciduous trees softened edges and allowed the sunlight to filter through in delicate patterns. New buildings such as the Opera House and the National Theatre in Copenhagen are simply stunning but so is the delightful Hesselagergaard castle begun in the 1530s. The tradition of excellence is very well entrenched.

I am amongst those who are irritated, and sometimes alarmed, by cyclists who drive with machismo at speed along the wrong way in one way streets, on pavements and through red lights. But if we adopted the Danish model, the conflict between cyclists and others might evaporate. The Danes ride Miss Marple-type bikes at a stately speed through their towns and cities. There is no competitive anxiousness to get ahead to save a few seconds. Lights and lanes are obeyed and this is helped by wide, demarcated cycle paths. Mind you having a largely flat topography helps!

MGIR

## HOVE CIVIC SOCIETY

Winter Programme 2008/9 (all Thursdays)

Hove Civic Society has kindly invited Regency Society members to its lectures (£2 payable at the door).

They take place at The Courtlands Hotel, The Drive, Hove.

**16 October 2008 2.30 pm**

AGM & The James Gray Collection

Duncan McNeill

**13 November 2008 7 pm**

Ellen Terry of Smallhythe Place

Laton Frewin

**11 December 2008 2.30 pm**

Hove Churches

Sue Berry

**29 January 2009 7 pm**

Sussex in the Bayeux Tapestry

Michael Smith

**19 February 2009 2.30 pm**

Standen - Life in the Beale Household

Madeleine Greatorex

**19 March 2009 7 pm**

Vernacular Buildings

Trevor Povey

### The James Gray Collection

We're now over half-way to digitising the Collection and making it available to all on our website, 20 out of 39 volumes completed. The latest volume, number 32, Rottingdean & Saltdean has been sponsored by Edward Goring, Rottingdean Parish Council and Rottingdean Preservation Trust. Many thanks to them, and should you consider sponsoring one of the remaining volumes, please contact either Michael Ray on 01273-506077 or Selma Montford on 01273-509209, to discuss possibilities.

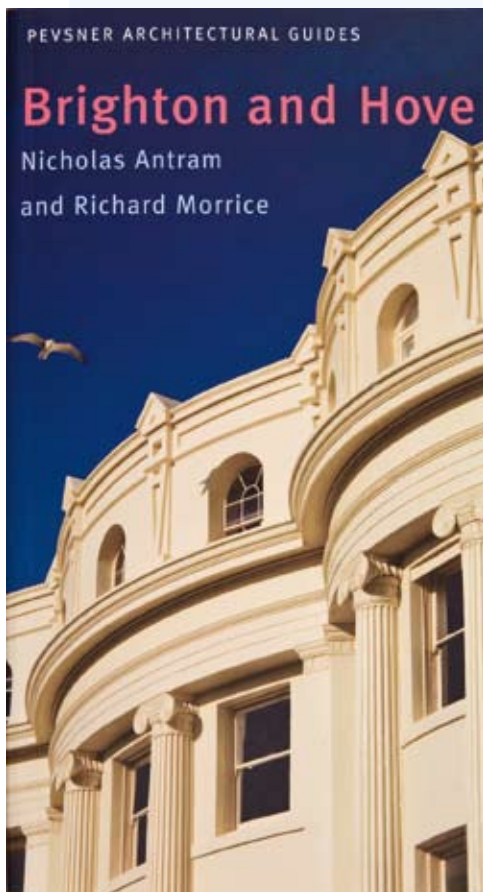


**Chalk Paths by Eric Ravilious**

Image courtesy of Bookroom Art Press, Kemp Town Books, 91, St George's Road, Brighton. BN2 1EE [www.bookroomartpress.co.uk](http://www.bookroomartpress.co.uk)

Following John Small's decision to step down from his rôle as Honorary Secretary of the Society after long and distinguished service, committee members marked the occasion with the gift of *Chalk Paths* by Eric Ravilious. The presentation was at the summer garden party, although this was a 'virtual' one, since the weather was not ideal for paper-based art! We hope that this fine work will be some indication of our appreciation for his contribution to both the Regency Society and to the architectural life of the City.

## Pevsner . . . Plus!



Pevsner produced his mighty *Buildings of England* series from 1951 to 1974, averaging two volumes a year. To maintain this schedule and to maximise his chances of living to complete the series, he was only able to spend around four weeks visiting each county. He also chose to delegate the *Sussex* volume (1965) to Ian Nairn, who duly completed *West Sussex* but could not face *East Sussex* as well, which is therefore Pevsner's own work.

The co-authors of the new *Pevsner Architectural Guide to Brighton and Hove* acknowledge their debt to Pevsner in their very first sentence, affirming that his text on Brighton and Hove is the foundation of their own. This Guide follows much the same structure as its parent, albeit on a much larger scale - an historical Introduction

to the city, detailed discussion of a selection of major buildings and then twelve walks, each with its own historical introduction. An evolution of Pevsner's "Perambulations", these walks allow an in-depth look at the various distinct areas of the city. Hove (Walk 11) has not this time been neglected: "Hove is Brighton," asserts Nairn in his *General Introduction to Sussex*. However, as Antram and Morrice reflect, this part of the city has always had "quite a different character from that of its raffish neighbour".

Although otherwise covering only the central area of the city, a meaty chapter on Stanmer and the University of Sussex has been included. This is an apposite choice for Stanmer House has revealed considerably more of its past in recent years whilst Pevsner was clearly intrigued by Spence's vision for the University, then still under construction.

*Brighton and Hove* is easy to navigate and beautifully presented. The dominant pink may or may not be 'significant' but is certainly attractive. Topic

boxes covering broader themes - building materials, bow windows and orientalism, for example - are usefully placed whilst bold text to mark key words, period prints and magnificent contemporary colour photographs of architectural detail further break up the text. Accurate colour maps plot the route and distance of each walk whilst the illustrated glossary of architectural terms seems comprehensive enough - at least it has not let me down yet!

Despite being highly readable and practical, this Guide contains plenty of detail to engage those who feel they already know the city and its history rather well. And neither is it wanting in Pevsneresque piquance: Hangleton is "the end of Brighton's sprawl and had better remain so," exhorts Pevsner in 1965, whilst "... such is the scale of the main spaces, there seem remarkably few books," Antram and Morrice bemusedly observe in 2008. Regency Review readers will need no help to determine which new local building they are referring to!

NW



# THE AQUARIUM REVISITED

When an old building is to be replaced by something new there are many differing ideas in the local and national press as to what should take its place. Thus it was with the Aquarium on Brighton's seafront. Built in 1871 to the designs of Eugenius Birch (who also designed the West Pier), it was always popular with the public as a concert venue as well as housing many strange sea-creatures. Financial difficulties forced the sale of the Aquarium to Brighton Council in 1901. During the 1st World War the building was in military occupation and subsequently fell into disrepair; by 1924 it was thought the building should be modernised and Captain Bertie MacLaren, Superintendent of Brighton Parks Department, offered a complete design for a building and gardens.

MacLaren said the Aquarium site was 'the town's most important entrance to the sea', lamenting the then existing building as an 'accumulation of mean structures, nothing beautiful or attractive'. He asked local artist, Charles Knight to realise his scheme which, although simple in form was theatrical in realisation, the whole dominated by a raised platform commanding uninterrupted views. The concert hall was to have a waggon shaped roof of glass and the section above ground level a frontage of sliding glass doors, which could be opened in the summer. All around this frontage would be a canopied walk where open-air performances of the orchestra could be heard in full view of the sea. He imagined couples at night, in true John Travolta fashion, dancing on 'a prism glass floor electrically illuminated underneath'. The surrounding slopes laid out as a rock garden - 'in natural stratification ... one blaze of colour all through the season.'

The local press were not in favour of an ornamental garden, commenting that its location was not suitable being exposed to salty spray and winds off the sea. The rock garden was rejected, along with MacLaren's design for the building on the grounds that it had not taken into account the surrounding architecture and the idea was too grand and costly for the site. MacLaren was not defeated however; the design of the building was later taken over by Harry Tillstone, the Borough Surveyor and his staff, with MacLaren in the reduced role of advising on the layout of the grounds alone. However, the building that was

eventually opened by the Duke of Kent on 12 June 1929 was designed by the Borough Engineer, David Edwards. This remained until its recent redevelopment.

Demolition of the eastern end of the old aquarium started in 1927. With his usual proclivity for rescuing and recycling decorative fixtures and fittings from the town's demolished buildings, MacLaren removed the four figures on 'The Seasons' which adorned the clock tower. They were later moved to Preston Park rose garden; two mythical beasts were placed by the pool in front of the Rotunda in Preston Park and bronze masks adorn various buildings around the park, although sadly many of these have now gone.

Charles Knight's watercolours for MacLaren's scheme were exhibited at the International Exhibition for Garden Design and Conference Planning at the Royal Horticultural Society in 1928; and the one shown here is in the collection of Brighton and Hove Museum.

James Gray's photographs of the varying stages of the Aquarium may be viewed online on our website - Volume 4 of the Collection.

*Bibliography:*  
 Brighton Herald.  
 Brighton Parks Department - an exploration of its early history and its formative Superintendent, Captain Bertie Hubbard MacLaren 1994, Virginia Hinze

