



Regency Review

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

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Garden Party

It's that time of year again! Some may enjoy tennis, or the mixture of leather & willow, or even the sound of hooves upon turf, but deep down, you know that there's only one place to be in Brighton on June 21 – The Secret Garden Party! Of course, we are in the lap of the Gods when final conditions are resolved, but we have been lucky in previous years, and keep our fingers crossed. Full details enclosed, but please get your tickets as soon as you can.

The Times ... they are a changing

The new Constitution, adopted at the AGM, will bring significant changes to the governance of the Regency Society. The old Constitution provided for a committee of up to fifteen members who were elected by the AGM together with the Officers: a Chairman, up to six Vice-Chairmen, Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. In practice, only two or three of the Vice-Chairmen attended Committee meetings. However, these arrangements meant that over twenty people were eligible to attend the Committee.

After the transitional year, which will end in April 2009, the maximum number of committee members will remain at fifteen but the officers (Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, Honorary Secretary and Treasurer) will have to be selected from this body. Indeed, as John Small has indicated that he will resign as Honorary Secretary during the year, his replacement will have to be sought from amongst the present Committee members. Committee membership will change too. Five new members

were elected in April 2008, although two had served in the past. The five longest serving members will have to stand down next year. This will mean that following the 2009 AGM, two thirds of the Committee will not have been on the Committee during 2007–8. In 2010, the next five longest serving members will also have to stand down.

These changes are intended to refresh the Committee thoroughly and it will be vital to attract new talent to serve in future years to build on the successes of the past and to face new challenges which we already know about or which will come at us out of the blue.

We have an immediate problem with the resignation of the Minutes Secretary and the impending departure of the Membership Secretary. The Finance and Administration Sub-Committee is looking into how we should fill these posts. The Society would be really grateful if any member could offer to undertake these vital roles.

The 1820s and the City

Between about 1818 and 1832, the landscape of the City underwent a rapid transformation, much of it around the outer edge of the Georgian resort. The early Georgian facilities and houses were largely untouched although some of the tourist facilities were by then quite old, dating from Brighton's early development as a resort which had begun in the 1750s, long before the Prince of Wales arrived in the 1780s to see what two of his uncles were up to down here.

The early developments which still stood included The Castle Inn with its chapel like Assembly Room (largely 1750s and 1760s), the New Inn (1780s, still in North Street, now largely empty again) and the long narrow streets aligned to Paul's Pieces, the strips of farmland over which they were built, such as Charles Street and Broad Street. The only squares were Bedford and New Steine, both begun in 1799. New Steine, being better located was finished first. Until the later 1810s most visitors rented apartments, not whole houses and so lived here as they did in a lot of Georgian towns and cities, renting only the rooms they needed. Take-away food was common. The local bakers and pubs supplied meals.

By 1818 Brighton was in need of more modern projects which suited both the taste for bigger town houses to rent beside the seaside and also the fashion for entertaining at home. The town was spreading into locations where more large plots of land could be bought for development as squares and crescents. The grander schemes included Brunswick and Kemp Towns, Hanover Crescent and Regency Square. Investment also flowed in for other projects such as the Chain Pier, the York (now reopened) and the Albion Hotels. The latter built there after a debate about whether or not the Commissioners who ran Brighton should and legally could buy the land on which Russell House had stood, in order to open the view from the Steine, then the area where people promenaded. If you look down from the Steine now, it is still possible to see why this idea was mooted.

New Chapels of Ease were built with the intention that the income from letting the pews should pay for the curate, the building and also make a profit for the owner. Thomas Read Kemp commissioned St George's from Busby and Charles Barry designed St Andrews in Waterloo Street and St Peter's as the chapel of ease for St Nicholas's Church. St Peter's was the only church paid for by rates and loans from the government. Barry won the competition for the design for the Royal Sussex County Hospital, the first part of which was built in this period.

New private or subscription gardens opened. Ireland's Gardens with its cricket and stool ball grounds was the subject of several engravings. Now under Park Crescent, these gardens limped along into the 1830s and 1840s. Queen's Park was also unsuccessful as gardens and a spa and the owners sought to add villas, a project which also failed to work in spite of quite heavy promotion.

The Chain Pier a polygraph of the mid 1820s showing the cliff top before the town decided to build the protective wall.



Building work has to be paid for, so where did all of the capital that flowed into all of these projects come from? That is not easily established. But it was all the work of developers, some building a house or two or finding a builder to do it for them, others simply taking the risk of lending the money as mortgages. Many backers were friends and family, this much emerges from the bankruptcy records which give us an insight into who were the creditors. The loss of builders' accounts, family accounts and correspondence such as any sources for the prolific Wilds, Amon and Amon Henry who were working in the town by 1818 greatly limits our understanding of who played major roles as developers and arbiters of style. The Wilds built anything they were asked to including the Phoenix Brewery for Richard Tamplin who opened it in 1822 just behind Richmond Terrace.

At this time, it was not the banks and other bodies we are used to today which funded building development. Planning control was slight and confined mainly to preventing buildings intruding into the road and similar issues.

Rates were paid directly by ratepayers who also attended meetings where the management of the town by the Commissioners and of the poor by the Directors and Guardians was examined. Any extra expenditure was carefully examined. Many owners of houses had bought to let and so needed to keep the town prosperous to make their investment worthwhile. Local businessmen also had a keen interest in maintaining the flow of visitors coming in.

Ratepayers opted for gas lighting, more powers to widen streets, a proto police force and agreed that both the cliff top to the east of the town centre and a link road right along the front of the old town had to be built. Previously visitors and residents had to detour round North Street to get from the east to the west side of town. This had been the source of complaints and a reason why the western side of the town had been slow to develop. The ratepayers also relocated the Poor House to the north side of town, where Buckingham Place and Albert Road now stand. This was another major piece of organising and a financial pressure on the ratepayers. With the great amount of building in Brighton and in Hove, (together with the revamping of some of the houses in the surrounding villages which are now in the City,) by 1832 the whole area looked prosperous. Yet within the back streets the population was high and in due course, the failure to provide adequate sewerage, fresh water and street cleaning in these areas was to become a major issue which had a profound effect on the reputation of Brighton and Hove. But that is another story.

Sue Berry

This Chapel, built in the 1820s (print c1832) is now the Broughelm Centre.

The cottage to the left is still there.

The burial ground was railed - as almost all open spaces used to be to reduce the abuse and vandalism that happened in the past as it does now. Today this is one of the few small green open spaces in the centre of the City. A potential little gem with neglected flower beds by the buildings and overgrown beds beside the paths which need either weeding or returning to grass. Surely it could be maintained better by the City as so many people walk through it and if necessary, the main part re-railed and locked at night?





REPAIR *and* RESTORATION of the WESTERN BANDSTAND on the WESTERN ESPLANADE of the seafront, BRIGHTON

THE COUNCIL'S DECISION TO PROCEED WITH THE REPAIR and adaptation of the bandstand and its immediate environs using its own resources was welcomed by the member societies which form the majority of bodies represented on the Conservation Advisory Group when a progress report was brought to it in January.

Giles Ings, managing director of DRP Architects, attended the meeting to provide an update on the current position. DRP is the architectural practice appointed by the Council for this restoration project, together with Fiona Atkinson, Landscape Architect.

The architects have made applications for planning and listed building consent and are now preparing the documents to be sent to contractors who will be invited to tender for this project. It is intended that the original pedestrian bridge and steps between the upper esplanade and the bandstand level of the building will be replaced. When it is necessary for ambulant disabled performers to gain access to the bandstand a lightweight ramp will be brought into use on the upper esplanade to facilitate this. At other times the bridge will be permanently accessible and lighting and CCTV surveillance is under consideration to avoid the need for locked gates across the entrance at night. We understand that advice will be sought from a specialist lighting engineer to design an imaginative and practical scheme. It is expected that the original movable full height screens (at present stored in the roofspace above the bandstand), which were designed to protect the bandsmen and performers from inclement weather, will be restored and reinstated.

The proposed café use on the ground and basement floors will not require commercial scale mechanical ventilation because cooked meals will not be produced on site. Nevertheless, the seating area behind replica cast iron hooped-top railings, (with the possibility of striped canvas wind breaks to protect customers from annoying breezes), will create a stylish venue

a million times more attractive than the sorry and untidy surroundings to this now sad, but soon to be born again, festive building. Just what we have always hoped for!

The icing on the (tea) cakes will be when there are events by bands or other performances on the raised bandstand above, which the enthusiastic Friends of Brighton Bandstand are actively planning.



PRESTON PARK lies adjacent to the busy London Road and is, with its green space, tall elm trees and the colourful Rockery opposite, an impressive entrance to the City of Brighton. Brighton Corporation bought it from the Bennett-Stanford family of Preston Manor in 1883. Covering 63 acres it was Brighton's first public park.

However by 1922 the condition of the park had deteriorated and members of the Council asked the Superintendent of the Parks and Gardens, Captain Bertie MacLaren, to produce a Grand Design that, we might say these days, should have the "wow factor"

MacLaren pulled out all the stops and produced a scheme that was both visionary and breathtaking in its design. He proposed a boulevard system already started in the Steine, which would encircle the park by removing the heavy railings, and removing the lodge at the south end.

The focal point of his design was a 6 acre lake filling the western half of the park, parallel to the main London Road. The lake shores were to be constructed of concrete with formal terraces to the north and south, the rest left as natural grass slopes with existing trees kept as shade.

The steep slope to the north east behind the lake was designed as a rock garden, with a waterfall to the lake, the rock *'...stratified to copy nature and ideal for the growth of alpine plants. Seats in sheltered niches amid this wealth of floral colour completed his fine scenic effect.*

The lake was to be informal in shape with an island in the north-west corner 'where water-plants and reeds can grow and swans and waterfowl make their home'.

MacLaren commissioned Charles Knight, a local artist, and lecturer at the School of Art, to paint a watercolour of his Grand Design, which he then submitted to the International Exhibition of Garden Design in 1928. Preston Manor and St Peters church, Preston became the main focus of the view to the north, the main London Road lies beyond the picture to the left. The Chalet is to the right of the lake.

MacLaren rescued urns and tazze from the recently demolished Aquarium and placed them in the gardens of Preston Park. In the Superintendent's Report book of December 1926, MacLaren writes, *"I have made use of the Chalet as an outstanding point of interest which should prove a source of revenue. This centrepiece with five terraces jutting naturally into the lake is easily approachable from the principle parts of the park and is designed on such a scale as will accommodate large crowds of people. The Chalet improvement also provides space for promenading and ample sitting out room for those requiring refreshments. To secure a dignified effect at this point I have introduced on the top terrace stone pergolas in order to camouflage a building which although useful is not altogether beautiful. The pergolas can be so arranged that screens could be fixed when required for shelter to suit the convenience of those dining or dancing. On a lower elevation spacious stone landing stages with ample seating add to the harmonious composition of the whole and suggestively make an ideal site of accommodating spectators at regattas and water sport meetings"*.

However, his scheme would have done away with the football pitches, which may have upset some people. The basic estimate of cost was £50,000, a huge sum for that time – but it would have created much needed work for the unemployed. Sadly other schemes in the town took priority and the "Grand Design" was rejected. Perhaps now is the time to flood the football pitches and realise Bertie MacLaren's visionary scheme!

The watercolour by Charles Knight (catalogue No. FA 103808) can be seen in the Exhibition "Surprises in Store" currently in the Prints and Drawings gallery of Brighton Museum until October 2008.

Lavender Jones

References: Virginia Hinze: *Thesis on Parks and Gardens of Brighton. Virginia is a landscape architect, working for English Heritage, with a special interest and training in the conservation of historic parks.*



SUMMER VISITS

Hove Civic Society has arranged a programme of visits to which our members are invited to participate

THURSDAY 12th JUNE 2008 – DEPARTURE 0800 FROM HOVE TOWN HALL – NORTON ROAD ENTRANCE. PRICE £25.00

A full day visit to Rochester where people will have time to look round Rochester, have lunch and then meet outside Restoration House, the finest example of a pre Civic War town house in England.

THURSDAY 17th JULY 2008 – DEPARTURE 09.00 FROM HOVE TOWN HALL – NORTON ROAD ENTRANCE. PRICE £26.00 for NT members and £31.00 for non-members.

A morning visit to Polesden Lacey where lunch can be taken, followed by an afternoon visit to **Stratfield Saye**, country home of the first Duke of Wellington.

THURSDAY 21st AUGUST 2008 – DEPARTURE 0800 FROM HOVE TOWN HALL – NORTON ROAD ENTRANCE. PRICE 22.00

A full day visit to Greenwich Royal Observatory, The National Maritime Museum and Queen's House.

THURSDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 2008 – DEPARTURE 08.00 FROM HOVE TOWN HALL - NORTON ROAD ENTRANCE. PRICE £32.00.

A visit to Hatfield House in Hertfordshire.

For an application form and full details please contact
Mrs. Sue Ellerton – 01273 746 745.