



Regency Review



Issue 8

www.regencysociety.org

September 2003

Gehry Graces chosen for King Alfred

The city's policy & resources committee have announced their preferred developer for the new King Alfred sports centre, with retail space and some 438 flats: Karis/ING with architects Frank Gehry and Piers Gough leading the team of consultants. This decision has been welcomed by those who find the exceptional design of their towers exciting and attractive (particularly when compared to our present inheritance of tower blocks) – but others dislike it intensely. The architects describe the towers as the Four Graces, while some have called them tin cans.

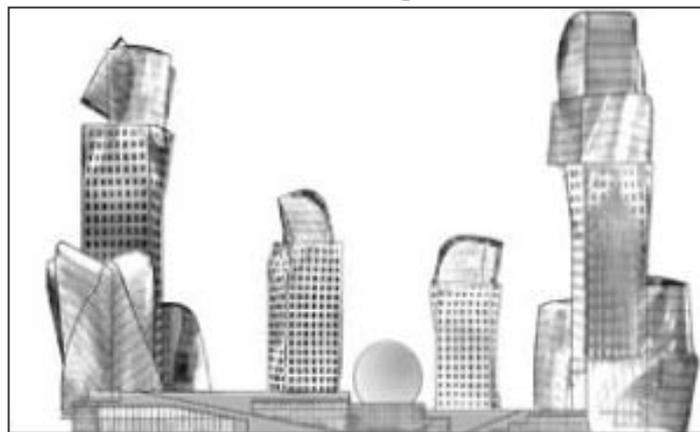
The decision was based on financial reports to the council. The economic impact of the Karis/ING scheme was preferred to the Barratt-Brunswick/Wilkinson Eyre bid (who proposed lower buildings with 468 flats); and the council's consultants considered that it "best promoted the image of the city, continuing business confidence and in turn attracting further investment".

The scheme will provide greatly improved sports facilities. The present run-down, under-used facilities require a huge annual subsidy. It is forecast that, with the new sports centre, the subsidy per user will fall from nearly £2 to just under £1, with 75 per cent more users likely than at present.

The Council stipulated that the scheme should include a large number of affordable flats, as central sites for dwellings for key-workers are very scarce. This proposal provides 175 which, while welcomed by the council, has resulted in a scheme that



consists of four very high towers. The assessment of the impact of the buildings' bulk and height and the number of additional people living in the area – as well as the expected number of



visitors coming to look at the buildings – will continue to be vital as the scheme develops. The public open space on the decks beneath the towers will be specifically designed to attract visitors, as will the public viewing gallery on the 18th floor of one tower.

We need to discover whether the sea can be seen between the towers, when viewed from the streets to the north; and whether a sea view is maintained closer to, where the sports buildings stretch across the site, with public decks above them. The impact of the towers when seen along the coast, from various points within Hove and from the Downs beyond, will also be critical

The designers have explained that the current drawings represent a very early stage of design and that there may be quite radical changes. Frank Gehry is known for his determination to develop and improve his original ideas for new buildings, which often results in the production of literally hundreds of development sketches and models.

For further information on this proposal, please visit: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk and www.regencysociety.org

• WITH the Gehry towers design at an early stage, it is timely that the council's consultants, from urban design and planning practice Gillespies, are due to report on their recommended policy for tall buildings. Planning permission for several schemes is on hold until the council makes a decision on the detailed recommendations expected.

John Orpen, a formidable force in conservation, 1908-2003

John Orpen was associated with the Regency Society almost from its inception in 1945. He was a committee member from 1949 to 1951, a vice-chairman from 1952 to 1966, chairman from 1967 to 1973, and a vice-chairman again from 1974 to 1995.

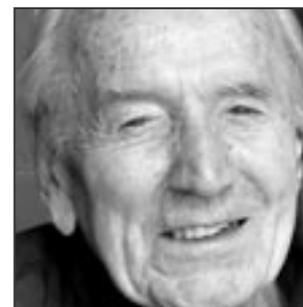
Throughout this long period John Orpen was always available to advise and caution and give generously of his time when the committee needed

help with legal matters – which, as a retired senior partner of Fitzhugh Gates solicitors, he was well qualified to give. For example, he was invaluable in advising on the Archway at Park Crescent, Worthing.

During his time as chairman he was also elected as a vice-chairman of the Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies. The Regency Society also appointed him its representative on the planning (historic buildings)

sub-committee for Brighton Corporation.

Throughout his life, John Orpen showed his strong interest in historic buildings and their conservation. This could be seen, too, in his collection of books, which reflected his interest in art, particularly in the pre-Raphaelites, and in literature, especially the writers and painters of the Bloomsbury group, so much so that he helped, in later life, to found the



Charleston Trust.

He was a formidable force in conservation in Brighton and Hove. He will be much missed.

Shake-up could downgrade CAAG

An officers' preliminary report to the conservation areas advisory group, discussed in August, proposes that the CAAG should meet only quarterly and that it should no longer make regular recommendations on planning applications.

A design panel, which would replace the architects' panel and the CAAG, has been suggested. At present these two advisory committees do different jobs. The panel advises on new buildings throughout the city; whereas the CAAG's advice is confined to new build or alteration proposals within conservation areas or affecting listed buildings.

The city planners' aim is to reduce officer time devoted to servicing committees and to streamline the processes leading to planning decisions.

The council has stated that it is keen to "retain good working relationships with amenity groups and maintain feedback (from them) on conservation issues". We have stressed to the planning officer and the chief executive the value of input from individual societies with close contact and knowledge of the conservation areas they serve.

It has now been suggested that at least two members from individual societies should serve on the design panel, possibly alternating, so that all societies are represented over the course of a year; and that a representative from each of the major societies (The Regency Society, The Brighton Society and Hove Civic Society), shall have a permanent seat on the committee.

If you have views on the matter, please contact John Small at: john-small@lineone.net



Marlborough saga goes on to autumn

Readers of the Argus may have seen a report earlier this summer designed to reassure them about the progress of external repairs to Marlborough House, which includes the restoration of the forecourt facing the Old Steine. The project had been proceeding very slowly but is now expected to be completed by late autumn.

The front entrance porch was removed for full restoration off site. It is now completed and is said to look magnificent. We shall welcome its return and also the full restoration of the forecourt.

Nick Tyson, curator of the Regency Town House and a Society committee member, is acting as an advisor to the owners of Marlborough House. He has extended and developed the archaeological research already carried out on the building and will report in a future issue of Regency Review.

Huge challenge for city's churches

The report from the Brighton & Hove Deaneries' pastoral strategy review group, published in June, made dramatic recommendations. A number of churches are under threat and the parishes affected are required to respond by November.

The architectural significance of individual churches was not a primary consideration of the review group: but it will be to us.

In particular, we shall watch the proposals affecting the former civic churches of St Peter's (Brighton) and All Saints (Hove).

St Peter's is of historic significance and a major landmark, although possibly not of first rate architectural merit by the exceptional standard of Brighton's churches. All Saints (pictured) has an impressive interior.

Both are listed Grade I and both require very extensive – and expensive – repairs. The report includes alternative proposals for both buildings as they may cease to be required as parish churches.

It will take much imagination and lateral thinking to find suitable new uses that will maintain the architectural space and detail of their interiors. Any new uses must be capable of raising sufficient funds for their repair, from the outset. The possible need for enabling developments to provide these sums would present tremendous challenges.

In recent years, St Patrick's, Hove, while still holding services, was developed to become, in part, an alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre and night refuge.

It is now proposed that all church services should cease and that its parish be divided between St John's (Palmeira



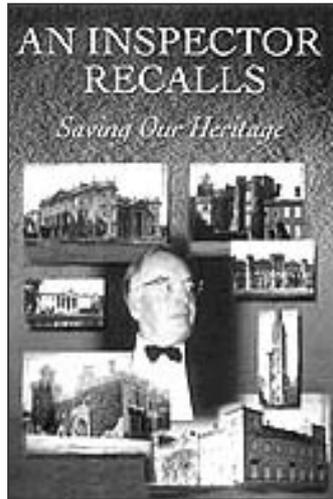
Square) and St Michael and All Angels.

The review group's report merely describes the problems for the churches at risk, and sets out the direction of some solutions. The challenge to avoid wholesale demolition, amputation or unsatisfactory adaptation and conversion of the church buildings is huge.

Still angry after all these years

Derek Sherborn is still "angry that certain recommendations I have made for listing in Brighton have been rejected, and that the Imperial Theatre in North Street was eventually demolished". Derek parted company with the Society on this issue, having been a committee member and a vice-chairman for years.

Leaving that to one side, his wholehearted commitment to conservation and the preservation of old buildings shines out of the pages of this highly idiosyncratic book of personal reminiscences.



The first half is a personal and family history. Fawns Manor seems to have belonged to the Sherborn family for many centuries, on and off. In recent years it suffered cruelly from being almost next to the perimeter fence of Heathrow, with planes roaring in overhead day and night. It was also ruthlessly modernised in the late nineteenth century by a Sherborn antecedent, who pioneered the domestic use of reinforced concrete, creating a claustrophobic effect not unlike the interior of an Egyptian pyramid. After a series of armed robberies, the old house was abandoned for a handsome seafront town house on the fringes of Kemp Town, where the author still lives.

Then there are the exhaustive lists of houses visited; the turning pages of numerous appointments' diaries are almost audible. Old scores are settled in a refreshingly combative spirit. A visitation to Fawns Manor by two officials of the National Trust to assess the gift-worthiness of the Manor and its contents was not well received: one "said nothing" and the other "said too much". They were not impressed by a room containing pictures by "Gainsborough, Lawrence, Wright of Derby, Lely, Romney, Brooking, Towne, Daniel Gardner and Hans Eworth"; nor the "Chippendale period furniture, fine ormolu candelabra and a chandelier". If Sherborn did leave the house to the National Trust, he was assured that they would promptly sell it. The officials left with the sound of the very solid front door slammed behind them.

And then there is the Imperial. It was completed in 1940 but never successful as a theatre. Despite the doubtful claim that the building had architectural merit, the idea that Brighton could support another major working theatre without huge subsidies was unrealistic. The Society made the right decision to concentrate on attempting to secure a worthy building to replace it. What did is unfortunate but conservation issues are seldom clear-cut, except in the mind of an absolute idealist like Derek. Ideals have their place – but so does realism.

Peter Rose

- An Inspector Recalls: Saving Our Heritage by Derek Sherborn (The Book Guild, Lewes. £16.95)

Study tour to the North-East

June 8-13, 2003

Our trip to Newcastle had been arranged with usual flair by Tony and Stella Mercer. We were based at the Royal Station Hotel, opened by queen Victoria in 1858.

On Monday, we left for a guided walk round Grainger Town, the brainchild of developer Richard Grainger and his architect, John Dobson. We then crossed the Tyne by the new Millennium Bridge to Gateshead.

We spent the afternoon at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, viewing Antony Gormley's Domain Field.

The following day we travelled to Chillingham Castle to be greeted by owner Sir Humphrey Wakefield and our chairman. Built by Border Reivers, the castle has many treasures and its share of ghosts. In contrast, the afternoon was spent at Craggside, now owned by the National Trust. Built for industrialist William Armstrong by Norman Shaw, it is an arts and crafts house with many technical innovations.

On Wednesday, we visited part of Hadrian's Wall. Coffee and Housesteads and a brisk walk to the fort and museum nearby, was followed by a visit to Vindolanda and the Roman Army Museum. The afternoon was spent at Seaton Delevall Hall, built by Sir John Vanburgh between 1718 and 1728.

On Thursday, to Beamish, by way of the Angel of the North. Beamish Open Air Museum shows what life was like in the north-east between 1825 and 1913, with groups of buildings reached by foot or tram. In the afternoon we visited the Anglican Cathedral of St Nicholas in Newcastle, some staying for evensong. Just before leaving on Friday, there was enough time to see the Laing Art Gallery and The Blue Carpet – a shimmering public space all in blue. It's quite a sight.

Eileen Hollingdale

More benefits for you

Your new Regency Society membership card comes with an extra benefit – discounts.

Donatello and Pinnocchio's restaurants and Leoframes, the master framers, picture restorers and antique prints gallery are supporters of the Society and are offering 10 per cent off all sales to members.

To benefit, please show your card when you pay your bill – no card, no discount.

You will find Donatello at 3 Brighton Place, The Lanes, Brighton. For bookings, please call 01273 775477. Pinocchio's can be found at 22 New Road, Brighton. Bookings on 01273 677676. Leoframes' gallery is at 70 North Road, Brighton. You can call them on 01273 695862.

Please sign your card on receipt and show it at any Society event you choose to attend.

Please keep your card safe – they are designed to last for several years. Each card is individually numbered. This allows the membership secretary to check that membership is up-to-date at Society events and remind those who have not renewed. A fee will be payable for replacement of lost cards.



Autumn talks

**Hélène Binet and David Robson:
The Architectural Image**

In association with the University of Brighton

Tuesday 7 October. Tour 6.00pm, University Gallery

Lecture 7.00pm, Sallis Benney Theatre

A guided tour and lecture to complement Images of Place, an exhibition of drawings and photographs of the work of Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa. Hélène Binet is "one of the world's



finest architectural photographers...[who] responds to buildings with the eye of an artist, her brush a large-format camera, her canvas a hand-crafted black-and-white print." (Jonathan Glancey, *The Guardian*)

Hélène will talk about photographing architecture. Her subject

is the play of light and shadow in architectural space. Stunning examples of her prints of Bawa's buildings can be seen at the show. (University of Brighton Grand Parade Gallery, 4 -18 October).

Bawa, who died last May, was one Asia's leading architects for 40 years. David, curator of the exhibition, is the author of a highly-acclaimed monograph on his work and will show Society members around the exhibition before the lecture.

Members are invited to bring a friend, free, to this inaugural event of the season. The Sallis Benney café will be open for coffee and refreshments from 5.30 pm until the lecture.

TALL STOREYS

Nicholas Antram, assistant director, English Heritage, London Region, leads a discussion on tall buildings.

Tuesday 11 November 7.00pm, Sallis Benney Theatre

The proposed Gehry towers (see page 1) and others have fuelled a local debate on tall buildings. This evening we look at the subject of tall buildings in a broader context.

What kind of urban environment do we want to achieve? What form should urban buildings take? What qualities can tall buildings add to a townscape – and what are their benefits in terms of public space and long-term economic impact?

Short presentations will be followed by an audience discussion. Nicholas Antram is an architectural historian and town planner with wide experience on new developments in historic areas. He has contributed to the formation of policy on tall buildings in London.

The Sallis Benney café will be open for coffee and refreshments from 6.30 pm until the lecture.

TALL TOWERS

Representatives from the Victorian Society and English Heritage lead a discussion on the future of Brighton's churches.

Tuesday 2 December 7.00pm, The Music Room, Royal Pavilion

The Brighton and Hove Pastoral Strategy Review, published in June, has caused anger and disappointment as it plans to close several of Brighton's famous, listed landmarks (see page 2). The Review is a major, pressing architectural problem for the city.

The forms, mass and heights of many churches mean that they must be considered as part of the current study on the placing of towers in Brighton and Hove.

Their possible demolition raises further issues which other towns and cities are also facing: What does one do with all the redundant churches?

Commemorations: the Spring lecture series

Committee members have carried out a detailed survey of the memorial plaques in the city and have compiled the first definitive list, which includes their location and current state of repair.

Our spring lecture series, with diary dates right, will relate to those remembered – or not remembered – by these plaques and will culminate in a special Society publication.

Full details will be available in the next issue of *Regency Review*.

Artists in Brighton & Hove

Tuesday, 13 January, 7.00pm
Sallis Benney Theatre

Musicians in B&H

Tuesday, 10 February, 7.00pm
Salvation Army Citadel

Park Crescent

Preachers and

philosophers in B&H

Tuesday, 9 March, 7.00pm
Dorset Gardens

Methodist Church

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, 6 April, 7.00pm
The Music Room, Royal Pavilion
Speaker to be announced

STUDY TOUR OF EAST ANGLIA

Friday 4 – Wednesday 9 June, 2004

Next year's study tour is planned to centre on Norwich – an ideal base for exploring the region.

This city's architectural riches include its magnificent cathedral, the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norman Foster's internationally-renowned Sainsbury Centre and Michael Hopkins' The Forum, a landmark library building.

The tour is still at the research stage but possible visits include: Sandringham and Houghton Hall; Holkham Hall

and Blickling Hall; Ickworth House and Lavenham; Sutton Hoo and Sizewell nuclear power station.

The full itinerary and costs will be printed in the next issue of *Regency Review* but it would help Tony and Stella Mercer, who are planning the tour, if interested members could tell them, without commitment, as soon as possible to: 12 Norbury Way, Great Bookham, KT23 4RY; tel: 01372 458641; e-mail: tonymerc@bookham240.freemove.co.uk

Hove Civic Society Autumn talks

Hove Civic Society shares similar aims to those of the Regency Society and cordially invites our members to its annual Rex Binning Memorial lecture without charge. Please show your Regency Society membership charge.

Other Hove Civic lectures are charged at £2.00 each.

All talks take place at St Andrew's Church Hall, Church Road, Hove.

Sidonie Bond on: Hanningtons – the town's department store

Tuesday, 21 October, 2.30pm

Janet Pennington on: Wiston House – the story of Sir Thomas Sherley, an Elizabethan con man

Tuesday, 18 November, 7.30pm

Christopher Rudd on: London – the heart of the Capital

The Rex Binning Memorial Lecture, Tuesday, 16 December, 7.30pm