



KEMP TOWN SOCIETY

SPRING INTO SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2020

Ready but still waiting.....

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and gave up the idea of free-standing ones, which were estimated at a cool £15,000. The greatest saving (£7,000) came, thanks to Vanessa, from doing the design ourselves.

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Kemp Town Society

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The artwork caused headaches, too. The idea for the background “watermark”, which links the boards and echoes the shapes of the Estate’s cast-iron work, came in a wonderful “Archimedes moment” from a plant design on Vanessa’s favourite cushions. But getting copyright permissions for the other artwork was often immensely frustrating. Some owners could not be traced; others wanted absurd amounts of money. And there was always the budget to bear in mind...

Nevertheless, texts and designs were duly delivered to Fitzpatrick Woolmer (who do work all over the country, and are also doing boards for the Queen at Sandringham!). And now the finished boards have been delivered back to us. The Committee hopes they will be enjoyed by everyone; that they will answer some myths and mysteries about the Estate; and that they may lead people in the rest of Brighton – and beyond! – to realise what a special, and historically significant, place this is.

Alex Bruce

The information boards have been made possible by the generous bequest of Alex Bruce, a friend and neighbour of many people on the Estate. His friend Robert Edwards remembers him.

Alex was born in South Shields in County Durham in 1934. His family were farmers and grocers in the Tyneside region. He lost both parents during his childhood, and attended a charitable boarding school. He moved to London to placements as an intern, including a stint at number 9 Downing Street.

When he was eighteen he had an opportunity to go to Australia. He lived in Melbourne for many years, working in a bookshop where his fascination with the arts probably took root. After this he studied, and got a history degree at the university, where he became a career academic. He took an interest in Chinese history, then in Chinese languages, through which he found an affinity with Japanese. From then on, his subject for the rest of his career was Japanese Studies. He occupied senior posts at universities in Japan, Hong Kong and (I think) New Zealand. His final working years were spent as a tutor in Japanese at St Antony’s College, Oxford. After retiring he moved to Brighton where some friends had settled, taking a top-floor eyrie in Sussex Square.

The passion for pottery seems, like his love of music, to have been as much a discovery in itself as something inspired or guided by the connection with North-East Asian cultures. His tentative but very truthful reference to himself as a “hoarder” produced the enormous collection of pots in his possession, ranging from large items of significance which he eventually passed to the V&A, to all manner of odd, small items routinely picked up for as little as 50p at the Marina Sunday market.

His personality was a striking combination of, on the one hand, calm stillness and serenity, most especially when listening to music or attending concerts and



performances including opera; and, on the other hand, an uncontrollable impatience – he found queues excruciating, and could confidently dismiss and curtail a conversation if he grew bored with it. Certain pastimes could bring out either altogether or alternately these contrasting traits. Snooker was the closest thing to a spectator sport to compel him at length as a television viewer – and, perhaps, wine-tasting as a

spectator / participant. He was a member of the Kemp Town Wine Club for many years, holding tastings memorable for the abseiling skills required to get up his final flight of stairs, where the only hand-hold was a rope. (His niece however regards him as having been a whisky drinker; and he was entertainingly wry on the subject of beer in 1950s Australia.) He loved watching University Challenge.

His relationship with food was curious. He was very particular in his requirements for some foods, such as white fish, ice cream, cakes, grapefruit, potato and swede; whereas he had so little familiarity with some mainstream British green vegetables that he once asked me to introduce him to and explain to him the mysteries of lettuce, cabbage and greens. This led to little success, after he gave up on needing to separate the stalks from the soft of the spring greens, and was abruptly convinced that purple patches in varieties of lettuce meant they must be rotting. (Curious, given his family background in agriculture and groceries.) He knew far too much about what Chinese and Japanese food should taste like to explore the versions of those cuisines that are available in this country.

When I think of him in the setting of the gardens in the Square, I also think of his remarkable skill and flair in cut flower arranging. Perhaps this too was influenced by Japanese culture, which remained to the end the greatest passion of his life.

Who's Been Living in My House ?

How to find out more...

When designing the information boards, it soon became blindingly apparent that only a fraction of the knowledge we have concerning the correct history and construction of the Estate could be included. The solution – of course! – was to display the Who's Been Living in My House website address on the boards. You will find it in the top left-hand corner of each one.

Adam Liversidge, our webmaster, has rearranged the home page so that an image of Board 1 is in the centre. Click on "more" and go through to a new page with images of all five boards. Listed beneath each one are all the topics illustrated thereon. Click on any topic and go through to the full version on the website. Do try it out !

www.kemptonestatehistories.com

In this way our boards and our website interact, perfectly fulfilling the Kemp Town Society's brief of "Conservation, Community, Culture".



The Bench Project

People are always surprised to learn how many benches the Gardens contain. At the last count (and allowing for the fact that some mysteriously move around), there were six in the North Garden and 33 in the South Garden. Most have dedications to recall the residents who, like their families and successors, loved to sit and dream, or sip a glass, in a favourite spot.

Janine Nahapiet, who lives in Lewes Crescent, first became interested in the benches as a photographer. She liked the way they anchored the perspective as she photographed the gardens, and their different look in different seasons. Then she became interested in the dedications. This grew into a threefold project: first, to photograph each bench in its wider context of



shrubs and lawns; then to photograph the particular view from it; and then to collect the story behind each bench. Who were the people commemorated? What was their experience of the Gardens? And why was that place chosen?

She is hoping to gather as many stories as she can, and to put both these and the pictures into a photo book. She may also be able to include dedication plaques that used to be on trees, or on benches that have gone, as Jeremy, the head gardener, has carefully preserved a box of these.

Do you have a story of your own family bench? Or do you know people who have dedicated a bench, and then died or moved away? Do let Janine know.

Her e-mail is nahapiet@btinternet.com. Thankyou.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CORONAVIRUS: HOW TO GET HELP

Are you self-isolating at home, and need help with shopping, posting mail, walking the dog, or anything else?

Or are you low-risk, and able to join a team of local volunteers to carry out such tasks for your neighbours?

**In either case, if you live on or near the Estate, please contact Kelly Walsh, the team organiser, on 0771 1963 855.
<https://coronasupport.house/>**

In light of Coronavirus, the AGM of the Society, which was due to be held in May, has been postponed indefinitely.

This year's KTS Garden Party now also seems to hang in the balance, but it is planned for **June 27th** in the North Garden, from 12-4, and with the usual delights. The theme this year – possibly not ideal at a time of pandemic – is spots, or dots if you prefer. We were also hoping to introduce a **secondhand toy stall**, to give the children something, besides cake, to spend their pocket money on, and it is still worth collecting your old toys in the hope that we may resurrect a party at some later point. Watch the Garden gates and the website for information, as these wistful Dalmatians are doing!



The Newsletter is expanding! From the next issue, at the beginning of September, we hope to run a six- or eight-page Newsletter. This will allow us to run more pictures and increase the size of the font, which we have long wanted to do, but above all it will give us more room for stories of interest to all on the Estate.

We therefore need your contributions! Now that so many of us are confined to barracks at home, it's an ideal moment to consider writing historical/biographical/literary/comical and even poetical appreciations of life around the Estate. Or you could pen a complaint, and provoke reactions! Your pictures, drawn or photographed, by residents of any age, would be good to have too. As long as we are able to print, this project could help preserve some of the fellowship we all used to enjoy round the Estate and in the Gardens.

Please send all ideas to annwroe@gmail.com or paulinkeith@gmail.com.
Thankyou!



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