

KTS Chairman's Report 2024

OVERVIEW

2023, the Bicentenary year of the Estate, saw large numbers of members and others gathering on several occasions to celebrate the legacy of Thomas Read Kemp.

The year officially began with the unveiling of a lectern displaying an early relief map of the Estate, lovingly created by Vanessa Minns. Gavin Henderson, whose knowledge of Brighton's cultural history is encyclopaedic, was Guest of Honour at the ceremony on the south side of the coast road in bright Spring sunshine before a group of members, and then entertained them after lunch with a host of anecdotes about Kemp town characters and the origin of KTS itself, celebrating its 50th anniversary. The occasion also provided an opportunity for Vanessa to be presented with an engraved glass bowl in recognition of all her work for KTS over some 20 years. This marked the culmination of what turned out to be a 5-year project to install information boards around the Estate, all made possible by a bequest from Alex Bruce, now commemorated himself on a brass plaque on one of the pillars at the bottom of the western arm of Lewes Crescent. Earlier in the year, all nine pillars and their spherical finials were decorated by KTS.

The sun shone even more brightly on Saturday 24 June, when some 400 residents from wider Kemptown and beyond came to enjoy the Regency Garden Party in the North Garden. The design team of Vanessa Minns and Kate Drohan created what was effectively a spectacular stage set on which the whole event was played out. Our Deputy Chairman Vaughan Rees was the enthusiastic and very active co-ordinator of the large number of volunteers who came to run the stalls and set them up beforehand.

Full details of this and other events, such as the March Quiz, the Christmas Kinderfest, a delightful children's evening masterminded by Lucy Dean, and the Seen from the Street Competition, driven by Maggie Tattersall, appear in the thrice-yearly newsletter. Jointly edited and compiled by Ann Wroe and Keith Paulin, this is a chronicle of all KTS events as well as a forum for articles on architecture and conservation, in line with our charitable purpose.

CONSERVATION

For the third year running this report refers to the proposals for the developing the Gasworks site, just to the east of the Estate. The developers, St William, part of the Berkeley Group, have now presented for public comment the third iteration of their design. Although the number of dwellings has reduced from 565 to 495 and the tallest buildings have lost 2 or 3 storeys, the height and massing of the development is still, in our view, unacceptable. Had 3D modelling of the site been made available to the public, more residents would be able to see the full extent of the proposals, particularly in the approach to the city down Wilson Avenue. Of course the derelict Gasworks is a grim reminder of an industrial past and its development is much needed. But not this one. The KTS response to the planning application is available on our website.

Another long-running development scheme, the Madeira Arches, is a matter of concern. The Council announced in the autumn that rising costs are leading it to scale back the Phase 1 of the project, reducing it from 40 to 28 arches and, importantly a new lift from Marine Parade to Madeira Drive. More visible progress is being made further east with the Black Rock site: the Temple has been impressively restored, and a leaseholder found, who plans to turn it into a coffee shop. Further east, the restored Reading Room with its attractive landscaping is still seeking a tenant. KTS welcomes and applauds the improvements that have been made to this once derelict site. Opinions are likely to be more divided over the Ibiza Proms, with a 50-piece orchestra, planned to take place at Black Rock on 29 July from 2pm to 10pm.

KTS has taken a keen interest in the development of the hospital, now embarking on its next stage, with the demolition of the Barry Building to make way for the new Sussex Cancer Centre. This has involved the re-siting of its chapel at the eastern end of the Louisa Martindale Building, described in an article in the New Year Newsletter. We have been in contact with the hospital management about this newly termed 'Heritage Space' being available and accessible to local residents, with the offer to provide KTS volunteers to supervise it when necessary.

MEMBERSHIP

There are currently 190 households (roughly half of them on the Estate itself) who are members. Most have now converted their minimum annual donation from £10 to £15, a change that came into effect in November 2022. Those who have yet to make this change to their annual payment are being contacted with details of the preferred method of payment. The main website and its companion site Who's Been Living in My House had significant rises in visits in early March; likewise the Facebook page now has in excess of 950 followers.

COMMITTEE

KTS continues to be extremely well served by its committee. Vaughan Rees, apart from working over the past year on the Bicentenary Party, is also our deputy representative on the Blue Plaques Committee. Jayne Paulin is our main representative here, and she remains as secretary. We could not ask for someone more efficient or more knowledgeable about the minutiae of bureaucratic procedures and requirements. Diligence is also the byword of Michael Bedingfield: as our representative on CAG, he pores through relevant documents and draws the committee's attention to planning aberrations, writing well-crafted objections to them. Jeremy Browning is our treasurer, curator of our website, and author of well-judged emails to members about forthcoming events and other matters. Ann Wroe is a long-established and wise member of the committee. Her elegant and sometimes pithy prose is invaluable, particularly in her many contributions to the Newsletter.

As well as the above, we are lucky to be able to call on a number of individuals who are not currently on the committee. Keith Paulin (former treasurer) makes contributions to, and co-edits, the Newsletter, as well as providing sound advice about financial matters; Lucy Dean has made Kinderfest her own, forming a link with St Mark's Primary School; and Debra Erskine takes the lead on events, becoming a familiar figure behind the bar. No society such as ours could function without the unfailingly generous and good-natured contributions of time from those most closely associated with it, not to mention the considerable physical exertions required in the setting up and taking down of events. I am full of admiration for them.

2024 will not be such a busy year as the Bicentenary just gone, but members will continue to be kept fully informed about planned changes to the built environment of Kemp Town, and to have opportunities to get to know each other at the various events in this lively community, which we are privileged to be part of.

Simon Smith
March 2024