



The Death of the King Alfred scheme?

On 15 October, the Society wrote to the City Council. We asked that, if no alternative funding partners to replace ING had been secured by the 9 November deadline in the City Council's agreement with Karis to redevelop the King Alfred, the Council should reconsider whether it should continue to support the proposals for which planning consent is in place. We noted that the continuing participation of the world-renowned Frank Gehry was one of the justifications for, and a requirement of the consent. It is now quite clear that he is no longer part of the

development team. We stated that the Society remained ready to assist in the preparation of new proposals which are sustainable and neighbourly whilst securing a major new asset for the City.

On 8 November it became clear that new funding was not available and Karis confirmed that the scheme would not go ahead. However, Karis stated that it still hoped that a development might go ahead in the future. The Cabinet of the Council will consider the issue on 20 November. Only after that meeting will we have a clearer idea of the future for the site.

The decision of Karis to use Gehry was a bold move but it never worked in practice and the requirements of the Council's brief led to a scheme which would have been a vast overdevelopment of the site.

No one can welcome the recession but, if it gives us a second chance to get a more acceptable scheme for the King Alfred site which has public support, then at least something good will have come out of these dark days. Neighbours of the King Alfred might be able to rejoice in having a blight lifted from their properties and they will

continue to enjoy living in their most attractive area. Maybe, for the future, the employment of a good local architect would lead to a better understanding of the site and its context.



King Alfred, 1946. from the James Gray Collection

It is interesting that in *The Architects' Journal* of November 11 there is an editorial by Kieran Long that refers to the scheme as "...lazy, façade-focused housing." It further goes on to say "...The UK has not lost a distinguished scheme... (it) was a compromise, which like so many of Gehry's recent buildings, achieves little at the ground level of public value. ... The bling exterior of the King Alfred proposal seduced the CABE design review panel and may seduce some architects, but I urge you to look at the drawings on Brighton and Hove City Council's website. Other design-led architects are still being given awards for projects with pretty exteriors but flat layouts that would embarrass a prison-warden. It's time for CABE and the planners to look critically at the housing we've been waving through the system over the last few years and ask if anyone would really want to live there." We couldn't have put it better ourselves, since this is just what we did say to the city council, many, many times! **MGR**



Lancing College's Reeve Art School

It gives great pleasure to report the completion of an uncompromising modern building of distinction, set amongst historic buildings in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - a tricky combination at the best of times!

Lancing College commissioned LCE Architects, of Brighton's Jubilee Library fame, to design a new Art Complex for the school. The result is a contemporary building that provides flexible studio spaces and photography studios; that the building succeeds is a tribute to everyone involved in the process. Only too often do those responsible for failed schemes try to blame negative forces for their problems, while in reality their difficulties may relate more to greed and poor design. At Lancing the solution is deceptively simple, and shows that modern design is quite at home in a historic setting as long as it is of a high quality. It probably also helps to have a client with a long view.

What is not so readily appreciated, of course, is the complex technology that makes a building such as this function; it is to be hoped that others may follow Lancing College's lead in promoting architectural excellence. More photographs may be seen online at <http://snipurl.com/4rtdq>

Brighton and the Fishing Village Myth



Above: *Brighthelmstone-Fishermen Returning*. De Loutherboung engraved by Hill. Very like the scene that this research conjures up. Note the cliff, easily eroded and not shored up until the late 1810s and early 1820s. There is a capstan in the right lower corner of the picture for winching vessels partly or wholly onto the beach according to their size to unload goods. From c1500-1670s the town made its living from selling fish caught in the North Sea to merchants at Yarmouth. From the 1670s, fishing in the Channel became increasingly important and from later 1700s a popular theme for artists. Note the bathing lady and, a shrimper in the sea. Tucked behind the boats, there are bathing machines.



Above: *Lambert's view of Brighton from the East* – this is part of the engraving of 1765 which shows the early resort buildings and bathing machines grouped around the Steine which was used as the promenade for the front was too crumbly. Russell House is beside the bathing machines.

Left: *The Prince of Wales* was not the creator of Brighton nor was this the first seaside home built in the town. This is the Pavilion in 1809 looking across the Steine from St James's Street. Holland's little villa is dwarfed by Porden's Dome behind it. From *Attree's Topography of Brighton: and, Picture of the Roads*, 1809.

Most places have two histories, the actual and the mythical. Some myths become so well-established that they overshadow the history of a place. One of the most pervasive myths about Brighton is that it was a poor fishing village until (depending on the source), either Dr. Richard Russell or George, Prince of Wales arrived here and singlehandedly turned it in to a fashionable resort. This myth started during the 1770s when Dr Russell was credited with this transformation. Some sources refer to the Duke of Cumberland as the saviour of Brighton. From the 1780s, the Prince of Wales was usually identified as the accidental promoter of Brighton's transformation. These stories, mostly promoted in guide books, overstate the role of both men and obscure a very important fact about Brighton which explains why it and not, for example Rottingdean, became a seaside resort in the 1750s and 1760s.

Crucially, Brighton was a small town with basic shops, a lot of cheap accommodation and high unemployment. For a short period in the mid to later seventeenth century, Brighton was probably the largest town in Sussex, with a population of perhaps 4,000. The town's economy depended on long distance fishing, particularly for herring in the North Sea. Even in the 1520s, the government was eyeing up this growing community to decide whether or not it should be subject to town taxes. The fishing industry collapsed for a variety of reasons between about 1670 and 1700. Competition from larger fishing vessels in the herring industry in the North Sea, the acceleration of the coastal erosion that bedevilled the town right into the later 1700s and the decline in long distance coastal carrying trade were but some of the reasons why Brighton declined.

Brighton's development as a resort was also the result of a combination of factors. Sea bathing was becoming fashionable before the first resorts developed, and without that new trend, the resorts could not have developed, for they needed groups of people to take an interest in this new fashion for investment

in facilities, even bathing machines, to be worthwhile. Early resorts had very short seasons during which a few hundred people might visit. In Sanditon, her unfinished story about the development of a new resort, Jane Austen points out that trying to build a resort from new was not easy due to the capital cost of new houses, baths, assembly rooms, a library, a theatre, a chapel, a promenade and bathing machines. In old towns, the risk could be spread between many.

All of the other early resorts; Hastings, Margate, Scarborough and Weymouth were also small coastal towns which needed new sources of employment. Why were the early resorts so similar in character? Small coastal towns had reasonable communication networks – both inland and by sea. The tales of woe about the state of the Weald of Sussex and its impact on the economy of the county are literary license. Coaches and carriers' wagons were reaching Brighton within the day in the 1760s. These towns normally had financial and other links with more prosperous inland centres. During the 1750s and 1760s a considerable amount of the early capital which was invested in the basic tourism facilities, such as libraries, came from Lewes. Russell had a fashionable practice in Lewes. Shergold, who

bought a house in Brighton and turned it into the Castle Inn, was an innkeeper from Lewes. The name of the Inn referred to the Castle in his home town.

Between 1750 and 1780, tourism became a life line for the town. Had local landowners, businessmen and doctors not become supporters of the development of tourism here, then Brighton would have shrunk back to the village it had once been in the medieval period. There are many communities in Britain where this happened right into the nineteenth century. The idea of keeping towns alive by public subsidy is a twentieth century concept.

The growth of Brighton exerted a profound influence on all of the parishes now in the City. Rottingdean attracted visitors to sea bathe in the 1760s if not sooner. Hove supplied building materials - bricks and tiles and then space for houses. Preston had a tea garden in the 1760s. The archaeological sites in several parishes were popular to visit. The long lost Hove barrow was one. Several of the graveyards of the ancient parish churches became popular places in which to be buried. The grounds of Stanmer House (revamped in the 1720s and the Park between the 1720s and 1800) were visited by wealthy visitors to Brighton. Some, from the 1770s, were invited to dine. The surviving guest book is a 'who's who' of the period. Guests included Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, George Prince of Wales and many prominent Whigs.

At five and a half hours it's not 'Just a Minute!'
First reactions to the new online service from Brighton & Hove City Council.

Did you know that Brighton & Hove City Council's planning committee meetings are now available on their website? Not the applications and drawings, these have been up for some time, together with thousands of pages of reference documents. But now the full deliberations of the meetings can be seen as a webcast on the council's web site.

The meeting on 14 November lasted five and a half hours so you will have to be a bit of an enthusiast to watch the whole thing. Sadly, they have not got round to doing edited highlights yet. The council chamber was tidied up a bit, no sandwiches or coffee was on view, but there were some discreet glasses of water. If the experiment succeeds a set more like that for QI could be built. Clearly, this may not become a popular channel but it's early days so let's give it a chance to develop. Who thought that anyone would sit glued to the shopping channels? (Query to Editor: Does anyone watch the shopping channels?)

Some additional protocols may turn out to be necessary. No Deviation, Repetition or Hesitation, perhaps? This might help speed things up. Councillors do have a tendency to say that the previous speaker has already said what they wanted to say, but they then go on to say it all over again.

Possibly a form of scoring is needed. This would not be difficult to introduce. *Councillors versus planning officers* is a possibility. Unusually, on 14 November several applications in a row were recommended for refusal. The councillors could get points for overturning the officers' recommendations which, in one or two cases, they did.

At present costumes are also rather dull. Period dress during the discussion of conservation area applications might add to authenticity but would also be a bit complicated to achieve. Party colours for the councillors would be much easier. The officers should be variously clad, sometimes costumes of the Spanish Inquisition would be appropriate at others a much lighter touch would go down well...

See for yourself at <http://snipurl.com/5ovp3> JCS

Summer Study Tours

Members will be very sorry to hear that, after many years of sterling service organising the Summer Study Tours, Tony and Stella Mercer have decided to step down. They have arranged wonderful events in fascinating places and we owe them considerable thanks for creating so much enjoyment.

Is any member willing to take on this demanding but pleasurable task? If so, please contact Michael Ray on 01273 506077.

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Membership Secretary

We welcome our new Membership Secretary, Lesley Clarke. She will be known to many already, and we are grateful to her for undertaking this essential and often overlooked rôle. Many thanks to Jackie FitzGerald for her hard work in this position in recent years; it is much appreciated.

Further reading – Berry, S., *Myth and Reality in the Representation of Resorts; Brighton and the emergence of the 'Prince and the fishing village' myth 1770-1824* *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 140 (2002) 97-112. Berry, S., *Georgian Brighton* (Phillimore, 2005). Sue Berry is the Editor of the Victoria County History *City of Brighton and Hove* within which new research will be included.

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Queens Park and Thomas Attree

Thomas Allom's view of Queen's Park by kind permission of Howlett Clarke, Solicitors.

Thomas Attree was born in 1778 at No 8 Ship Street, Brighton. With his younger brother John, he worked in his father's solicitor's office under the name of Attree and Son. The firm of solicitors is not only the oldest firm in Brighton but also the only one that can be traced back to the 18th century although it now practises under the name of Howlett Clarke.

Attree became one of the most prominent men in Brighton. When his father died in 1810, he was appointed Clerk to the Vestry and Solicitor to the directors and guardians of the parish. He was also employed by the Royal family to do legal work on the estate of the Royal Pavilion and subsequently became known as the "King of Brighton".

Attree had outgrown the family house in Ship Street and needed something grander to suit his position in the town. He purchased the parkland on the edge of the town on which to build himself a grand villa, commissioning Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860) to design it. Barry is best known for the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament, he also designed the Church of St Peter, Brighton, and St Andrew's, Waterloo Street, Hove. Attree's idea was for a speculative development where the open space would raise the value of the properties. He had already acquired the lordship of the manor of Atlingworth, where he had built Marine Square on Brighton's seafront in 1824/5

It may have been Barry who suggested that Thomas Allom prepare the grand design for the whole proposed layout, shown in the watercolour above, which would embody Barry's design for Attree's own villa. Allom (1804-1872), who painted the watercolour in 1835, worked with Barry on several projects including the Houses of Parliament and the remodelling of Highclere Castle in Hampshire. He studied at the Royal Academy of Art and was articled to the architect Francis Goodwin, designing many churches and other buildings in this country. However, it may well have been Barry himself who decided on the design of all the villas illustrated in the watercolour.

"This view is intended to show the general effect of villas which are proposed to be erected within the park in addition to those that already exist. The building plots are confined to the space between the Upper Drive and the Boundary Wall; they contain an average depth of 250 feet, and may have any amount of frontage that may be desired. The owner of each plot is to be at liberty to build according to his Design subject to the approval of the Proprietor of the park. The interior of the park within the drive is not to be built upon but to be left free and forever appropriated as at present for lawn and Plantations. The trees of the latter are of ten years growth and average from fifteen to twenty feet high..."

Although a grand scheme, its layout was typical of other speculative developments of the period such as James and Decimus Burton's villa landscape of c1828 at St Leonards-on-Sea. The houses are arranged around central gardens (with private access), carriageways and gatehouses (it predated Joseph Paxton's great scheme for Birkenhead Park in Liverpool however by 8 years). In the end, the only buildings to be built in Attree's lifetime were the Spa, W.S. Cowell's Villa (erected

before Attree's Villa) and the water tower now known as the Pepperbox or pot, the gateways and the gazebo. It is thought Attree ran out of money before his grand scheme could be realised and after his death in 1863 aged 85, the estate came onto the market. George Duddell bought the estate for a mere £28,000 and lived in the villa until his death in 1887. Duddell was unmarried but brought his niece Kate to live in the villa with her children. She was known as his wife and was 32 years his junior. After her husband's death the town tried to secure the area as a public park before the auction in 1888 but Mrs Duddell was reluctant to name a price on the basis that if the council rejected it no one else would be prepared to meet it.

The whole estate was divided into lots with a building line allowing for houses to be erected on both sides of the Drives, as they were to become, and a minimum value fixed for the houses to be erected. Kate Duddell could only build houses of the description authorised. By the same token no structures could be raised on the top of the bank that might obstruct views from the houses round the park. However much Mrs Duddell wished to ensure the people of Brighton should benefit from her park, she, like Attree before her, was keen that it should also enhance the value of the surrounding land. The final area agreed upon came to 17 acres, including the Spa's one acre. The Pepperbox also became part of the Race Stand Trustee's gift. The trustees spent £13,500: £9,500 was paid to Mrs Duddell and £4,000 to the town for the work done by the council on her behalf.

The park was actually bought by the Corporation in the last days of December 1890 and the covenants transferred to Mayor Soper at a banquet thrown by the trustees. From that moment on, the property became the freehold of the Corporation on behalf of the inhabitants of Brighton. At the banquet a 'souvenir' presentation was made to each of the trustees of a silver salver, silver tea tray and clock costing £210. Weeks before the official opening ceremony it was also decided to erect a drinking fountain in the park in memory of the gift.

The Villa

In 1891 Edward Henry Howard (1829 - 1892) was living in Attree's villa. He was born in London and became a catholic priest and archbishop and was made a Cardinal in 1877. After a short time in the British Army, he resigned his commission to enter the English College at Rome, where he was ordained. He was made Cardinal in 1877 as part of his promotion to become the Protector of the English College as well as an Arch priest at St Peter's Basilica. He retired to Duddell's villa in 1891 and died not long after; he is buried at the Fitzalan Chapel in Arundel, West Sussex. Whilst at Brighton he had an entourage of six servants including an Italian valet, Gaetano Dele Donne, whose wife and daughter lived in a cottage over the coach houses. On the 1891 census the Cardinal is described as a Lunatic.

The villa lay empty for several years and became the Xaverian college for boys. After its closure the villa fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1972 despite it being a Grade II* listed building. LJ