



## SUMMER / AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2021

### The Preston Twin in Kemp Town

Anyone peeping recently through the gates of the Secret Garden in Bristol Gardens will have seen an astonishing sight: the vast, gnarled trunk of a great elm tree.

It is one of a pair, the Preston Twins, which for 400 years - since 1613 - stood together in Preston Park. They were thought to be among the largest and oldest English elms in the world, more than 30 metres high and seven metres thick.

Elms have so completely disappeared from our national landscape that it's a matter of pride that Brighton has managed to preserve so many, and in pretty good health. According to the Ancient Tree Forum, it has 17,000, while outside Brighton only a thousand or so mature specimens survive in Britain. The city is also the host for the National Elm Collection. And though this particular tree is dead, seeing it is still like an encounter with a venerable ancestor.

It was felled in 2019, when it was discovered to be hollow and was invaded by Dutch Elm Disease. Its likely fate was to be burned or otherwise disposed of, but instead Alister Peters,

a tree consultant for Connick Tree Care, approached visual artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva to see if this magnificent tree could be given another life as a work of art. Elpida thought it could, and needed only a big, secure studio to work on it.

The Secret Garden turned out to be ideal and over these summer weeks and coming winter months Elpida will be working on the Twin, using an ancient Japanese technique to remove the bark (to clear out infection), char the wood and gild it.

Visitors are welcome in the garden from 11-5 every Sunday until September 26th. There is a cafe to enjoy, too.

Next spring an exhibition called "In Nature: A Celebration in Sculpture" will focus on tree and art forms, and at the centre the great elm will preside in its new glory.

After that, it will rejoin its (no doubt astonished) Twin, which is still standing in Preston Park's Coronation Garden. Catch it while it's here!

Kemp Town Society  
Registered office. Flat 1, 9 Sussex Square, Brighton BN2 1FJ  
Company Limited by Guarantee No 7734051 Registered Charity No 1146155  
[www.kempton-society.org.uk](http://www.kempton-society.org.uk)

## Alice in Kemp Town - Announcing the 2022 KTS Calendar



Trusting that 2022 will bring better times, we have commissioned a new illustrated calendar, celebrating the link with Lewis Carroll and his classic adventures of “Alice in Wonderland” with unusual glimpses of “Through the Looking Glass”.

It has been created by Sally Henry, a graphic designer living in Kemp Town, who also designed and produced our very popular 2020 calendar which brightened many walls, even though there were few engagements to fill it!

*Sally writes;*

“Everyone recognizes the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party, which will be our cover image, but further pages reveal more of Sir John Tenniel’s famous pen and ink illustrations, revised in colour and merged into landscape settings very familiar to those who enjoy the gardens of the Estate and its environs.

“The new calendar also features many of the lovely buildings on the Estate, but with a novel twist for the digital age. Lewis Carroll is continuing to inspire local artists and writers, particularly as the creative arts have been under siege lately.

\*Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898), far better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, often

stayed at 11 Sussex Square with a friend’s family for summer recesses, escaping from Oxford to a fashionable seaside resort.

“Scholars have suggested that he much enjoyed relaxing in the nearby Enclosures. Maybe this is the stuff of urban legend or wishful thinking, even magical myth? Whatever the “facts” are alleged to be, it’s a great reason to reinterpret his sometimes fantastical observations for our own entertainment!”

This will be a limited edition and the calendars would make ideal Christmas gifts for friends and family.

The KTS 2022 “Alice in Kemp Town” Calendars will be available from our Treasurer, Keith Paulin, in September. The cost is £15.00 plus £2.50 postage and packing (free delivery for Estate addresses).

Order by post to Flat 1, 9 Sussex Square, BN2 1FJ,  
cheques payable to “Kemp Town Society”.

Or pre-order by email to paulinkeith@hotmail.com

## The Garden Party - forward to June 2022!

The decision to cancel the Garden Party in September was a hard one. After all, we had missed last year's, and wanted to celebrate our "freedom" with a bang. Much work had already been done: the musicians booked, the poster ready, the tables and chairs ordered, Marmalade poised to supply their wonderful cakes, the children's games organised, the books for the bookstall bagged up in my office at the The Economist... But in the end the Committee decided it was wiser not to go ahead.

For practical purposes we had to decide by the end of July, and our meeting then coincided with a severe spike in covid cases in Brighton, as well as the expectation that, with reopening, things would only get worse. Many friends and neighbours, double-jabbed though most were, still seemed hesitant about coming to such events, even in the open air. And the final straw was government regulations. Although many of them seemed fairly far-fetched, it was clear that the bring-a-plate open-service food stall was doomed; and that is the heart of the Garden Party. The prospect of masks, queues and sanitiser on all fronts was also pretty depressing.

So it's on to 2022, when the party is provisionally booked for June 25th, the Saturday before Wimbledon. We are looking to build a team of planners and helpers to assist with next year's event; there is always plenty of work to be done in advance and on the day, and we are always looking for ways to refresh the formula. If you have time, energy and new ideas for what this much-loved community gathering could be, do step up! Please get in touch with me at [annwroe@economist.com](mailto:annwroe@economist.com) or with Keith Paulin at [paulinkeith@hotmail.com](mailto:paulinkeith@hotmail.com) or 1/9 Sussex Square – thank you!

*Ann Wroe*

## Seafront lighting - a hopeful update

Our city's historic seafront lighting columns have been a feature of Marine Parade and Madeira Drive for over a hundred years.

However as we reported in our Winter (January 2021) issue, time and the sea air have taken their toll on the Victorian ironwork and many of the lanterns have become unsafe because of corrosion and have had to be removed.

The Council has now launched a £2 million project to restore and reinstate the lanterns and brackets, in partnership with Historic England and leading street industry experts, with the hope of starting to return the lights to their rightful place early in 2022. The whole project is expected to take up to three years to complete.

In total, sixty of the eighty light columns along the Kemp Town seafront will have their lanterns and brackets removed for repair or – where the damage is too extensive - replacement, with temporary lighting fitted in their place to ensure the seafront remains fully and safely lit.

Following the earlier scandal when some of the lanterns were offered for unauthorized sale on Facebook Marketplace, the Council has stressed that all the lanterns will be safely and securely stored in steel shipping containers in secure locations.

Lighting lanterns along the north side of Marine Parade – which are not protected by any Historic England listed building status – are also being replaced with like-for-like LED lights.

We will continue to follow progress on this project and you can also get more information from the Council's dedicated web page at [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/heritagelighting](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/heritagelighting).

## New art for Black Rock - What do we want from public art?

Now that the Black Rock development has started, minds are turning to the public art being commissioned by the Council for the new spaces that will be opened up. What makes good art is, of course, extremely subjective; but some sorts evidently please the public much more than others.

Brighton and Hove Council have recently asked the consultants Bridget Sawyers to draw up a ten-year Public Art Strategy. They invited various people in the arts field to give their views, including Vaughan Rees OBE, a member of the KTS committee. Vaughan, as well as being part of the team that ran the Albert Hall, was formerly chairman of Brighton and Hove Arts Council and a principal private secretary to the Minister for the Arts. He offered the following thoughts.



*Constellation, by Jonathan Wright, the debut Hove Plinth sculpture*

Having lived here for over 25 years, I have observed the stark contrast between the considerable (and welcome) investment that has transformed the seafront to the west of the pier, and the actual deterioration of the physical infrastructure and amenities to the east. YellowWave and other recent beachfront leisure

developments, including the bright new cycle lane, are very welcome and give some hope for the future; but, to date at least, none has encompassed the commissioning of any public art of note. What exists is distinctly second- or third-rate. “My desire is great” is mystifying and has lost some letters; Steve Ovett is simply dull. Rory McCormack’s pebble-sculpture compound, full of wonderfully witty pieces that would be well worth proper public display, is so barely tolerated by the Council that it is more or less forced into hiding.

Yet the purpose of public art is to enhance our urban and coastal environments: to make them more welcoming, interesting and harmonious by generating a marked response - hopefully positive, sometimes inspiring and thought-provoking - in the viewer. Obvious examples include sculpture in all its forms; external murals, again in a range of genres (but not the sort of graffiti that is simply and clearly aimed to be antisocial) and - perhaps less obviously, but as the city’s Victorian administrators well understood - imaginative garden plantings and elegant street furniture.

As we saw recently in the debacle over the street lamps, good public art wins popular support and often real affection. In a city like Brighton it also has the power to draw visitors all year round, not simply in the summer.

Since 2000 the Council has commissioned around 40 artworks at a cost of at least £1m. Most, including the dozen or so works that make up the two current “sculpture trails”, have

failed to make an impression and look distinctly uncared for. Given Brighton's reputation for cutting-edge originality and creativity, we could and should have done better than this. I can think of, at most, only three modern sculptures that have had a significant impact: the "Doughnut" on the Albion groyne, the "Kiss Wall" close by and, most notably, the beautiful "Constellation" on the Hove Plinth. (More than 600 images of "Constellation" have been posted on Instagram, and the next occupant of the plinth, "Flight of the Langoustine", a tremendous, dramatic piece, looks a worthy successor.) And sometimes, out of the blue, less orthodox works like the Martlets Snow Dogs bring a joyous sense of fun wherever they turn up.



*Flight of the Langoustine (Maquette 2), by Pierre Diamantopoulos, the planned second sculpture for Hove Plinth*

How can things be improved on a more sustained and permanent basis? First, a strategic overview of public art, such as the one the Council is considering, is long overdue. It should be based on the richness of Brighton's architectural heritage, and our pride in it. Over recent decades the city appears to have become somewhat shabbier, rather more "down at heel" and certainly dirtier - though there has been a noticeable effort to keep the seafront clear of rubbish. Certainly there are severe budget constraints. But where the Council has acted as a positive enabler, as on the Level and in the shoreline works to the west

of the pier (especially the superb restoration of the Shelter Hall), great improvements have been made. It could play the same role in providing high-quality public art.

One idea would be to earmark at least part of planning-consent revenues to fund a programme of public-art provision over the longer term. This would provide a foundation for a wholly new approach. A separate mechanism, something like the Arts Council, could be created to allow distinguished artists - and the general public - to have their say. When the Hove Plinth was first opened to commissions, the public were shown representations or maquettes of the proposed pieces and voted on a shortlist. It was very successful. Collaboration is also financially vital; given the Council's lack of funds, it has to be recognised that, in future, any major commissioning of public art will depend on partnership funding that might involve the private sector, trusts and foundations and public appeals.

Great attention and high expectations are now focused on the future of the Black Rock site. Bridget Sawyers Consultants are now undertaking a Council commission entitled "Black Rock and Sea Kale: Friends with Benefits" with proposals invited from artists for a decision in the autumn. The commission hopes that "the reinvigorated public realm will become a canvas for artists to respond creatively, celebrating and reimagining what Black Rock might be and contributing to the city's cultural richness."

The local community certainly hopes the same, and has given the redevelopment plans an extremely enthusiastic welcome. This could be a prime example of building on the architectural beauty of Kemp Town to extend that beauty and vitality to the shoreline. We can only hope that the Council seizes this hugely significant opportunity, and works to produce an area that is once again full of character, life - and art.

## Best Patio Garden 2021 – James Aynsley, Arundel Terrace



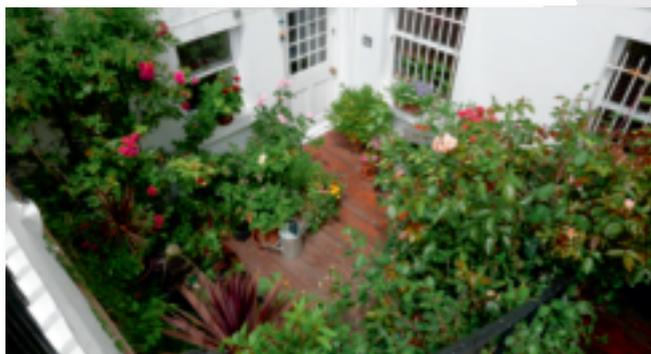
*The Judges; KTS chairman Simon Smith with last year's runner-up Mark Tucker, Joyce Clegg, Maggie Tattersall, 2020 winners Lucy & Mark Dean, Shirley Collins. (right)*

This year's prize-giving for the 2021 Patio garden competition was held in the South Garden at the end of June, socially distanced and in glorious sunshine.

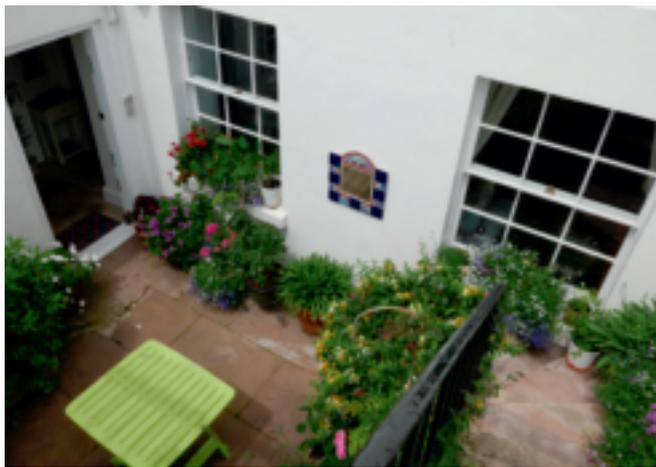
Top prize went to James for his glorious garden in Arundel Terrace. The roses were beautiful, the honeysuckle smelt wonderful and the little pool added a special touch.

We nominated Cheryl's garden in Lewes Crescent and Andrea's garden in Sussex Square as runners-up. All three gardens were very different: established plants in Arundel Terrace, a garden ablaze with brightly filled pots in Lewes Crescent, and wonderful vegetables in Sussex Square. It's great to see what different gardeners think of doing with tiny spaces, and all in different parts of Mr Kemp's grand design.

Thank you to everyone who took part, both gardeners and judges – who had such a hard time deciding who should win!



## Runners up – Cheryl Dickens, Lewes Crescent, and Andrea Baker, Sussex Square





Notice is hereby given that  
The 10th Annual General Meeting of the Company  
Will be held on  
SATURDAY 2nd OCTOBER 2021 at 10.30  
EF Language School, 1-2 Sussex Square  
A G E N D A

1. Welcome and apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 9th (2020) Annual General Meeting of the Company
3. Accounts of the Company for the year ending 31 December 2020  
- Treasurer's Report and appointment of Reporting Accountants
4. Resignation/Election of Trustees
5. Chairman's Report
6. Alex Bruce Legacy
7. Summary of Fund Raising Events 2020/21
8. Website & Communication Report
9. Any Other Business

**Background papers and proxy voting forms can be viewed and downloaded from <https://www.kempton-society.org.uk/> one week prior to the meeting or requested in writing from the Society at Flat 1, 9 Sussex Square, BN2 1FJ**

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