

Historic urban stabling in Britain today and The Regency Town House ‘Stable Appeal’

Introduction

Over the last 150 years, the historic built environment has come to benefit from greatly improved safeguarding, but we continue to leave important sites vulnerable. A compelling example of this relates to England’s traditional farmsteads. Long recognised as seminal to our countryside, only in the last 20 years have they been mapped and researched in any detail, their contribution officially acknowledged. Regrettably, no such activity has been conducted in relation to urban equestrian architecture, although much and especially so that designed as integral to our great terraced houses, is in crisis and becoming ever more compromised. This situation has arisen largely for two reasons:

- In the early 20th C, before the *Town and Country Planning Act of 1947* required the listing of ‘significant’ buildings, the stabling attached to large town houses was invariably sold off. Connecting doorways were bricked up, back streets were renumbered, and new property titles issued. These steps broke the link between the front and rear quarters of such buildings and saw the latter left undesignated.
- After WW2, as listing was implemented, it was widely held that the working areas of historic properties were unimportant, protection unnecessary. With generations of local government conservation and planning officers taking a steer from this, the widespread disfigurement of ‘back-street’ equestrian architecture followed.

Numerical data provides evidence for the scale of this problem. In the city of Brighton & Hove, long considered a showcase for some of the Regency’s finest buildings, there are over three thousand listed residential properties but only a handful of attached equestrian locations. Moreover, where this style of architecture does survive, it generally has little original character to its external elevations and none whatsoever internally.

Yet the stabling attached to large, once fashionable terraced housing is of significant heritage value. Purpose designed to be functional, hygienic, comfortable for valuable animals, and secure for expensive coaches, such sites provide tangible links to past practices and illuminate the experiences of the highest-born residents and lowliest of working staff - showcasing key aspects of social, economic, technical and architectural history.

Moving forward, we must overcome the notion that this form of development is ‘worthless’, a mere afterthought. Architecture of this type was erected as a crucial part of a meticulously designed landscape and constitutes the second most important feature within which it stands. Each individual stable was a hub of activity, an integral and indispensable facet to the operation of a grand home, quite literally - and in so many other ways - the driving force behind daily life. While, collectively, such stabling provided the backbone to the success of our great urban estates and, in turn, that of the towns and cities in which they stood.

Our stabling and our campaign to reunite it with The Regency Town House

The Regency Town House at 13 Brunswick Square, Hove, stands in the centre of C A Busby's Brunswick Town, a large-scale development of the 1820s that quickly became the fashionable heart of late Georgian Brighton. Operating today as a heritage centre focused on traditional building practice and Regency history, those at the grade I listed Town House have been trying for the last 40 years to re-acquire the original stable and coach house to the property, which stands immediately behind No. 13 and is still directly connected to it.



Overview of RTH site in Brunswick Square, stabling highlighted in red

This site is a rare survivor and something of an architectural gem for while today surviving original features are extremely unusual in urban stables, at the Town House stands a true relic of early 19th century life which, with relatively minor repair, could once more provide a living testament to the rhythms and practices of a bygone era, even its lime-washed hay loft is still intact.

Unexpectedly, the opportunity has arisen to secure this prize, as the current owners, who have been considering modernisation of their unlisted asset, are keen that the Town House might acquire the site for heritage use. If this can be achieved, No. 13 will become the only terraced historic home in the country to offer visitors authentic grand interiors, servant's working rooms and equestrian quarters. Regarding this opportunity, the Curator at the Town House, Nick Tyson, says:

"For many years it's been deeply frustrating to provide Town House visitors with a description of a local stable, the lives of those who worked there, and the significance of horses and carriages to early residents, without being able to show them an actual site. Today, we have before us the prospect of rectifying this deficiency. Re-acquiring our original stabling is critical if we are to deliver our full potential"

The Brunswick Town Charitable Trust, (Reg. UK No. 1012216), the organisation formed to progress The Regency Town House project, is well on the way to agreeing the sale and reuniting the original parts of 13 Brunswick Square. However, it still needs the support of the major heritage-focused funding agencies. One might expect this would be straightforward but regrettably it is challenging, because many such organisations, including the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF), use listed status as the key determinant of heritage value. This viewpoint greatly disadvantages our appeal to save an unlisted stable and coach house - which despite not being protected, is significant.

Can you help us?

We hope you will endorse our campaign and support us by writing to provide your perspective on the heritage value of the property involved and our overall project. We will collate responses and incorporate them into our submissions for financial support. If we are to succeed, it is essential that we offer potential funders reassurance that our project is important and something they should strive to facilitate.

What acquiring the stabling would mean...

As an 'annex' to The Regency Town House', our stable and coach house will greatly enrich our heritage provision, aiding understanding of how a grand house in a great seaside estate once operated. Acquisition will deliver many additional benefits, but two are particularly important:

- The floor and wall areas available to us for the staging of events, exhibitions, and workshops will nearly double.
- Our concurrency regarding access/egress and room use across our site will significantly improve, enabling us to host more visitors and parallel events,

These outcomes will help better fund our trust and improve our scope of operation.

Our stable appeal

We have a three-part plan to raise the £500,000* required for purchase and repair, secure £100,000 via public donation (of which £38,000 has been raised in recent weeks), £250,000 from the NHLF, and a bridging loan of £150,000 from the Architectural Heritage Fund (this being replaced by a mortgage as repairs conclude).

To discuss this campaign, please call or write to our Curator, Nick Tyson

+44 1273 206306

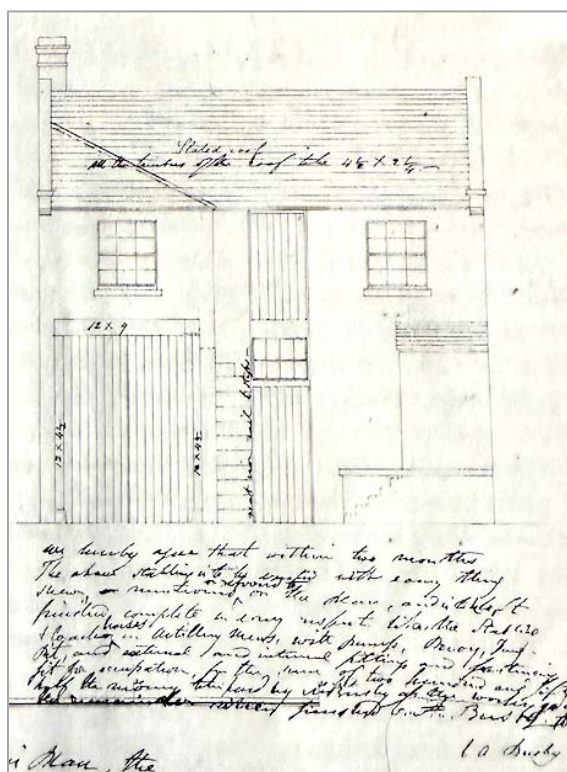
nick@rth.org.uk

The Regency Town House (stables)
13 Brunswick Square
Brighton & Hove, BN3 1EH, UK

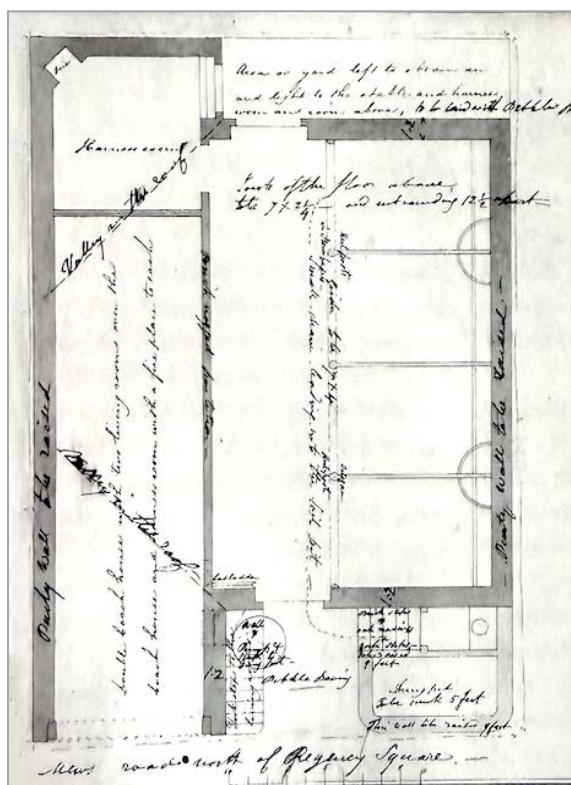
NOTE: Our secure page for public donations, (target £100,000, gifts to date £38,000), hosted by Charities Aid Foundation, is at: [Donate to our stable appeal](#). More information about our campaign is at: [Further detail](#)

* If our campaign is unsuccessful, we will return donations or, with permission, use funds for the maintenance of The Regency Town House.

Set out below - Drawings of Brighton & Hove stabling produced in the 1820s by architect Charles Augustin Busby, additional contextual photos and images, and a plan of the ground floor facilities established in the stable and coach house to 13 Brunswick Square (now The Regency Town House)



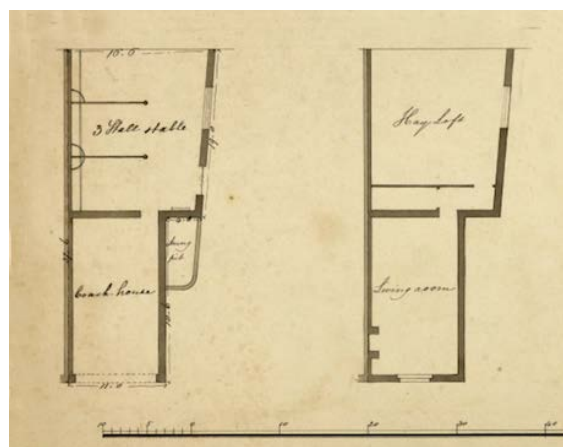
Brighton stable, front elevation. C A Busby, 1827



Brighton stable, plan. C A Busby, 1827



Brighton stable, front elevation. C A Busby, 1828



Brighton stable, plan. C A Busby, 1828



Brighton stable, front elevation. C A Busby, 1828



Replacement coach house door to the stabling at RTH



Flooring to the stabling to RTH



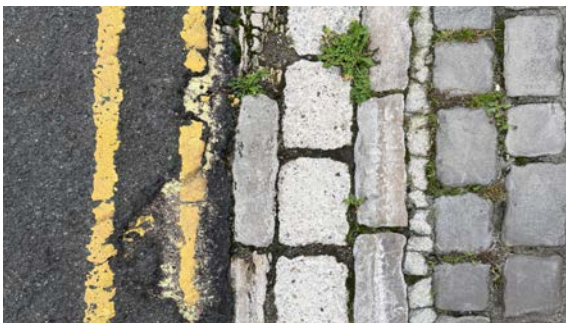
Geo, Scharf sketch of an early 19th C stable in London



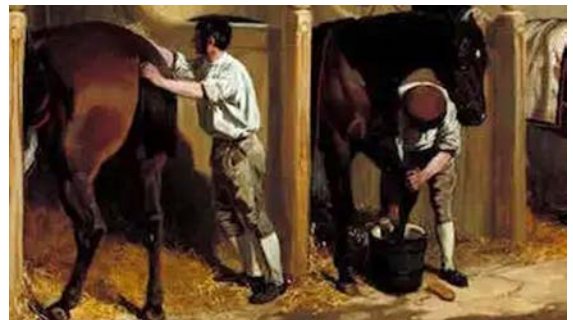
The lime-washed hay loft above the stabling to RTH



19th C stalls, like those at the stabling to RTH



Fabric outside the stabling to RTH



Stabling by John Frederick Herring, 1845



1st F, rear sash in the stabling to RTH



GF, rear sash in the stabling to RTH



1st F, fireplace in the stabling to RTH



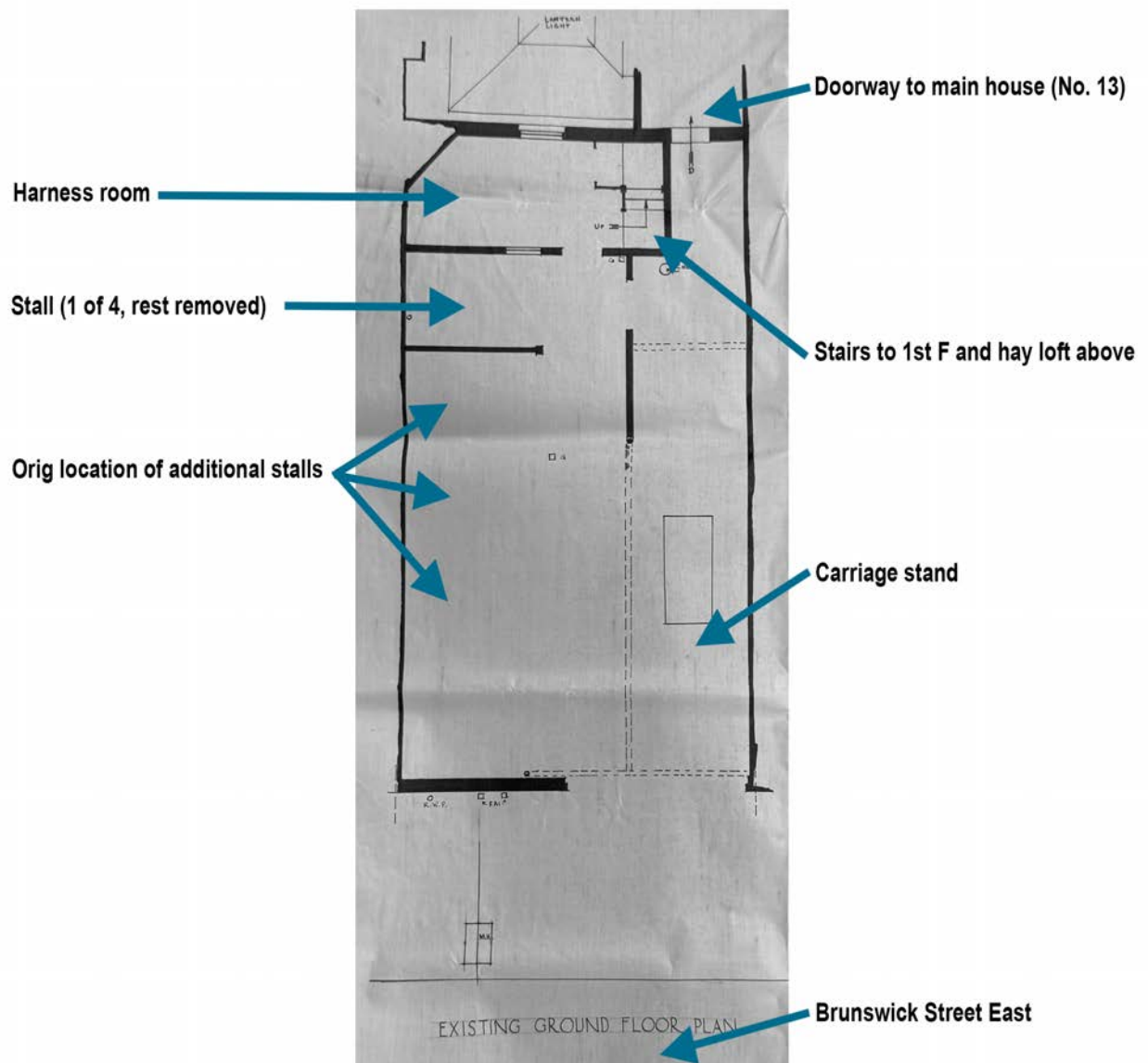
GF, brick floor in the rear of the stabling to RTH



GF, harness room fireplace in the stabling to RTH



GF, T&G bead-butt boarding in the stabling to RTH



1930s plan of the GF to the RTH stabling, showing three stalls removed in preparation for use as a garage