

THE TOWN HOUSE TIMES

Issue 3
March
2013

Welcome to Issue 3 of Town House Times.

Although it's traditionally the time of year that things go into hibernation, all at the Town House have been very busy over the late-autumn and winter months.

The repair work in the basement of No. 10, which I wrote about in the last issue, has continued, except on the coldest of days, and we are now nearing the end of the plastering and joinery work needed to fully restore the House Keepers room. See, 'Restoration update' for further details of this work.

All this repair work has provided us with some great pictures and video and enabled us to plan out the structure of our building repair video training sequences. We expect to complete these over the next couple of months.

As Christmas arrived, we were all getting very excited about the MyHouseMyStreet project. The outcome of 13-man-months of work is now a fully indexed set of Directory pages - some 100,000 in all. This means that visitors to the website (www.mhms.org.uk) can now enter the name of any local street in Brighton & Hove into the Directory pages search box and get back in the results field a series of links that will navigate them to the specific page in each directory where the requested street is listed. During 2014, we will be working to provide free access to all the census data for the city, indexed by street and house number.

With the arrival of Spring, the Brighton Festival looms and it's time for us to think about our 2013 exhibition. This year, internationally respected artist Mariele Neudecker is showcasing '**Heterotopias and other domestic landscapes**' an exhibition that follows on from a sled expedition to Northern Greenland. Come along and travel from the dark

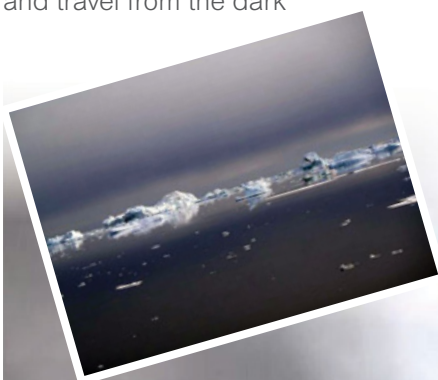


emptiness of the deep sea, recreated in our basement, to the sun-filled images to be found on our first floor. You can read more about Mariele's work in, 'Upcoming events'.

Brighton & Hove Open Door, staged each September, is a long way off yet but organization has just started. This year, the early administrative work is being undertaken by a new and very enthusiastic German volunteer, Antonia, who joins us from Berlin on a work and language exchange course. The dates for BHOD 2013 are 12-15 September.

In closing I should mention that we have just secured a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for our long-planned silhouette project, Profiles of the Past. We will have much more about this exciting initiative in the next issue of Town House Times.

Nick Tyson
Curator



Images from Heterotopias and other domestic landscapes by Mariele Neudecker

Today, when producing bricks, we utilise sophisticated manufacturing processes and advanced firing technologies that deliver high and uniform temperature throughout the kiln. All of this results in reliable and standardised brick characteristics. Regency and Victorian methods of brick production were very different and manufacturing outcomes less consistent. The consequence of this remains important, even today, when we need to attend to the maintenance of ancient brick elevations.



A considerable quantity of all the brick used in Brighton & Hove over the last few centuries was produced locally, especially on the clay-rich ground to the west of Brighton.

Once made, the bricks were turned onto pallets for the slow drying process until 'white' hard. This would take about one week in the summer months. They were then ready to be heated to a great temperature, or 'fired'.

Historically, bricks were fired in a 'clamp', a large temporary construction made primarily of the white hard bricks and the fuel to fire them. The main advantage of clamp firing was that it could be done on or near the building site without the need to fabricate a kiln. There could be between 30,000 and 150,000 bricks in a single clamp, with bricks taking between three and twelve weeks to fire, depending on size.

Clamp-produced brick varies considerably in character, depending, particularly, on where it was positioned during firing. Those near the centre of the clamp were heated to high temperatures and consequently were very hard. Most bricks were of average hardness and durability. Those near the outside were softer and more susceptible to frost damage - these were generally set aside and used in the less exposed, interior parts, of buildings. Another factor affecting durability was the exact chemical and material composition of each brick.

Historic Brick Walls

Brick walls, when built in historical times, were jointed with lime-putty bedding mortars, soft sacrificial material that eroded faster than the brick-face when challenged by inclement weather. As time went by, all the owner of a building needed to do was re-point with more lime mortar, to effect proper maintenance.

Today, however, it is common practice to re-point ancient brick walls using sand and cement mixes, a practice that reduces the life of a historic wall built from clamp-fired brick.

The reason for this is that the sand/cement mix is less porous than the traditional lime putty jointing and it is harder. This means that every time it rains a brick wall re-pointed in sand and cement has less surface area over which to evaporate away the absorbed water. Less area means slower evaporation and so, necessarily, the brick is wetter for longer periods of time. This allows the process of freeze/thaw to

accelerate the fracturing of the brick face (spalling) and causes greater damage over unit time. Additional problems arise from the hard mortar restricting brick expansion and causing compression stress faults. We see the consequence of this type of failure as a reverse of the traditionally weathered brick wall. Instead of the pointing leaching away leaving the brick faces standing proud, the brick face deteriorates and leaves the pointing standing out like some kind of rectangular matrix, as can be seen above.

This type of damage can be wholly avoided just by using the right pointing materials.

PS - Of course, over very long time periods, the bricks in walls do naturally deteriorate, with the less chemically and materially desirable, and lower fired, softer and less resistant bricks failing first under the 'selection pressure' of the environment

NOTES:

For further information about traditional brick production and the maintenance of brick walls, see: <http://www.rth.org.uk/care-of-historic-homes>

For lime bedding mortars contact: <http://www.englandsornamental.co.uk>

One of our volunteers, Lyndsay Cooper undertakes the repair of brick walls, you can contact her via: littlelitlelynds@hotmail.com

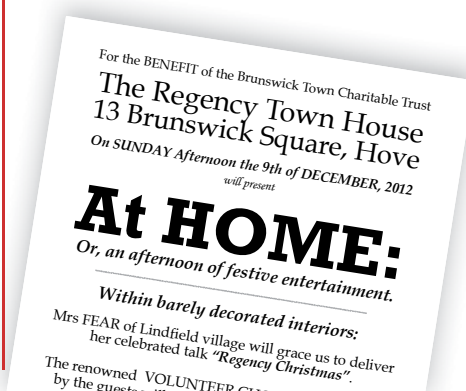


At Home

The response to Phil Blume's beautifully crafted invitation to an At Home at the Regency Town House was immediate, and on 9th December, sixty five people crammed in to the first floor living room at no 13 Brunswick Square for a very good party. Gilly Burton and Jane Ringe had decorated the house beautifully with greenery, candles and subtle lighting.

There were meeters and greeters at the door to welcome guests and a small army of volunteers who served mince pies and

the delicious mulled wine made by Nick. All this provided the backdrop to the main entertainment.



To begin with Elaine Fear told us about how Regency Christmases had been different before the Victorians. Then a select number of the choral friends of the Town House, conducted by Nick Hancock and accompanied by Celia Vince, sang five carols (pictured). This was followed by Catherine Page recounting her 'most chilling' ghost story which you can hear by going to www.rth.co.uk where you will find it at the bottom of the front page. After an interval for recharging glasses David Jackson read a humorous poem about Christmas in Brighton originally written and published in a London magazine in 1825, and finally everyone sang carols together.

There was a very successful raffle with two particularly glittering and much sought after prizes. One was a magnificent cheese platter donated by David at La Cave à Fromage on the Western Road and the other was a beautiful flower arrangement from Pauline and Kerrie at Florians on the Western Road.

It was well after five when we emerged into the night, happy and well primed for the festive season, for it had started on an excellent note. Moreover, it raised £817 pounds for a very good cause.

Architectural Antiques

We told you in the last Newsletter about our eBay project where we are selling architectural items on eBay. We have now expanded and are selling lower value items on our own website – www.rth.org.uk - so this is the place to find hooks, sash window lifts, casement window handles.

We are still selling the higher value items on eBay – find us there as Regency_Town_House.

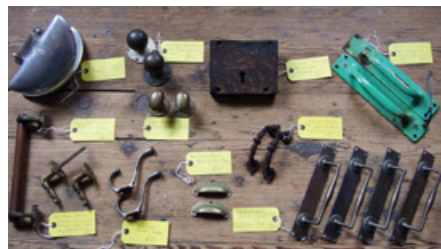
We have had some wonderful items through our hands, showing craftsmanship and quality not often found in modern equivalents. Sometimes we're sad to pack them up and send them off!



Brass fingerplates with musical instruments

Some of our highlights...

- A pair of beautiful brass fingerplates with musical instruments which were made about 1937, probably by Beardsmore, and came from a swish Park Lane apartment.
- Ten pairs of ebony doorknobs with ornate Gothic brass back plates that were designed by George Gilbert Scott Architect c1872 for the St Pancras Hotel.
- Gorgeous Art Deco door pulls – we think they might have come from a cinema – but how good would they look on a retro style café?
- Poole Pottery tiles that were designed for the Music Room in Sir Adrian Boult's house at Quakers Orchard, Peaslake, Surrey.



Architectural items for sale on eBay



Ebony doorknobs with Gothic brass back plates

It would be interesting to know where our treasures have gone.

Do go and have a look on the eBay and RTH websites and be inspired to do that renovation you've been planning - we offer plenty of inspiration and you can support us at the same time. All of the profits go towards the ongoing work on the house.

The era of Artisans

by Catherine Page

One of the things that makes the North Laine different is the variety of small and individual shops. But forty years ago in the '70s, there were more and they were ground breaking. People interested in alternative approaches to life would often come to Brighton, knowing that for a relatively small rent and with a minimum of legalities, they could try out what seemed to be a bright, retail idea. The Body Shop started here, and Infinity Foods and RinTinTin are still here. 'Cicada' which made original resin jewellery was on the corner of 50 Gloucester Road.

Pat Thornton and Nick Orsborn, having been to art school, moved to Brighton in 1971. After a multitude of casual jobs, Pat began to learn the trade of making clothes from Simon and Dinah Nicholson. They had a prototype art deco shop in Duke Street, but also 'Frock Shop' in Middle Street for which Simon, and soon Pat, made everything out of bags of old materials sold by rag men. The going rate was 7/6p for a bag of old frocks which had been sorted out and Pat attributes much of the unleashing of her creativity to Simon who had been a costume designer at the BBC.

After three years, Pat and Nick decided to work together and started creating jewellery from polyethylene moulds which they constructed in their bedsit from ICI chemicals. Eventually, chased out by complaints about the smells, they rented a lock-up shop at 32J Viaduct Road and began to sell their jewellery through a few shops in the King's Road, Chelsea.

Their real break-through came when they were taken up by Biba, and then Liberty. They were featured in 'Cosmopolitan' and when 'Over 21' made some of their jewellery a special offer they could afford to rent what became their seminal shop on the corner of Gloucester Road and Frederick Place which had a big flat above it.*



'Cicada', on the corner of Gloucester Road, made original resin jewellery



Pat Thornton

largely in 1930s crepe dresses, she was able to work in their workshop next door as well as bring up three children. There were a lot of small children in the area and she recalls that many would join on to the crocodile as she would walk her own down the twittens to the nursery of the school in Middle Street. But the North Laine wasn't only united by school children and commerce, there were all sorts of committees at which local people would air their problems since the Brighton and Hove Corporation regarded the area more as a blight than an asset. She can remember the general squalor and the poverty and there was a noticeable number of old men who had no money, nowhere to live and seemingly no options.

To begin with life was simple: they had no till, no VAT to pay and no regulations to follow. Pat became clever in ways of dressing the shop to give the impression of plenty and dressed

Money was generally scarce and a culture of what we now call 'Vintage' and was then 'second hand', pervaded. This covered not only clothes but extended to furniture, kitchen ware, bedding and everything except food. The small shops sold a variety of speciality items from lace to post cards, from furs to cork, from clothes to jewellery, to coffee to cheese and to silver plaiting made by the foundry in Foundry Street.

London traders would come down on Mondays ostensibly to buy antiques, but all the shop keepers profited. However, whilst in general the area was safe and friendly, the antiques trade was separate and felt slightly suspect. It kept itself apart. Fights, occasioned by rivalries, would sometimes break out in pubs. These were evidenced by dried-up spatters of blood on the pavements. Despite this, a lot of people were employed 'finishing', repairing and French polishing antiques for the export market and at the end of each week, huge lorries and large vans would arrive, load up and then disappear in the direction of the ports.

This particular version of 'The Good Life' ended in the mid 1980s. Pat and Nick and many of their colleagues and friends were chased out of the North Laine by a relentless mixture of rent hikes, inflation, VAT increases, costly fire regulations and perhaps most tellingly by the fashion, which changed from the large flamboyancy of the 60's and '70s to a more discreet style.

In the '70s, having a shop in the North Laine was exciting, challenging and pregnant with possibilities. Able to secure a bank loan without a business plan, artisans could exploit their potential to the limit of their own ability. The area was a unique and particular little pocket of civilization and it provided a heady atmosphere which gave rise to great creativity and great individuality.

* Further written references include Sylvia Katz's Classic Plastics (Thames & Hudson) where Cicada is featured under the chapter on 1980s. Also Resin Jewellery by Kathie Murphy pub A&C Black 2002. Work held in Brighton Museum and V&A museum London and Bournemouth Institute in their Plastics Museum.



DATES FOR YOUR

Diary

April 21st

Spring at Home

Costumed vignettes of
Regency Life
Musical Group
performance
Refreshments

May

Brighton Festival

An evening preview of the
art exhibiton at the house
as well as an audience
with the artist Mariele
Neudecker
Refreshments

June 30th

Brunswick Art Fair

Sketching and painting event
in the House. Numbers are
limited to 15
Stall at the festival displaying
Regency Town House projects

**June through
August**

Film Nights

Throughout the Summer
months, with an insider
view on film and television
production

August 18th

The Brunswick Festival

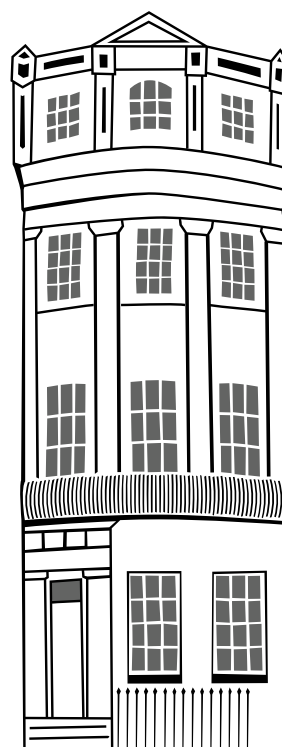
Save your Bric-a-brac to
support our annual stall at
the Festival, we will collect.
The House will be open for
refreshments
Town House Tours

September 12-15th

Brighton and Hove Open Door

December

At Home Christmas Event



- Priority Booking for the Friends of the Regency Town House
- Friends Advance Notification of all events prior to public announcement
- Pre Reserved Seats at each event held for Friends
- Voucher for a complimentary refreshment at events for Friends

Restoration update

by Liz German

At the moment, we're concentrating on the basement at No 10 Brunswick Square. We are very lucky to have the benefit of the expertise of Paul Robinson, our volunteer plasterer. He is going through Number 10, restoring all the plaster, where necessary, on ceilings and walls. Depending on which surface he has to cover, he uses subtly different lime plasters, for instance some with hair and some without.

In the housekeeper's room at the front of the basement, we are refurbishing the large walk-in cupboard. This has deep shelves on one side that would have been for the

linens whilst on the other side there stood a dresser. Currently we are researching to find more precisely what the contents of this cupboard would have been.

Gilly, one of our volunteers, is scraping off the old paint to the outermost leaves of the window shutters, around the sash boxes, the cupboard and storage boxes beneath. Over the years, and in the direct sunlight coming through the glass the paintwork has become so crazed and brittle that it too difficult to sand. However, the inside leaves of the shutters only need a light sanding as the sun has not reached it, therefore the original paintwork can be preserved. On one side the window seat can be lifted, whilst on the other there is a front opening cupboard, thus

demonstrating different methods of access to stored items.

At some stage the sash windows will have to be repaired with new cords and the dado rail will have to be replaced. In this room it was approximately 14 cms deep and flat and fulfilled a purely functional purpose which was to protect the walls from the furniture. After this, the room will be painted in the original colours of the basement which were Regency Green and Cream, and the woodwork will be grained as was evident from the original paintwork. We very much hope that by the end of the year, the restoration of the Houskeeper's room will be finished and after that it will be furnished.

VOLUNTEER *inputs*

Australia's loss is Brighton's gain

by Catherine Page



Rosemary Pugh

Rosemary Pugh's interests have always been in social history and she is currently researching Market Street and Waterloo Street for MyHouseMyStreet. She feels quite strongly that the glamour of 19th century Brighton has been well explored, but that life in the back streets, albeit vital to its success as a fashionable resort, has been rather ignored. She wants to reveal

the teaming life going on just round the corner from the famous squares and the cultural space that the Regency Town House offers, has enabled her to do so.

Rosemary has had an impressive background as a researcher. Having been born in Australia, then having worked Hong Kong, in she finally arrived in England in 1963 and spent much of the 'swinging sixties' in a flat off the King's Road, Chelsea. From then on, part of her time involved being in charge of the library in the Hong Kong Government office, whilst the other part involved going to art galleries, seeing Solti conduct and camping outside the Royal Opera House to get seats for performances by Nureyev and Fonteyn.

After a few years of enjoying London, having met and married a lecturer in Pharmacy at the University of Brighton, she had two children and eventually moved to Park Gate, Hove in 1985 where she and her husband now live.

When her daughter started school, Rosemary decided that she didn't want to go back to library work, so she educated herself in the history of Sussex, and with the help of a teaching certificate, started to spread her knowledge. She then took this interest in local history a step further by getting an MA in it, in 1986. She embarked on writing and then publishing a much-lauded history of Park Gate itself, an Eric Lyons Span designed apartment block. At the same time local colleges began to snap up her expertise and enthusiasm and she soon found herself not only teaching local, but ancient history, archaeology and classical civilization as well.

Her real breakthrough came when she decided to organize coach trips for people interested in going to performances, galleries, events and places they could reach in a day from Hove. In fact, she had derived so much pleasure from the cultural side of her life in the '60s, that she decided to pass her enthusiasms on. To begin with the tours were in 20 seater coaches and they were advertised through word of mouth. Very quickly they became immensely popular and one year Rosemary found herself leading 30 tours, some of them much expanded because she had also started taking people abroad on holidays to Bruges or Rouen or the Loire Valley. However, she soon realised that she was happier (and less tired) if she concentrated on tours in this country. Finally after 25 years, she found that she could no longer do the backbreaking work necessary to continue the tours and she resigned.

That is when she joined the team at the Town House. She aims, next, to look at Brunswick Street East and West and also Farm Street and, under the auspices of MyHouseMyStreet, will bring the same forensic scrutiny to her examination of them as she has to everything she has done in the past.