

SPRING / SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2021

Black Rock Rejuvenation: Starting, At Last

The past year has really pointed the contrast between the west end of town, with the beautifully restored Shelter Hall and the thriving arches, and our forlorn and graffiti-daubed stretch in the east.

Small wonder, then, that when the Council consulted on its plans for rejuvenating Black Rock fully 86% of respondents said yes, please. The money, £12m from the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership, is in the hopper and earmarked for this project, so even a council as cash-strapped as Brighton and Hove's has been able to forge ahead.

The Council has been generous with its information, and there are boards everywhere explaining the project: new cycling and pedestrian links to the Marina, a boardwalk along the beach, an ecology trail, a new sea wall, clearing and replanting on Duke's Mound, a sports court and BMX track where the old swimming pool used to be, a new learning centre (with public loos) by Black Rock Station, and the restoration and repurposing of the Old Reading Room and the Temple on the

Esplanade, probably as cafes. If all this could be done it would, of course, be wonderful. Let's hope.

Work started on February 15th with the clearing of shrubs and trees from Duke's Mound. This was a surprise, and drew some indignation, including a woman who held up work for a while by clinging to a tree. (The diggers took to starting very early in the morning, to avoid confrontation). An unscientific survey of onlookers showed that while most were glad to see the back of the tatty old tamarisks, some were less glad to see the end of the euonymus, which is a handsome, robust plant. Above all, people were relieved to be able to walk on those paths again without feeling they were going through hazardously overgrown undergrowth and could now enjoy the new views of the sea and the pier.

From mid-March, though, the work was "paused", for no apparent reason, with a lot more tamarisks still to shift. Perhaps the workmen can't face the daunting next step of getting the stumps out. However, they have promised to clear the slopes, and work is now underway to reseed them and

continued on page 2

Kemp Town Society

plant native grasses and flowers which will make an excellent foreground to the fine terraces behind them.

Of further works there is not much sign yet, but as they are supposed to last until spring 2022, it is still early days. One innovation is the laying of an electric cable along the slip road between Marine Parade and Madeira Drive, which will serve traffic lights at both the top and bottom of the road: a boon to everyone. Less welcome is the loss of the fig-and-euonymus covering of the wall beside the Volks office, presumably for the lights. This was part of the Green Wall, and might have been better mostly left that way, rather than opened up to taggers and their aerosols.

Diggers and bulldozers have meanwhile been tearing round on the beach east of the station. This is not connected to the redevelopment, however, but is the regular “recycling and bypassing”, the shifting of accumulated shingle from Kemp Town to Shoreham, which takes place twice a year to compensate for the west-east drift of material in the Channel. As we went to press, at least, little else was going on; the van park was still a van park, and will be till covid restrictions end.

However the Council’s timetable promises

significant works over the summer, including the new sea defences, and renovation of the Old Reading Room taking place in the autumn.

The more lively news is that the Council has given approval and permanent consent for an Olympic-size heated pool to be built between the sea and Sea Lanes, farther west along Madeira Drive. It will open, it’s said, by spring next year. If that were to happen, and the other fitness hubs already there expanded, and the 30-40 arches adjacent to Concorde 2 were restored (as planned, starting in October), our east end could become a real draw.

Those with suspicious minds will, however, note that much of the Black Rock plan is temporary. The sports court and BMX pump track are both intended to last for “three or four years”, until “a decision is made on the long-term future of the land”. The need for a “direct public transport link” (apparently, in the Council’s plans, a seafront hopper service) between the eastern seafront and the Marina suggests a big development, as does the extending of the sea wall and the moving of the vegetated shingle. A “permanent redevelopment” will begin in four years, the Council says. Is that conference centre still a threat? It’s as well to be watchful.



The Garden Party: moved but not forgotten!



The much-loved and much-cancelled Garden Party will now be held on **SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 11th**, at 12 noon in the North Garden as usual, but in a different format.

Instead of browsing stalls, which may still be tricky, guests will be invited to bring their own picnic, wine and chairs, and form a constellation of social bubbles with a certain amount of distancing. With luck we should still be able to make the day festive, musical and neighbourly!

Please watch the website, and posters on the Garden gates, for further updates.

Annual General Meeting 2021

Another victim of the Covid lockdown was this year's AGM, originally scheduled for May 1st but no sooner publicised in the last Newsletter than cancelled due to the new lockdown restrictions announced in January.

The meeting will now take place on **SATURDAY OCTOBER 2nd**. We hope very much that this will be our usual 'in person' event; but should events overtake us once again, we will go ahead virtually, on Zoom, as we did last year.

Full details and agenda will be in our next Newsletter.

Patio Garden Competition Year 2

Last year the Society was saddened not to be able to hold the Summer Garden party because of the Covid lockdown. To replace it we organised at short notice a competition to find the best Patio garden on the Estate. It was hard to choose a winner from the 19 entries! Regular passers-by enjoyed looking over the railings and seeing the wonderful and creative ways gardeners had added colour and texture to the street-scape. So many people told us that they appreciated the efforts of basement-dwellers to make a garden with no soil and a few pots, that we have decided to continue to hold the competition... but this year you have more notice!

We shall judge the competition during the week beginning 21 June and announce the winner on Saturday 26 June at noon, when the Garden Party would have been starting. Entries please before 1st June to tattersallmaggie4@gmail.com

Our chief judge will once again be Maggie Tattersall who writes;

"As a gardener I appreciate knowing when my plot has to be looking at its best. This year competition entrants have longer to plan. Now is the time to sow seeds and dream of a wonderful display in June so as to win the competition!

"Please enter this year. It was so good to meet those of you who did last year and enjoyed it, Isn't it wonderful to look out of a window and see growing things rather than a blank wall!"



Derek Granger at 100 – Happy Birthday!

Former Society chairman – and also, of course, award-winning TV producer and writer – Derek Granger celebrated his 100th birthday on April 23rd. We asked Derek to look back over his time with KTS and his years in Brighton and reminisce...

My parents lived in Eastbourne and I was brought up and educated there so Brighton was always a part of my life. It was a place to which I made frequent excursions to sample the rather flashier lifestyle than that which was provided by Brighton's more sedate sister town to the East.



All my life Brighton provided this escape to the pleasures of a bustling cosmopolitan city. It was a role which Brighton always aspired to and which was officially conferred when the twin towns of Brighton and Hove were granted City status in 2001.

I was always a passionate conservationist and I cherish the way a town's whole character and history can be conserved in its architecture. But the day I got passionately involved was when I attended a meeting in August 1994 where it was seriously proposed to put a funfair on the beach. This appalling idea drove me to take part in a meeting where I strenuously voiced my opposition and that was the actual moment when I became a dedicated full-time activist for conservation.

My interest in this kind of preservation led in due course to my eventually becoming Chairman of the KTS. I enjoyed my role as Chairman very much because I was surrounded by a sympathetic group of like-minded colleagues, but life got quite tough when the Council

decided to revoke a key clause in the Planning Inspector's long-standing recommendations. This was Brighton's future development, namely that no subsequent development should ever rise above the height of the cliffs, a caveat that had been in force for many years and had even been enshrined in an Act of Parliament.

To my appalled horror the Council voted at a full Council meeting (it had been specially called for the purpose) to revoke the Inspector's ruling. I never believed this could happen and the Council's blithely philistine attitude shocked me deeply. I now realised how mistaken I was in believing a responsible local body could take such a cavalier attitude to a planning edict which had been in force for so many years. It was a leading QC who later told me that local Councils have very great power in such matters and were easily able to overturn any measures which they might regard as restrictive, even those seemingly enshrined in law. It is also true that local Councils would nearly always opt for solutions which appealed most to the public appetite for popular entertainment and amusement.



"Derek receiving the Golden Globe award for Best TV Miniseries for Brideshead Revisited in 1983"

Kemp Town Society

On the question of the Marina development there was a general feeling that the height restriction imposed by planning inspectors would remain in force and therefore act as a protective measure against any unseemly high rise development. But this did not prove to be the case; it also appeared that it was well within the Council's powers to revoke the previous prohibition.

When I first went to live in London having become the drama critic of the Financial Times



I greatly missed Brighton's healthful sea air and it was then that I found myself taking a weekend flat in the splendid Regency surroundings of Chichester Terrace.

Because my working life was spent in the media I entertained over the years a great number of starry guests. That glittering list included Ingrid Bergman, Alec Guinness, Laurence Olivier, Joan Plowright, Cecil Beaton, John Gielgud, Gilbert Harding and Godfrey Winn, the gossip columnist, who was then at the apex of his popularity. Godfrey was famously imperious. He rang me up one day to declare: "I'm driving to Hampshire this evening to dine with Dicky and Edwina [Mountbatten] at Broadlands. I shall need some sustenance before I leave. If I come to you at five could you prepare for me, please, two softly boiled eggs with brown-bread- and-butter soldier fingers."

Cecil Beaton, John Gielgud and Gilbert Harding were other visitors. From the time of the Regency Brighton had been a welcoming rendezvous for people of creative talent. The playwright Alan

Melville and Terence Rattigan both had homes in Brighton as did David Webster who ran Covent Garden opera. I was lucky, over the years, to see much of them all.

My theory has always been that because people's funds were greatly restricted if they wanted to live wholly or partly abroad, Brighton became a kind of substitute for Europe.

Brighton and Hove were both places within easy reach of London and with Brighton's Theatre Royal being perhaps the most important theatre date in England for plays "trying out" before their London openings the town was a magnet for the acting profession. The Royal Crescent Hotel became a favourite place at which to stay for those in the theatre profession and a glimpse of Dame Edith Evans or a sidelong glance at Dame Flora Robson became rewarding extras to a Brighton promenade.

The wealth of this creative talent crammed in one place seemed very much to follow the model of the actual Regency when the Prince Regent's seaside Court contained distinguished literary figures such as Lord Byron and the notorious dandy, Beau Brummel.

In these more relaxed open times it also does well for us all to remember our friends in the LGBTQ bracket - and be duly grateful that the matters which concern them can now be dealt with in such an honest, straightforward and easy way. This marks a real change in the increasingly civilised procedures of our times. I believe we are lucky to be living in such a very enlightened and understanding era.



PLANNING NEWS: GAS WORKS AND MARINA UPDATES

The proposed controversial housing development of the gasworks site continues to unite heritage groups across the city in concerns about the height and density of the planned buildings, and the treatment of the site's contaminated land.

The consortium of heritage groups, including KTS, has worked together to produce 14 detailed questions about the plans which can be found in the Latest News section of the KTS web site (kemptown-society.org.uk). The developers, Berkeley/St William, have confirmed that the questions have been registered as part of the public consultation process and are being considered along with all other comments received.

Berkeley/St William Development Director Dan Wickham advises; "We plan to hold our next

public event in the summer to update everyone on our updated design proposals when we have collated the planning application documents, at which point we will be able to provide information on detailed aspects of the proposals such as microclimate, overshadowing and affordable housing. We will also be submitting a Statement of Community Involvement and will be sharing the consultation responses received."

KTS continues to maintain concerns about the height and massing of the development as well as the widespread fears about dealing with the contamination of the site. Once the formal planning application is submitted we will make our own independent submission to the council as part of the planning permission process.



Government to decide on Marina "Poundshop Dubai"

Meanwhile the fate of the Marina 28-storey tower block development - dubbed "a Poundshop Dubai" by one Brighton & Hove city councillor - rests with the Government after it decided not to proceed with a public enquiry into the scheme.

Following the Council's failure to agree the scheme, the developer's appeal will be decided by

Secretary of State Robert Jenrick, based on the report and advice of a planning inspector. The council - which is opposed to the scheme - and the developers presented their cases at a hearing at the end of March and the inspector from the Government's Planning Inspectorate will now draw up a report for Mr Jenrick's decision.

Who's Been Living in My House?

A Victorian Artist in Kemp Town

Known as 'England's Michelangelo', George Frederic Watts was one of the greatest artists of the Victorian era.

He was the creator of the celebrated allegorical painting *Hope* and the sculpture *Physical Energy*, as well as being renowned for his portraits of the eminent figures of his day. However, it is not widely recognised that Watts spent many winters in the 1870s and 1880s in Brighton.



George Watts working on "Ariadne in Naxos" in his studio in Sussex Square, 1888. Photograph by Donovan & Son, St James's Street, Brighton. Copyright: Watts Gallery Trust

A book entitled *The Winter Studio: An Account of George Frederic Watts's Life and Work in Brighton* which tells the story of the artist's frequent visits to the Kemp Town Estate, has recently been published. The author, **Martin Kenig**, writes here of how he learned that Watts once had a studio in the building where he lives, news that came out of the blue.

"I first heard that George Watts had stayed at 31 Sussex Square, where I had already been living for many years, when I arrived home one evening to find a note which had been put through the letterbox by a researcher who had been reading Mary Watts's accounts of their

time at the house. She was hoping to obtain more information about the building where Watts had worked on one of his most important canvases, the 14-foot-high *Court of Death*.

"It was a genuine surprise and immediately sparked my interest as I had always been interested in Victorian art and already knew Watts's work. I owned a couple of books about him, I was a volunteer at Tate Britain, and had previously visited the gallery near Guildford which had been established to display Watts's pictures. I went back to the gallery and within minutes I saw in a display case a letter that Watts had written giving his address as No. 31, and my research into his Brighton visits began.

"The Kemp Town connection started at 24 Lewes Crescent where Watts passed the winters from 1878 until 1885 in the company of his



"Miss Florence Fisher", by George Watts. Photograph by Frederic Hollyer, 1880. Copyright: Watts Gallery Trust

old friend Sara Prinsep and his ward Blanche Clougston. Furthermore, at Brighton, Watts's health would benefit as he was away from the London fogs and he could take advantage of the better light by the sea. In one of his letters written from the Estate in January 1881, Watts describes the weather that day 'as bright and lovely as ever I saw it at Naples'. As well as landscapes, Watts worked on several portraits while at 24 Lewes Crescent. One of his youngest sitters was Florence Fisher, who also sat for the pioneering photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, and who later became a playwright and married Charles Darwin's son.

"Watts returned to Brighton in 1888, moving at the beginning of November into 31 Sussex Square, then owned by Sir John Puleston. He was now married to Mary Seton Fraser Tytler. Mary is much admired today as a designer and exponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement. She was also an active campaigner for women's education and suffrage.

"Watts was able to make use of a bright, spacious and lofty room in the building as a studio where he could work on his large Symbolist pictures. Among these was *She shall be called woman* of which Mary wrote as follows: 'The Brighton studio showed this picture to an advantage it has never had since. Very often we breakfasted in that room, and the morning light poured down upon the breast of the Great-Mother till it seemed to breathe and scintillate'.

"An interesting glimpse of Watts at work on another painting, *Ariadne*, can be seen in a photograph of the Sussex Square studio. All around are other canvases resting against the walls, including *She shall be called woman*.

"George and Mary left No. 31 at the end of May 1889. By 1891, they had built their house at Compton in the Surrey countryside - now the Watts Gallery Artists' Village (wattsgallery.org.uk) - making only occasional brief visits to Brighton in the succeeding years."



"She shall be called woman" by George Watts, c. 1875-92
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