



## SUMMER/AUTUMN 2023 NEWSLETTER

### Wanted: One Careful Tenant

The historic Temple and Reading Room on the Kemp Town Esplanades have been restored to gleaming white-painted condition as work continues on the rejuvenation of the east Brighton seafront.

The two buildings were built in the 1850s as part of the development of the sea front Esplanade linked to the private Kemp Town Estate gardens by the famous tunnel under Marine Parade. The Temple, always open to the elements, formed both a visual full-stop to the promenade overlooking Black Rock and a shelter from more extreme elements, be they rain, wind or sunshine. The name may have been a reference to Thomas Read Kemp's original Brighton home, also called The Temple, and now Brighton Girls School.

The Esplanade Temple has been in a neglected state for many decades; the earliest known image, from 1948, shows the building with a lookout post on the roof, doubtless used during the war to spot potential invaders and air raids, but otherwise in poor condition and hemmed in by undergrowth. And so it remained until the decision in early 2021 to restore it and the similarly neglected Reading Room to commercial use as a café and restaurant respectively.

However dreams of lattes and fine dining with the best sea views in the city have had to

be put on hold for this summer due to delays in the redevelopment and the difficulties in finding suitable tenants to run the two sites. As the Newsletter went to press, further delays to the opening of the Temple Café had been caused by the need to obtain additional planning permission for a staff WC tucked behind the building, although at the beginning of August the Council stated that “news on the new tenants will be announced in the next few weeks.”

The Kemp Town Society strongly supports the work carried out so far to restore the two buildings and their surrounding landscaping, and believes they will form a valued asset to the architectural heritage and community life of the Estate. We also understand that the work carried out so far can only be sustained by creating thriving and successful commercial enterprises in both the Reading Room and the Temple.

To this end we hope that the planning issue around the staff WC can be swiftly resolved and the necessary work carried out to bring the buildings back to full life.

In the meantime, we can at least enjoy the views of the two restored buildings framed by the spectacular backdrop of the Estate itself.

Keith Paulin

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## Our city past and present



Rock Street in 1930. Photo from the James Gray Collection courtesy of the Regency Society.

The Regency Society has launched its new website of the photographs from the James Gray collection of historic images of Brighton and Hove, taken between the earliest days of photography and the 1980s – with each image accompanied by its modern version to create a unique then-and-now record of the city.

James Gray (1904–1998) was a local man who worked all his life in insurance. He was also an avid collector with a passion for the streets of Brighton and Hove, and his initial collection of stamps gave way in the 1950s to local topographical photographs following the chance acquisition of a few images of Western Road. From this small beginning he went on to build up a massive collection of over 7,500 images, exchanging copies with other collectors, purchasing images and even commissioning photographs. Following his death, the Regency Society recognised the unique importance of the collection, and purchased and digitised it to create the original James Gray Collection.

The James Gray Collection is unusual. The vast majority of the photographs are of places where ordinary people lived and worked, away from the well-known tourist sites. Some of the city's most famous historic sites are not included at all. This collection is therefore of special interest to people who live and work in the city and care about its history.

In 2018 the Regency Society began its project to capture contemporary views of the buildings and sites from the Gray collection, many of which are now lost, demolished or redeveloped. The Society assembled a team of volunteer photographers who between 2018 and 2022 researched the Gray images and went out onto the city's streets to capture the modern view as best they could. Many new images were taken on the empty streets of the pandemic lockdown, creating an additional layer of historical interest for future viewers. The Society then built a new website to display the old and new images



Lewes Crescent page from the Regency Society's new James Gray Collection website.

along with written commentaries and an easily searchable street index and maps of the city. Many local people have devoted countless hours to this project.

Almost 90% of the photographs in the James Gray collection are included in the new site, and more will be added in due course. Some are impossible to replicate in the twenty first century, for example the interiors of demolished buildings. So far, nearly 5,000 contemporary photographs have been added.

The original website has become a favourite of many local historians and others with an interest in the built environment of Brighton and Hove, and there is no intention to remove it. The purpose of this new website is to make browsing easy by providing a street index and map, and to draw attention to the twenty first century images of the places in the James Gray collection. In this way this unique collection is now accessible to a wider audience seeking to see what used to be alongside what is there now.

Although there is a strong general interest today in old photographs, both for their factual content and also for their artistic value, when James Gray started his collection there was little. We must be grateful that he had the foresight and the single-minded dedication to assemble this unique record of our city.

The new web site can be found at <https://images.regencysociety.org/>

The original web site, containing the full Gray archive, can be viewed at <https://www.regencysociety-jamesgray.com/>

## Preparing the Look

### The KTS Regency Garden Party June 24th 2023

The Kemp Town Society Garden Party has been a summer fixture for most of the past 20 years. Originally it was a fairly simple event held in the South Garden and, one rainy year, with the addition of every candle available and many umbrellas, even in the Tunnel! Eventually the Party was moved to the North Garden where it was easier to control. As the years passed, the stalls grew. But this year, the bicentenary of the building of the Estate, demanded something really special.

I was idly watching “Persuasion” again on television one evening when the credits rolled: “Art Director, David Rogers”. David is a member of KTS. Immediately I emailed him to get his thoughts on styling a Regency Garden Party this year. We both had visions of the Vauxhall and Ranelagh Gardens, where in the 19th century spectacular summer events were held every evening with myriad twinkling lights, dancing, shaved-ham suppers and fireworks. David instantly produced some ideas, but sadly had just signed to a job abroad for a year. It was, however, a very exciting and inventive time.

The KTS Committee liked the idea in theory and set up a subcommittee chaired by Vaughan Rees. Meanwhile, by chance, I was introduced to Kate Drohan, a professional events manager who designs and sets up all kinds of events, particularly children’s parties. Kate lives in Lewes Crescent! Fate was definitely working overtime. With her modern expertise and my own design experience in film and television, we were on the way!

Having sketched out our general designs for the look of the Garden and the stalls, we got down to the details: graphic designs for two different posters, souvenir tickets, labels for the flower vases and signs for the stalls. There followed a huge amount of prep for Kate and me. All materials had to be sourced and obtained down to the last safety pin. Everything would have to be put up the day before the Party, and we were making most of the decorations out of tissue paper! Weather was therefore a big consideration. Some spectacular ideas had to be jettisoned, but we clung to our central “maypole”, our ribbons and garlands, roses, wisteria and ostrich feathers. The two wisteria-dressed arches for the gateway were somehow made and stored in her sitting room by Kate, and my flat became a ribbon jungle. The 20 stall-signs were designed and laminated and 300 souvenir tickets made. Tablecloths for



the 20 tables were ordered, and Michael Osborne donated a large flag showing Thomas Read Kemp’s coat of arms.

The day before the party about a dozen volunteers assembled in the gardens to realise our vision. By about 4 o’clock everything was in place. All the gazebos were decorated identically with flower garlands and big paper roses at the corners. The big main tent was created by lacing four gazebos together and adding swathes of muslin, miles of ribbon, golden crowns topped with Prince of Wales ostrich feathers and a beribboned maypole. Michele Lahey worked all day trimming fresh roses and greenery, including herbs, into 20 flower arrangements in decorated jars (more ribbons!) for the tables. Kate still had to create her magical Children’s Area, which she did remarkably quickly on the day itself.

I would like to thank every single person who helped before and on that day, in particular my marvellous colleague Kate and the indefatigable Vaughan, who saved the day several times. Up to the last minute he and his partner, Tony Hyde, were chopping fruit for Pimm’s and buying extra gazebos.

Over the years the gazebos have multiplied to house the bar, the raffle and everything in between, but this year they outdid themselves. They housed, as well as bar, band, raffle and books, a wonderful silhouette artist, Megumi, a sumptuous cake stall supplied with great generosity by Marmalade, the Kemp Town Artists with their joyous array of plein air paintings, and delicious local ice cream. Many thanks to everyone, not least the 400 people who came to enjoy themselves. You made all the hard work worthwhile!

Vanessa Minns

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## Through a (relative) newcomer's eyes

Our Estate has long been a favourite haunt of artists and theatricals, but it harbours some distinguished scientists too. Andy Clark, Professor of Cognitive Philosophy at the University of Sussex, and his partner Alexa Morcom, a cognitive neuroscientist, moved into Chichester Terrace in 2020. Andy's current work is concerned particularly with the idea that the brain is a "prediction machine" that does not merely take in sensory information, but applies "top down" processing to it. (His latest book is "The Experience Machine: How our Minds Predict and Shape Reality".) Both sensory and predictive processes seem to have been in play when he and Alexa arrived here!

At an early 2022 meeting of the KTS, I volunteered to write a short piece about my impressions as a relative newcomer to the Estate. Though time has passed, I can still say that the shortest version of this piece would consist of a single word: wow!

Along with my partner Alexa, I moved down from Edinburgh in January 2019. There, we had been fortunate enough to own a Grade II Listed apartment in the West End of the New Town. But heading south, our wish-list was simply to be close to the sea, and to have some kind of outside space (what folks in Scotland call a 'sit-oot-ery').

Some of my academic colleagues suggested we might consider something around Sussex Square. So when we spotted a nice and surprisingly affordable rental at the top of the square, we jumped at the chance.

Arriving on a rainy windy day in early January 2019, we were blown over – both by the remarkably fierce gusts and by the sheer grandeur of the rental apartment. The first floor flat had high ceilings, ornate coving, a massive living room, and balconies front and back. It wasn't all plain sailing, as we were plagued by persistent leaks from a huge double-height skylight far above the kitchen. But all things considered, it was still an amazingly beautiful flat.

Beauty aside, it was really our new neighbours who made our southern landing so happy and memorable. Even before the removal vans started disgorging our somewhat eccentric worldly goods, several had ventured out to welcome us. Our new basement neighbours (Tony and Cynthia Kynaston) stood out especially. Their own flat, we soon discovered, was home to an amazing variety

of objects and projects.

On arrival at Sussex Square, we were also given keys to the amazing (thank you Jeremy and the Voles) gardens. We were astounded by the sheer beauty of these, framed by the equal beauty of magnificent Regency architecture. We were also amused by the contrast between these picture-perfect frontages and the anarchic rear areas. Tony and Cynthia's flat, for example, boasts a tunnel leading out from the back of the flat, burrowing under the ground-floor flat's garden, leading out to their own garden space at the rear. Boys' (and Girls') Own adventure-story engineering indeed.

After six months of 'settling in' we thought it was time to try to buy, and plumped for a first-floor belvedere flat at Number 2, Chichester Terrace. The flat, though beautiful, needed extensive renovations, but in October 2020 (deep into the pandemic) we finally moved in and the flat, now full of light and space, is a joy.

We are also now the proud renters of an allotment (one of the Craven Vale batch) just up the road towards Whitehawk. The allotments are a great local resource and include a community food project doing amazing work. If anything, then, our love of the area and the people who live here has only increased since the time I first volunteered to write this piece.

My one concern is over energy efficiency in our beautiful listed buildings. Brighton Council and English Heritage currently apply an extremely restrictive set of rules for dealing with windows, balcony doors, and the like. But a little flexibility there would pay huge ecological dividends, preventing massive heat loss and ever-increasing energy bills. There needs to be a more open dialogue between the often-competing demands of preservation and historical accuracy (on one side) and those of ecology and energy efficiency (on the other). I hope this will be an agenda item for conservation societies like KTS in the coming years.

Andy Clark



Andy and Alexa

## Mrs Coade's Lithodipyra: Hiding in Plain Sight?



*Coade Stone at the Chapel Royal ...*



*... and, perhaps, at 32 Sussex Square*

**“Tis in grain, Sir; ‘twill endure wind and weather.” (Twelfth Night, Act 1, Sc. 5)**

No, it is not some exotic butterfly, but a Greek word meaning “twice-fired stone”. Mrs Eleanor Coade adopted the name for an artificial stone produced from 1769 until her successors’ insolvency in 1833, at her factory in Lambeth on the South Bank of the Thames.

Commonly referred to as Coade Stone, it was a high-fired, durable, vitreous, ceramic which could be made into the smallest interior decorating items—about the size of a 2p piece—or gigantic river gods like Father Thames outside Ham House; and large, spectacular architectural features such as the choir screen in St George’s Chapel, Windsor Castle, which is often mistaken for an authentic 15th-century Gothic work.

Sculpting of details in stone was a skilled, time-consuming and delicate business; the result of casting in plaster was fragile and could easily decay out of doors. Hence the search for a robust material which could be mass produced from moulds, at a fraction of the cost of stone.

Coade was not the only the producer of such wares, but she was the most successful for the longest period of time. Thomas Cubitt, the architect most associated with the building of Kemp Town, produced his own version with a distinct reddish tint. Coade’s product had a light tone close to that of Portland or Bath stone. Both could be disguised with white paint to blend with

stucco. So sharp can the detail be that Coade Stone has even, as in the capitals of Heaton Hall in Manchester, been mistaken for cast iron.

Much of her success was the result of publishing illustrated catalogues of her products, along with employing skilled sculptors such as John Bacon RA who was responsible, inter alia, for Father Thames.

Pevsner, in his “Buildings of England”, lists several examples of Coade stone in and around Brighton; the most prominent are the royal arms of George III on the pediment of the Chapel Royal in North Street. This is a full heraldic achievement with lion and unicorn supporters and several banners. It bears the Latin date MDCCXCIII for 1793 and is signed COADE. Other examples in Brighton and Lewes are capitals in the Ammonite order, which instead of the volutes of Ionic have a pair of these fossils. This order was first employed by George Dance on Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery in Pall Mall in 1789 and appears to be punningly adopted by Amon Wilde.

Given the proven existence of Coade stone in our area, I began to wonder if there was any in Kemp Town. By the time the Estate was built the Coade factory had passed through other hands but was still a going concern.

*Continued on page 8*

During lockdown I spent much time in our garden, and one day I wondered if the prominent Ionic pilasters on the rear elevations of the Peel House, at 32 Sussex Square, were Coade. These are crisp and deeply carved; the colour is right for Coade and could easily be mistaken for real stone.

Unusually the corner volutes are intact. A unique feature of the Ionic order is that it is symmetrical only on one axis as opposed to the other orders which are symmetrical on both. Thus, on turning a corner the observer sees on one side the full face of the capital; on the other its side: not the most elegant of solutions. One way of addressing this dilemma, employed here, was to cant out the volute on the apex of the corner at 135 degrees to each side. It is a solution which has

classical precedent, as in the Erechtheion on the Acropolis in Athens, but is not the most elegant of solutions either, and prone to decay and damage over the years. Indeed, they have so suffered. The Sussex Square ones remain intact, suggesting a material stronger than stucco.

In a sense, in the absence of documentary evidence, I am floating a hypothesis, open to contradiction. But I am reasonably convinced that Coade stone is alive and well in Kemp Town. Likely suspects are the capitals of Fife House. There must be others. All ideas and suggestions gratefully received.

Bruce Tattersall

## News and Announcements

### Garden Party Raffle Supporting Local Charities

For several years the Society has supported local charities working in the community with donations from the proceeds of the garden party raffle.

This year the Society's Trustees have chosen the Monday Food Bank, run by St John the Baptist parish church in Bristol Road Kemp Town, and Stand For Ukraine Brighton & Hove.

The Monday Food Bank was opened as a response to the pandemic, and the parish took it over in May 2021 and has continued to operate it as the covid crisis has been followed by the current cost-of-living crisis. The parish relies on donations to operate, and spends about £300 per week on food. The food bank is non referral – anyone in need is welcome, those of any faith or none, and it sees between 50 and 80 people each week.

Stand For Ukraine Brighton & Hove is a local community group created to support the Ukrainian community in the city which now comprises around 500 Ukrainians, mainly

women and children, the great majority of whom have found new homes in Brighton and Hove since the start of the war. The group promotes integration through arts and cultural events, family educational outings, drop-in sessions and online spaces.

### Summer extended in the Secret Garden

The David Breuer-Weil sculpture exhibition in the Secret Garden (in Bristol Gardens) has been a great success and is extended until September 24th, when the Garden closes for this year. The public opening is on Sundays only, 11am to 5pm, with Siobhan's wonderful cakes!