



SPRING/SUMMER 2022 NEWSLETTER

The Boardwalk – almost there...

A stroll down Duke's Mound to Madeira Drive has become an exciting event in the past few months. Changes seem to appear all the time, from the traffic lights and road markings to the spruced-up Volks office and the "social space" opposite, with slatted-wood and blue-metal seating and shiny bike racks ready for use. Some changes are sad, like the loss of the White Cloud Coffee pop-up and the yoga dome which so heroically moved outside during covid. Others are wonderful, like the five pine trees newly planted (with a few nice rocks) in the social space; stand under them on a warmish day, inhale, and you are instantly in Greece.

Joining all these together is the new Boardwalk, running from the Volks Workshop to the station. This is due to be opened in April. In mid-March it had reached the "tidying up" stage, meaning one man deploying a drill and five, in high viz, standing round him with wise expressions. Meanwhile the real hard work was happening east of the station, with several cranes charging about, but behind such mountains of shingle that it's impossible to see how the new sea wall is going.

The Boardwalk, however, is a fine sight already, and it's hard to resist the temptation to trespass onto it. It is not, in fact, made of wooden boards, but planks of composite recycled plastic which

were bought in Germany. They should last for 100 years. At intervals they are fitted with 180-degree lights which will shine towards the sea, not the shore, and will mean that night-birds can continue to walk there after the sun goes down.

The work has slowed up of late because the men from Landbuild are putting the final touches to the two level crossings, which will have flashing lights and automatic gates. They are also building access ramps to another socialising area, again with blue seating and bike racks, midway between the Volks workshop and the station. From this crossroads one section of boardwalk runs off southwards towards the sea, and another goes east to creep discreetly behind the nudist beach. At every point it is a huge improvement on the narrow and rather dismal concrete path that went before.

"Boardwalk" has grand connotations. There are not as many in Brighton as you might think. If the model is the one in Atlantic City, New Jersey, which runs between a vast sandy beach and a row of gold-sellers, donut stalls and casinos owned by D. Trump, then the Marina's version does not have enough beach and sea to look at. As for the Palace pier, it is a pier, not interacting with the beach at all. The walk that comes closest in atmosphere, especially on busy days, is the one west of the pier,

Kemp Town Society

running past the carousel and the Fishing Quarter. But it is laid with bricks.

Our Boardwalk, of course, is plastic, though no one need know that. It will have great sea views, and if the eco-banks thrive it will have a riot of flowers. But there will be nothing to buy at all. Instead it is a place, like the Undercliff, devoted to walking



The ground beneath our feet

Many of you will have noticed that the pavement on the north side of Marine Parade at Chichester Terrace has lately acquired a horrible chequered look. Defective paving slabs have been replaced not with new ones of a similar colour, but with patches of plain black tarmac as used on the road itself.

It is hard to judge the age of pavements, and the slabs that were taken up were probably not original; but they were a standard size, and the colour did no offence to the buildings behind them. Tarmac is a different case, entirely out of keeping with the Grade 1 Conservation Area. Other Conservation Areas in the city—round Preston Drove and Westbourne Gardens, in Hove—have also suffered the same treatment, with no regard for their handsome Victorian houses. When tarmac is patched randomly around the Regency Kemp Town Estate the effect is even worse.

The Brighton Society under its chairman, Jeremy Mustoe, has started a campaign against it,

(with dog or without), jogging and breathing. And perhaps all the better for that. After the Undercliff Walk opened, in 1933, a contemporary photograph shows it thronged with visitors in what looks like their Sunday best. Perhaps our Boardwalk can help to revive the lost art of simply promenading.

Ann Wroe

and our chairman, Simon Smith, lent his weight to this on January 27th, denouncing the tarmac to the Council as “an untidy and unsightly mess”, and sending some incriminating photos.

He also made the point that Kemp Town is the eastern “bookend” of Brighton, balancing Brunswick Town to the west; but far more care has been taken of the western end. In Brunswick Town much of the original York stone paving has been preserved, and with it the Regency character. In Kemp Town, by contrast, “we have two different sizes of paving stone and now a stretch of tarmac, completely detracting from the distinction of the architecture immediately to the north”. (The “different sizes” refers to the complete run of smaller paving slabs that seemed to appear overnight in Chichester Terrace, when the original pavement had very little wrong with it.)

KTS and the Brighton Society have appealed for the Marine Parade slabs, and the others, to be replaced. The Highways Department will doubtless take some persuading, as they can argue that pedestrian safety is their priority – as well as saving money. But pedestrians could be served just as well with new, level, matching slabs, which would enhance this part of the city – and also might well last longer.

Alternatively, if slabs bordering a main road are just too vulnerable to vehicle overruns, perhaps the Highways Dept could consider laying continuous amalgam to match the fine Victorian stuff at the eastern end of Clarendon Terrace, which has a pretty pinkish colour and proudly announces itself in metal inlay as “Stuart’s Granolithic”. This blend of high-grade concrete and powdered granite was considered just the thing at the time and still looks good, despite some shallow surface cracks. And the company, founded in Edinburgh in 1887, is still going strong!

Ann Wroe

Swimming to Blue Plaque fame



The pioneering cross-Channel swimmer and charity philanthropist Mercedes Gleitze – born in Freshfield Road, Brighton in 1900 – became the latest notable Brightonian to be commemorated with a Blue Plaque which was unveiled in January.

Mercedes was the first British woman to swim the Channel in October 1927, a swim that took a gruelling fifteen hours and which was swiftly embroiled in controversy when a rival swimmer claimed to have made the swim in a faster time. This was soon revealed to be a hoax, but under media pressure Mercedes agreed to repeat the swim just three weeks after her successful attempt. This second swim – known as the Vindication Swim – late in October in harshly cold conditions, ended after 10 hours in failure but its bravery made Mercedes a household name.

Mercedes went on to make further successful long-range swims, including the Wash, the Hellespont and Cape Town to Robben Island, and was one of the foremost female sports personalities of her time.

At the same time she used the proceeds from her famous swims to set up a charity for the homeless and a homeless shelter in Leicester, the Mercedes Gleitze Home for Destitute Men

and Women. “Life is kind to some of us, and it is very cruel to others”, she said in a 1928 interview. “The people who are down and out ... are not wicked. They are just unfortunate. It might have been you, it might have been me.”

Although the homes were destroyed in the Second World War, the charity still operates – as the Mercedes Gleitze Relief in Need Charity – under the trusteeship and administration of Family Action, with funds targeted towards grants for families in poverty.

Mercedes’s Vindication Swim will be the subject of a film due for release this year, and the film’s Brighton-born writer/director Elliott Hasler attended the Blue Plaque unveiling along with stars of the film including Kirsten Callaghan who plays Mercedes.

Our picture shows Elliott and Kirsten along with MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Roger Amerena, who chairs the Brighton & Hove Commemorative Plaque Panel. The plaque was formally unveiled by City Mayor Councillor Alan Robins.

Keith Paulin



Unveiling the plaque; from left to right Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP, Kirsten Callaghan, Roger Amerena and Elliott Hasler

Celebrating the Queen's Platinum Jubilee: Save the date!



The date to save is **June 5th**, and the event is the **Big Jubilee Picnic**, when we hope that the whole community round the Kemp Town Estate will come together in gratitude and jubilation. KTS is expanding the Garden Party and moving it forward so that we can join in the national "Big Lunch", when bands of friends and neighbours all over the country will also be organising street parties, picnics and general festivities to mark the Queen's extraordinary 70 years of service.

The regular Garden Party (regular, at least, until covid interrupted it), has always been for everyone, KTS members or not, and this is a great chance to emphasise that. Non-members are equally welcome, and pay a very small charge only because such a party costs a lot to put on, and members have already paid through their subscriptions. For the Jubilee picnic we are reducing the charge in any case for non-member households (see poster), so once the band starts to play, just before 12pm on June 5th, that is the signal to round up friends, neighbours, visitors and yourselves and head for the North Garden!

As is traditional at the Garden Party, every adult should bring a plate of savoury finger food, salad or fruit for the Food Stall, which we all then share. It will be the same this time, and home-cooked or ethnic food is especially appreciated. We will not be sitting at long trestle tables, as in all those old photographs, but scattering as

we like round the North Garden. **Plenty of seating will be supplied, but if in doubt please bring your own.** For the list of attractions (many new! And improved!), see Vanessa's poster on page 5. **Please display this in your hall or window to spread the word!**



In 2012 the theme was "Red, White and Blue", and that also seems an inescapable theme this time. So deck yourselves merrily, gather up your friends and neighbours, and come!

Offers of help beforehand are also very welcome. Could you lend a hand with setting up on Saturday June 4th from 2pm or taking down on the day itself? Could you donate books, or second-hand toys in good condition? Could you help on a stall, or offer to run one? (History and bric a brac stalls are always popular.) Most urgently, could you organise the raffle? Some prizes are already in...

Please send all offers and enquiries to: Lucy Dean at gardenparty@kemptown-society.org.uk or Ann Wroe annwroe@economist.com

Thankyou, and see you on June 5th!



A NATIONAL CELEBRATION OF THE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

RAFFLE CASH BAR TOY STALL CAKES FROM MARMALADE FACE PAINTING MORRIS MEN JAZZ BAND BOOKSTALL GAMES

Sunday June 5th 12.00 - 4.00
The North Garden Sussex Square

**Please bring a platter of food to share on
the Food Table. More if you are bringing friends**

ENTRY £5.00 per Household
KTS Members free

Diary dates and how to help

Patio Garden competition 2022

The Society's *Seen From The Street* competition will once again be rewarding the Estate's best patio gardens this summer. Gardens and main porches will be assessed by our team of judges in the week ending Saturday 18 June with the winners announced in the South Garden at noon on the following Saturday 25 June. Watch your email inbox and the Enclosure gates for further details soon.

The Secret Garden

The Secret Garden, Bristol Gardens, will open for the season on Sunday 3 April with a special exhibition, *'In Nature – a celebration in sculpture'*. Visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy this show every Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday until Sunday 5 June.

By popular demand, the garden will also open every Sunday and Bank Holiday from 19 June until 25 September.

Jackie FitzGerald, one of the Trustees who many of you will know, is organising the volunteer rota for 2022. The Secret Garden is looking for additional volunteers to help on the welcome desk with the Trustee on duty for the day. Our current volunteers have told us how much they enjoy their involvement in the garden, interacting with the visitors and making new friends.

Volunteers undertake 3 hour 'shifts' (11am - 2pm or 2pm - 5pm), for Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays between 3 April - 5 June; and Sundays and Bank Holidays 19 June - 25 September.

If you are interested, please contact Jackie with the dates and times that you are available, at: volunteers@secretgardenkemptown.co.uk

Memorial Concert for Joan Griffiths

A lunchtime concert in memory of Joan Griffiths will be held in the Royal Pavilion on Tuesday 5 July. Please contact griff1945ipad@gmail.com for further details.

National Garden Scheme

The South Garden will once again be opening to the public, in partnership with the National Garden Scheme, from noon to 5pm on Wednesday 25 May. Volunteers are needed to help with this event, which raises vital money for health-related charities. Even if you have just a little time available, and can help, please get in touch with Janine Nahapiet at nahapietjanine@gmail.com

Fitzherbert Community Hub – Thank you for your generous support

Thank you for contributing so generously to the December Crowd Funding appeal for the Fitzherbert Community Hub. **A grand total of £110,000 was raised**, which exceeded the ambitious target. Please visit <https://fitzherbertcommunityhub.org.uk/thank-you/> for a more personal message.

The four partners in the project - the *Brighton Table Tennis Club*, the *Real Junk Food Project*, *Voices in Exile* and the *Catholic Parish of East Brighton* - look forward to welcoming you to the Hub when it opens this Autumn.

Quiz Night 2022

The popular Society Quiz Night returned in person in early March, our first live event in two years. Hosted by EF Language School and presented by our regular imaginative and challenging quiz master Robert Snell, the evening was one of fierce but friendly competition. Our picture shows winning team captain Michele Lahey receiving the trophy from Society chairman Simon Smith.



The Reading Room – restoring the ruins



Surveying the scene in the Reading Room - plenty of work to do!

Brighton Town Council, now Brighton and Hove City Council, have owned the Reading Room since 1902. That was when, after nearly 100 years of wrangling over public access to the Esplanade, the Kemp Town Estate Committee finally came to an agreement whereby the Council relinquished a piece of ground on the south-west side of the slopes and received in exchange a smaller portion of ground on the south-east side. The Council thus became the owners of the Esplanade itself, including the Reading Room.

The Tunnel and cottages remained the property of the Estate. In fact the Estate gardener continued to use the Reading Room as a glorified potting shed and storage space for tennis netting and deckchairs until the start of world war two, when a large part of the South Garden, the spaces in front of Arundel Terrace and Chichester Terrace and the entire Esplanade were requisitioned by the army. Much barbed wire was rolled into position. The gardener was given a short window of time to remove the Estate's property from the Reading Room, but most of it had to be abandoned.

Although the KTE committee managed to obtain some compensation after the war for property destroyed by the army, the entire Esplanade was in a very bad way. The tunnel was blocked up and the cottages wrecked. The Reading Room never returned to its former glory, and gradually became a glorified squat for rough sleepers to inhabit for months at a time.

Fortunately, the Council is now poised to renovate the entire building. I was contacted by Katharine Pearce, the programme manager on the renovation, as she wanted to include a noticeboard outside the building to match the five I designed for the Kemp Town Society, which are now installed around the Estate. As a result, she kindly offered a chance for some of us to view the interior of the Reading Room as it was in January, before any renovation started. Although it was disfigured with unattractive spray graphics and scattered with squatter's detritus, we were all astonished at the size and excellent proportions of the room. With its central fireplace and paved floor, it would lend itself well to conversion to a cafe/restaurant. The space outside will be extended and laid with York stone, providing plenty of space for tables and chairs.

During the visit we also met Claire Deacon MA MRICS IHBC RICS, an accredited conservation surveyor, who is supervising the practical restoration and renovation of the Reading Room with extreme sensitivity.

Work is scheduled to begin in early summer. When completed it will be a huge attraction at this end of the beach, an improvement to the Estate and, I'm sure, will provide a great place for all of us to meet, as was originally intended by Thomas Read Kemp!

Vanessa Minns

Kemp Town Society



Notice is hereby given that

The 11th Annual General Meeting of the Company

Will be held on

SATURDAY 7th MAY 2022 at 10.30

EF Language School, 1-2 Sussex Square (Ground Floor)

A G E N D A

1. Welcome and apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the 10th (2021) Annual General Meeting of the Company
3. Accounts of the Company for the year ending 31 December 2021*
 - 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
8. Website & Communication Report
9. Bicentenary
10. Any Other Business

*The AGM in October 2021 (postponed from May 2021) was held to approve the accounts for the 2020 calendar year.

Background papers and proxy voting forms can be viewed and downloaded from <https://www.kempton-town-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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