



Regency Review

CONSIDERING THE PAST...FRAMING THE FUTURE

www.regencysociety.org

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE REGENCY SOCIETY

Issue 13
September 2005

King Alfred

The raison d'être for the re-development of the King Alfred site on Hove's seafront is to provide a new sport and leisure centre, to replace the out-dated and run-down 1938 buildings which house inadequate, poorly maintained facilities. From a recent presentation it is clear that the combined architectural and planning expertise of HOK Sport working with Frank Gehry and Partners have produced a stunning seafront building with superb new sports and swimming facilities. The representatives of various sports on the local consultation panel reported that they are pleased with the technical planning of the interconnecting pools and dry-sports facilities and both the exterior and interior appearance, now shown clearly in detailed plan and sectional drawings, with coloured perspective views, reverberates with the dazzling display of forms and colour for which Gehry is renowned. *Floreat Hova*, indeed.

But... and, sadly, there is always a but, all this comes at a price. The price to be paid by the residents of Brighton & Hove, and all the visitors to the city who will surely wish to see and enjoy this fine new sports centre, is that it is to be surrounded, all to tightly, by blocks of flats on three sides which are proposed to be between nine and eleven storeys high. It is as if Gehry's magical sports and leisure building needs to be tightly protected by burly 'bouncers' closely spaced around its perimeter. These buildings, probably perfectly presentable in themselves, on a somewhat larger site, here seem likely to overwhelm the new seaside 'sports palace', and the existing nearby buildings, which should

be allowed considerably more breathing space.

What, you will be asking, of the 'wonky towers'! They are still there, but now there are only two of them, with interesting sculptural forms. However, they now appear almost stunted because their height is only about half the thirty-eight storeys of the competition winning scheme, and this also gives them the appearance of being wider. Nevertheless, they are still more than twice the height of any nearby existing buildings.

On 12 September the Policy and Resources Committee of the City Council approved this development, on behalf of the council as landlord. A full planning application will follow and it will take some months before it reaches the Planning Applications Sub-Committee for decision. Since the committee will, as the local planning authority, be deciding this application in which the council has a considerable financial interest, as owner of the freehold of the land, the application may be 'called in' for decision by the government.

But, if HOK Sport and Gehry have answered the brief that they were given, the question remains, was it the right brief? Some of us would suggest that the result might imply that the City Council has been too greedy and that, if the detailed project proposals now provided show that this number of market and affordable flats is needed to pay for the sports facilities, then, on this site, it is too many and therefore something must be omitted. But then the sums don't work out! Perhaps Su Doku enthusiasts should turn their attention to real life planning problems!

JCS



Stanmer House



Stanmer House has rarely been absent from our annual reports and it is therefore a pleasant opportunity to provide an up-beat report on its present condition.

Internal repairs and re-decoration are in full swing. The Planning Applications Sub-Committee unanimously agreed on 31 August that it was minded to grant planning permission for the 'proposed change of use of (the) ground floor from office use to art gallery, public exhibition, conference and reception rooms for public and private functions.' Conditions were added to require a 'Green Travel Plan' to protect the character of the listed building and surrounding parkland. The developer, Cherrywood Investments, informally told members of the committee at a site meeting that cars would not be a problem because minibuses and coaches were expected to be the usual form of transport for guests attending wedding ceremonies. Members were also assured that the bar in the library annexe will be designed in accordance with English Heritage requirements. We hope that both these issues will be monitored by the City Council's Conservation Design team. Members did not probe the extent of 'public access' that would be provided but the planning officer said that it was expected that the detailed conditions would mimic those of the previous approval.

The exterior of the building was carefully and comprehensively restored some years ago with the aid of major conservation grants. We now hope that the interior will be completed to a high standard and that the project will result in the building being brought back into a suitable and sustainable use. It is also expected that putting part of the building back into use as offices (with a resident caretaker) will stop, or at the least reduce, the vandalism which has been a continuous problem in the past.

JCS

Brighton Marina

More and more flats? No - very slightly fewer!

Brunswick Developments Limited has recently revised its planning application for a large number of flats to be built on land to the south of the David Lloyd sports buildings on the west side of the marina harbour. It has reduced the total number of flats proposed by two!

There are many aspects of this development that raise concerns but the society has encapsulated its objection on grounds of the harmful and adverse impact that these proposals will have upon the townscape, character and appearance of the Kemp Town Conservation Area and on the setting of the Grade I listed buildings of Sussex Square, Lewes Crescent and Arundel Terrace. We believe that although the proposed tower may be a well designed building its impact coupled with that of the proposed buildings to the north of it will have a damaging affect on views of the lower end of the east side of Lewes Crescent, when seen from the north, as one walks towards the sea. In our opinion, the sublime curve of the buildings in the crescent would be greatly harmed by the proposed new development.

The ensemble design of the original Kemp Town square, crescents and terraces was an early example of planning a housing development on a very impressive scale, which faces and embraces the sea. The impact of this setting would be more than a little marred by a bulky new suburb, part built over the water of the harbour, which thrusts itself into view beyond the grand Regency terraces.

It is hard to describe most of the existing buildings at the Marina as 'things of beauty' but in the main they have the advantage of only marring their own environment, tucked as they are under the cliffs and behind the harbour. It is the thrusting bulk of this suggested new development which will affect not only Kemp Town but a great swathe of Brighton's seafront, as one walks eastwards from the Palace Pier.

Brighton & Hove's seafront is rightly acclaimed as a superb example of seaside architecture and town planning. Sadly, we are now faced with a proposal for a new housing development which is just too large and which will dramatically unbalance the existing equilibrium of our seafront vista. JCS



MARLBOROUGH HOUSE

A large sign in the forecourt of Marlborough House has been advertising its forthcoming use as a car wash location! We understand that the owner has been told that he will require listed building consent and planning approval for this proposed change of use. We view this prospect with extreme trepidation.

We are delighted by the external restoration of the main elevation of the building. We now look forward to the full restoration of the forecourt area and we trust that a suitable use for the building will be found which will enable its interior to be restored and also to allow some public access.

(P.S. Some of us always thought that this would be an ideal building for wedding ceremonies, civic receptions and the like. So much more convenient to the centre of Brighton than Stanmer House!)



HOVE LIBRARY

At its 31 August meeting the Planning Applications Sub-Committee also approved details of internal alterations to Hove Library which include improvements for disabled access. This has resulted from advice and meetings between the applicant (that is the Council's property officers), the Conservation Team and English Heritage. We were also assured at the meeting that no alterations would be made to the original hardwood bookcases or panelling on the first floor.

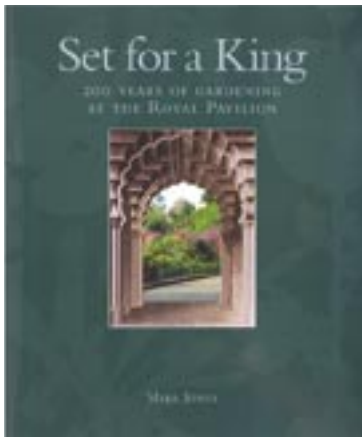
We have to thank some Hove library enthusiasts for achieving a *volte-face* by the City Council, which initially wished to dispose of the building and to re-locate the library facilities within Hove Town Hall. May the existing Edwardian building continue to provide improved facilities long into the future.

JCS



A New Look at the Pavilion Gardens

SET FOR A KING: 200 years of Gardens at the Royal Pavilion by Mike Jones. Published by Royal Pavilion, Museums and Libraries, 2005. price £19.99



Mike Jones is the author, illustrator and inspiration behind “Set for a King”, a remarkable book tracing the history of the Royal Pavilion Estate over the past two centuries. He is well qualified to do so, as he has spent the last thirty or so years as a designer at the Pavilion and Museums and is now the Head of Conservation and Design. The post-war transformation of the Pavilion Estate from municipal wasteland to its present magical and historically authentic complexity is perhaps surprisingly a labour of merely the past twenty years. Indeed it was not until 1995, ten years ago, that the first paths and planting linking the North Gate with the Pavilion were in place. Photographs of the black tarmac road, which allowed the mayoral limousine a free passage past the Pavilion entrance, within which the mayor held court, and images of harsh modern curbs, lined on both sides with parked cars, will be a dispiritingly familiar memory for most Brighton residents.

Much of the book however is a history of the creation of the original, Prince Regent inspired, Pavilion Estate, seen in the context of contemporary fashions in garden design. The book opens with a six page chronology embellished with watercolour drawings of marvellous delicacy. Successive chapters, show the many influences at work, drawing richly

on the exotic traditions of the Orient; just as did the Pavilion itself. Jones shows perceptively that the Chinese wallpapers, with their exquisite birds and flowers, delighted visitors by matching the choice of flowers in the real garden outside. The author devoted a year to collecting specimens from the garden daily, and, upon returning home, to draw them before supper in case they wilted: afterwards they would be completed in watercolour and gouache.

The nadir in the fortunes of the gardens was during the second world war, when pigs were penned outside the King’s Apartments, and the North Lawn converted into a specimen allotment. Following the end of the war, the garden, then as now, the responsibility of the municipality, became a rather conventional town park, to be ultimately transformed, as this book so triumphantly demonstrates. The final fifty or so pages, roughly a quarter of the book, take the reader through the four seasons, with an alluring mix of photographs, location

drawings, and of course many more of Mike Jones’ splendid watercolours. At his original job interview with the then Director, John Morley, a firm believer in testing practical skills, he was asked to do a drawing: Jones obliged with a Durer-like hare and Morley was so impressed with its quality that it secured him the post. The studies of plants, foliage and flowers which adorn this book, together with the numerous fine, accurate and detailed architectural drawings amply confirm that initial judgement.

Two minor quibbles. Firstly the cover is rather sombre, and the small centre-piece view of the garden through a ‘montaged’ North Gate gives little promise of the delights within. Secondly the title “Set for a King” might remind a nursery rhyme-addict of a certain blackbird pie, rather than the stage-setting for one of the most theatrical buildings in the world. However this is a glorious book, to be bought (at a very reasonable price) and treasured...surely a ‘must’ for Christmas.

PDR



Two of the many floral studies



Lectures for 2005-2006

All the lectures will take place at The Old Market, Upper Market Street, Hove, commencing at 7.00 pm. The only exception will be the AGM on April 4 2006, which will be held at The Royal Pavilion

Tuesday 4 October 2005 *The Antony Dale Memorial Lecture*

Tim Knox, Curator of Sir John Soane's Museum and was formerly Head Curator of the National Trust. *'Flights of Fancy: Stuffed Birds as interior decor in the English Country House.'*

Tuesday 1 November 2005 *Colloquium on the future of the Society*

Tuesday 6 December 2005 James Lomax, Curator of Temple Newsam House, Leeds on *'Isabella, Marchioness of Hertford, Queen (sic) of the Regency.'*

Tuesday 10 January 2006 Gillian Darby, Director, Christie's Education, *'Pleasing Painting and Gorgeous Gold: Porcelain of the early 19th Century.'*

Tuesday 7 February 2006 Stephen Wildman, Director of the Ruskin Library, University of Lancaster on *'Necessary and Inevitable Utterances': The influence of John Ruskin on the Arts and Crafts Movement.*

Tuesday 7 March 2006 Dr Ian Bristow. Dr Ian Bristow is a world authority on the history of painted surfaces. *'a look at the interior use of paint in early 19th century houses in both town and country.'*

Tuesday 4 April 2006 The Annual General Meeting of the Society, to be followed by Professor Gavin Stamp on *The architecture of Alexander Greek Thomson.*

The Study Tour to Bath June 27 to July 2 2005

"Four pence a night for Bed - Six pence with Supper". The Francis Hotel in the heart of Bath charges a little bit more than Mrs. Conkey did in 19th. century Massachusetts, and it was at the Francis that 31 members of the Society assembled for dinner on the evening of Monday, June 27. Once again, Tony and Stella Mercer had arranged an interesting programme of visits.

We began on Tuesday morning with a trip to Tyntesfield. It's amazing what you can build from bird poo, but the Gibbs family who built the house made their money from guano! If High Victorian Domestic Gothic is to your taste, then this house is an absolute must. There is quite a lot of work still to be done, but what has been achieved so far is of great credit to the National Trust.

We came back to Bath via Clevedon, to see the pier, and I noticed several charming houses on the prom painted in sugared-almond colours. Our last visit of the day was to Crowe Hall, by courtesy of John Barratt. He showed us the stupendous views from the garden and then encouraged us to wander through the house. The visit ended with tea and home-made cake on the terrace.

The following day Stella Mercer and I achieved a long-held ambition. "Well, we made it!", said Stella to me as we got off the coach at Wells Cathedral. There is so much to see there and the great scissor arches at the crossing are every bit as mind-boggling as the photographs lead you to believe. We were there at midday so we were able to see the cathedral's remarkable clock in action. Its jousting knights must have been the inspiration for Trumpton! We returned to Bath in the afternoon where there was an opportunity of going on a guided walk round the city. I opted instead for a visit to the Buildings of Bath Museum, housed in the former Chapel of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion.

Thursday morning saw us at Lacock, where the National Trust owns everything in sight, apart from one pub. We enjoyed a guided tour round the Abbey, accompanied for part of the way by a rather elderly ginger cat who obviously didn't trust us not to pinch the spoons! We lunched at Bowood and toured the house, but unfortunately the weather put a stop to any stroll round the grounds.

The American Museum at Claverton Manor in Bath is unique. Its founders first

acquired the building and then set out to fill it. They bought well and the exhibits are arranged as a series of room-settings. Our visit on Friday morning began with coffee and cookies on the terrace before we were taken on a whirlwind tour of the house. There was so much to see that I would certainly love to go there again. My favourite room was the Greek Revival Room but I must mention Conkey's Tavern. It was Mrs. Conkey who issued the rules, a copy of which is now hanging in my kitchen. Her husband was in charge of the alcohol. He served this from a counter surrounded by a cage which he would open up with the now celebrated phrase, "The bar's open!". The afternoon was spent at a rather damp Dyrham Park. I'm happy to say that the National Trust now takes visitors down the long drive from the carpark to the house by minibus. The route round the house has changed since I was last there but you may still see the wonderful van Hoogstraeten painting 'View down a Corridor' which so bedazzled Samuel Pepys when he saw it in London.

No, I couldn't ignore the various commemorative plaques I saw. I even photographed a couple, including a very elaborate affair near the hotel commemorating Dr. William Oliver, he of the biscuits! EH



Members will have noticed the brilliant hoardings that now surround the excavations and works on the site at Brighton Station. They were created as part of the HipHop Festival, and also by children of St. Bartholomew's school with artist Andrew Mocket - congratulations to all concerned and developers QED, for the welcome, if temporary, colour.

