

# Happy New Year!

## WINTER 2022/23 NEWSLETTER

### GASWORKS PROPOSALS – MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

Society members and Kemp Town residents are facing their final chance to make their voices heard on the controversial housing development of the Gasworks site overlooking the Estate.

Public consultation on the formal planning application for the site closes on Friday January 11<sup>th</sup> – making this the last week to have your say.

As Trustees of the Society we've always been clear that we support in principle the development of this brownfield site, which has remained undeveloped for decades and is a local eyesore. Our objections to the original planning application helped lead to its rejection by the Council early in 2022.

Since then the developers have returned to the drawing board and made welcome and significant changes to their plans, including 226 affordable homes (there was no provision in the first proposal) and some reductions in tower-block heights. The image above - taken from the planning application itself – shows the proposed

new estate looking south towards the seafront and the Marina.

However a number of key problems remain, which lead us to continue to oppose the current application. These include an increase in planned homes to 565 and buildings still up to 12 storeys tall, a massive overdevelopment of the site. Moreover there are no plans to provide additional parking, public transport or medical and school facilities, or to cope with the inevitable increase in traffic congestion and pollution.

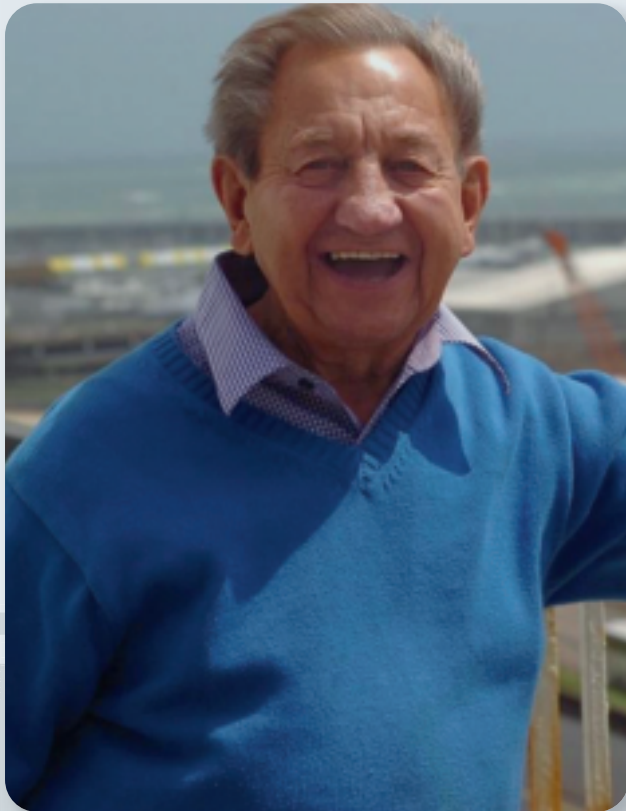
Above all we are concerned about the impact on our local conservation area and Grade 1-listed buildings, which are of national importance, and on the appearance of the eastern seafront generally.

You can find full details of the planning application and add your comments at [planningapps.brighton-hove.gov.uk](https://planningapps.brighton-hove.gov.uk) – search for 'gasworks'.

## Please speak up now!

## Derek Granger

**Born 23 April 1921 –  
Died 29 November 2022**



*Derek Granger 1921-2022*

We were all much saddened by the death of Derek Granger in November. He was a former Chairman of the Kemp Town Society and a renowned television producer and writer, whose adaptation of “Brideshead Revisited” is regarded as one of the finest British TV dramas.

Derek moved to Chichester Terrace in 1966. As Chairman, he was a stalwart for KTS, campaigning tirelessly for the conservation of the Estate. The Committee are enormously grateful for everything he did.

## Memorial Plaque

A memorial plaque has been fixed to one of the cast-iron pillars marking the entrance to the Kemptown Estate at the bottom of the east side of Lewes Crescent.

It was commissioned by Philip Tucker, a long-time resident, to mark the centenary of the birth of Donald Cairns, a Yorkshireman from the West Riding, who lived for many years at 19 Lewes Crescent. Before moving to Kemptown he had worked in the City of London as a banker and had also, in the 1950s, run the Midland Bank branch on the Cunard ships Queen Mary and Caronia. As a result, he had a rich fund of anecdotes regarding the rich, titled and famous who, in those days, regularly crossed the Atlantic by sea. Don loved his time in Kemptown and in return was a well known and loved member of the community. For several years he served the Kemp Town Society as Treasurer, so it is appropriate he should be remembered in this way.

If you would like to commemorate an Estate resident, the brass plaques – measuring 12” x 7.5” with raised lettering and patinated to withstand the elements – would cost £1000, inclusive of delivery and fitting. Please contact [treasurer@kemptown-society.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@kemptown-society.org.uk)



*Society chairman Simon Smith and resident Philip Tucker unveil the plaque*



## Thomas Read Kemp: Setting the record straight

Mike Osborne, who lives in Sussex Square, is an authority on Thomas Read Kemp and has been working for several years on a biography of him. Here he presents his definitive account of the man who, 200 years ago, began building the Kemp Town Estate, and whom we will celebrate this summer.

From his death Thomas Read Kemp (TRK) has been regularly vilified: at first by the local press and subsequently by local historians. The Brighton Herald's obituary in 1844 condensed the rich tapestry of a very full life to a caricature of a failed property developer – because that Whig paper could not forgive the morphing of “the modern commercial man's” radicalism into support for free trade in corn. A firm of local solicitors, who had come off badly in their dealings with TRK and his family, added to the fog of misinformation, accusing him of being hopelessly indebted, if not insolvent.

TRK was born into a trading family based at Barbican House on the High Street in Lewes. The



*Thomas Read Kemp in 1807, pastel by Sir Thomas Lawrence*

trade was principally in Brighton property, with a historical remnant of trading in wool fleeces. Thomas Kemp senior, TRK's father, had inherited a property portfolio amounting to about 23% of the parish of Brighton from his uncle, John Kemp. The inheritance had been fraught, managing to exclude all other members of the family.

One of the excluded was Thomas Summers Clarke, a partner in the firm of Howlett and Clarke, solicitors. He did not forget how his branch of the family had “received nothing” as Thomas Kemp senior took the lot. Similarly, his senior partner Thomas Attree held a lifetime grievance against TRK for having been sold a majority share in Brighton Park (now Queens Park) on the prospect of a development that did not materialise. These facts were discovered by Antony Dale, a previous historian of this Estate, when he was articled to the firm in the 1930s.

For a local boy, TRK's childhood was unconventional. From Westminster School he gained entrance to St John's College Cambridge to study general arts (not theology, as is sometimes claimed, which was unavailable until 1856). He graduated with a BA in 1805 and received an MA in 1810. In 1804 he was admitted to Middle Temple, polishing off his academic credentials with the practice of law to sharpen his commercial acumen. In short, a well-rounded education.

### Marrying money

Coming down from Cambridge to London he took a “set” in the newly launched

Albany on Piccadilly – the epicentre of well-heeled bachelorhood in the West

End. His father allowed him direct access to his bank account, which provided funding for TRK's sortie into the UK's top-end marriage market. The search proved successful: he married Frances Baring, the fifth daughter of Francis Baring, in June 1806. At the time Barings was the most successful banking business in the country. Sir Francis moved to London from Exeter in the 1750s,

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*Kemp's first Brighton home, The Temple – now Brighton Girls School – in 1825-6*

leaving behind the wool-fleece business established by his father. In terms of their family businesses, therefore, the Kemps and Barings were socially aligned. The charm, good looks and dynamism that captured the bride are fully apparent in the Thomas Lawrence pastel portrait of 1807, a year after his marriage. (The Barings were patrons of Lawrence.) It was a happy union, producing ten children, until Frances died in childbirth in 1825.

Much nonsensical ink has been spilt over his wife's marriage settlement. It is erroneously claimed that TRK took it and used it for property speculation. The settlement was invested in the family home, and at no time was it used or secured in Kemp Town. Each family invested £20,000 in the settlement – though the Barings invested cash, with Thomas Kemp senior's contribution financed by a mortgage.

## Radical awakenings

On the death of Thomas Kemp senior in May 1811, TRK was elected unopposed to his father's seat in the House of Commons. Other than on the issue of Catholicism (where he opposed Emancipation), he voted on radical lines favouring reform. Perhaps the most revealing record of this period is the gift from William Wilberforce of a printed copy of his speech of 1807, which was credited with persuading the House of Commons to abolish trading in slaves in the British empire. It is inscribed "To T R Kemp this book is presented by his sincere friend W. Wilberforce, June 1811". TRK's sister, however – who lived at 23 Sussex Square – married into the Cumberbatch family, plantation owners in

Jamaica; so her substantial wealth was probably tainted.

The end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 seemed to call for re-assessment of his life, as it did for many of his generation. His brother-in-law George Baring had seceded from the Anglican Church and built himself a Baptist chapel in Exeter. He was an extreme evangelical, prone to elevating his congregation to bouts of religious ecstasy. On failing to gain access to his chapel, some would climb ladders and take part through upper windows, while George addressed them as gods on their way to heaven.

After two visits to the West Country TRK decided to forgo his seat in Parliament and follow suit. He built a new chapel on land owned by the manor of Old Shoreham on Ship Lane, adjoining North Street. The interior was praised as an exquisite design boasting a pulpit constructed in the shape of a vase, consisting of 100 separate elements.

The young men's enthusiasm coincided with a period of economic distress leading to social disturbance. When the older Baring brothers heard of their religious exploits, they made it clear that the banking family could not be associated with religious hysteria in a period of economic angst. The best option was a trip abroad. George went to Rome, while TRK took his wife and children on a trip to the continent for a year. He returned in September 1820.

## Betting on Brighton

Before leaving for the continent, TRK had sold his estate and house at Herstmonceux for £60,000 in 1819—£4.2m in today's money. On his return to Brighton the new house, to be known as the Temple, was not finished.

Uncle Nathaniel (his father's brother) invited TRK and the family to stay with him at Ovingdean Hall. During this period TRK re-joined the Anglican Church, allowing him to re-enter Parliament in 1823. Over this period the property business picked up, along with the growth in the wider economy. Brighton was the fastest-growing town in England, with its



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resident population doubling from 12,012 in 1811 to 24,429 in 1821 and on to 46,661 in 1831. During the season, visitors tended to double the number of permanent residents.

At the inception of his alleged “great speculation” on 47 acres at Black Rock in 1823, TRK owned at least 900 acres in Brighton, amounting to 58% of the parish. The site which would be shortly known as Kemp Town was not that significant to him. The development was split into 105 building plots, to be offered on building leases to local builders. On the completion of the carcass the builder would pay £500 for the site, valuing the land on which the estate was to be built at £52,500 (or £3.7m in today’s prices). If built today, the finished estate would be valued at about £420m — the relative price of property having far outstripped prices in general.

Having taken the building plots under contract, the builder constructed the carcasses at his own expense. By December 1825 most of the plots had been let and building was well underway. But then the economy fell into recession on the back of a dramatic collapse in the stock market coupled with a banking crisis following the collapse of the incipient South American debt market. The extent of the downfall in activity was not surpassed in the records of UK economic history until the banking crisis of 2008-09. No man’s business plan — particularly in the property-development market — could have withstood such a macroeconomic onslaught.



*Kemp — in the brown coat — welcomes William IV and Queen Adelaide to Lewes in October 1830*

Antony Dale wrote in 1947 that TRK’s woes came about because he had “no business capacity whatever”. But any fool can thrive in a boom; it takes real business skill to survive a bust, and TRK survived. The builders had no contractual option but to hand back the plots and the partially built carcasses to TRK—they lost everything invested in the project. In each case, TRK lost a sale but owned a partially constructed building. Using his networks he brokered a deal with Thomas Cubitt, the largest builder of prime property at the time, to finish the carcasses in exchange for a plot and completed carcass for every £1,000-worth of building work: £500 for the plot, and £500 for the completed carcass.

TRK moved into the Estate in October 1827, taking 21 and 22 Sussex Square. It was one of the largest — if not the largest — house on the Estate. From 1833 he was joined by his second wife, Frances Margareta, and only son from that marriage. The grandest ball ever to be given at Kemp Town was thrown at the house in December 1835 with “nearly 300 fashionables present” - exceeding the 240 attending the first Mrs TRK’s ball on the launch of the Temple in January 1825.

Before settling in Paris (where the second Mrs Kemp’s brother lived) TRK embarked on an extensive tour of the continent with his wife, son, two daughters and his stepson. He toured from Spa in Belgium to Baden-Baden in Bavaria, Cannes and Rome—coming back to Brighton at least once, in 1840. While he was away no known mortgage was foreclosed, and the supply of cash to fund the trip was provided out of the Brighton business.

TRK died after a short illness on 20 December 1844, two days before his 62<sup>nd</sup> birthday, in the Parisian apartment he owned, overlooking the British Embassy and the Elysée Palace.

He was buried on land he owned in Père La Chaise Cemetery. Few if any of his contemporaries in Brighton or Lewes had such a multidimensional life, let alone achieved so much in it.

Mike Osborne’s biography of Kemp, “*Thomas Read Kemp: Brighton’s Premier Entrepreneur*”, will be published in 2024.



## Celebrating our 200<sup>th</sup>! 1823 - 2023

During 2023 the Kemp Town Society – which itself will be 50 years old – will be holding several events to mark the bicentenary of the Estate.

On May 13<sup>th</sup> 2023 we will be celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> year of the Estate with the unveiling of a bronze relief memorial plaque on the seafront and the launch of a new book, *“Hidden Treasures”*, by the KTS Historian and Archivist Vanessa Minns.

To celebrate the bicentennial, the Kemp Town Society in 2019 started “The Cubitt Project”. The aim was to find and record all the bas relief decorative panels known to be inside some of the 37 houses built by Thomas Cubitt on the Estate. In 200 years this had never been attempted, and an important part of the Estate’s original interior design remained unrecorded.

Every house on the Estate – with the exception of those in Arundel Terrace, which were built before the arrival of Thomas Cubitt – was contacted. All replied over time and around 40 bas reliefs were found and photographed. Many of them were found to be modelled on bas reliefs made by the world-famous Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844), making the Kemp Town Estate the site of a unique collection of his work in this country. Several are casts from his Alexander Frieze, commissioned by Napoleon. Similar Thorvaldsen designs are also found in

Queen Victoria’s Osborne House on the Isle of Wight and at Chatsworth House. The Estate’s collection is unique in that it is owned by the freeholders of some 20 houses, few of whom are yet aware of its extent or importance.

*“Hidden Treasures: The Bas Reliefs on the Kemp Town Estate”* contains illustrations of all the bas reliefs Vanessa Minns has discovered, in an elegant coffee-table format with photographs by Keith Paulin. It will be published in May and available online from Amazon, Waterstones and other participating online bookshops.

**Advance copies at the reduced price of £12 can be ordered immediately by email from Vanessa Minns: [vanessaminns.no28@gmail.com](mailto:vanessaminns.no28@gmail.com) until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.**

During the early part of the year the nine pillars on the seafront will also be re-decorated, and a new plaque to commemorate Thomas Read Kemp has been installed on one of them.

A sixth information board, sited at the east end of the South Garden railings on the seafront, will illustrate some of the bas reliefs found on the Estate and their story.

Finally this year’s garden party on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June will also celebrate the Estate’s bicentenary. Further details will be in our April Newsletter.

## HIDDEN TREASURES The Bas Reliefs on the Kemp Town Estate Vanessa Minns Photographs by Keith Paulin



*Babylonian mercenaries*



*Left: Ulysses returning home to Penelope*

*Right: Hermes escorting a soul to Hades*

*Below: The goddess Demeter*



*Babylonian mercenaries*



## NEWS – EVENTS – DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Following our email to all members in November, a reminder that the annual subscription to KTS – due by 1<sup>st</sup> March each year – has increased this year from £10 to £15. Please amend your standing order (our preferred means of payment) or alternatively you can pay as follows;

- cheque payable to Kemp Town Society to 1/9 Sussex Square BN2 1FJ
- bank transfer to **account no:** 20907868 **sort code:** 30-94-63

And please feel free to exceed the minimum amount of £15, if you are able to do so, as many members already do. This could help to avoid the need for a further increase next year and such generosity is always very much appreciated by the treasurer!



### QUIZ NIGHT

Our famed Quiz Night will be back this year hosted again by the all-knowledgeable quiz master Robert Snell on **FRIDAY 3<sup>rd</sup> MARCH** at **6.30 for a 7 o'clock start** in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor room at EF Language School, 1-2 Sussex Square. Please watch out for our email with further details soon!

### AGM

**The Society's 2023 AGM will be held on SATURDAY 13<sup>th</sup> MAY at 10.30 at EF Language School, 1-2 Sussex Square.**

The AGM is your chance to meet the Society's committee, hear the latest news and updates, elect new trustees, approve the Society's accounts and raise questions and issues from the floor.

Full details will be in our April Newsletter.

### READING ROOM CAFÉ

Work is continuing on the restoration of the Reading Room and Temple on the Estate's sea front esplanade, but as the Newsletter went to press the future of the proposed cafés remained uncertain.

Councillors were advised in December that while the Temple café was on course to open in the spring, to be operated by "a local business already accustomed to working in the area", the letting of the Reading Room had fallen through and would need to be re-advertised in the New Year.