

PALMEIRA PALACES

It is easy to walk through Palmeira Square and admire the two opposing ranges of buildings as just terraces of splendid but very similar houses. But there is much more to the design than that. Look again.....

Both sides are an exact mirror of each other, built as one contract in the 1870s, and forming a careful architectural set piece. The matching overall design of each side is “palace fronted”, meaning it has a central feature and two “pavilion” ends. To achieve this, each side has 17 houses, thus producing a central house – No9 on the east and No26 on the west. These are given the grand status of a full width colonnaded loggia on the ground floor, with rusticated columns, and a large square projecting bay on the first floor which is carried on up to the second floor. This very deliberate design eliminates the one-sided appearance of all the other houses, whose entrance porches occur on either the left or right.

The remainder of the houses on each side fall into one of two categories. Category One are those with a slightly projecting façade from the rest of the terrace, wider bay on the first floor and rusticated quoin blocks running full height on the corners. These are placed either side of the centre house, to reinforce its status, and in pairs at each extreme end to form the “pavilion”. Category Two are all the houses in between, with a slimmer bay on the first floor, and generally subordinate detailing.

If you stand in the middle of the Square and look at either side, you will see that the pattern of the porches is mirrored to either side of the centre house. In whichever direction they run as three singles, a double, one single and then a double as part of the “pavilion end”. The porches are treated to the distinctive Doric/Tuscan style of column, entablature and balcony balustrade, giving a quietly gracious atmosphere. If you stand on the porch of No10 and look southwards towards the sea, the view through all the porches is a great architectural experience.

You will also see that above the second floor windows, the raised pediment over the centre window varies according to the type of bay on the first floor. A curved pediment can be seen over the larger bays and a pitched pediment over the smaller ones.

The variations in the top floor windows are due to later alterations. Originally all were round headed, but many were changed to square head during the Wick Estate flat alterations after World War One.

There is also an interesting mistake to be spotted. If you look carefully at No10, you will see that the larger type first floor bay is not in proper alignment with the windows above. The bay appears to have been set out incorrectly at the time of construction, and evidently a decision was taken at the time to leave it as it is. Adequate supervision of building work seems to have been no better in 1870 than a century later!