

ADELAIDE CRESCENT AND PALMEIRA SQUARE - A SHORT HISTORY

The land occupied by the Crescent and Square was originally part of the Wick Estate, the property of the Stapley family for 150 years until 1701.

Anthony Stapley, a staunch Puritan who had succeeded to the estate at the age of fifteen, was distinguished by having been one of the judges at the trial of Charles the First, and a signatory to his death warrant of 29th January 1649, the day before the King's execution. He was active in the affairs of Sussex, Governor of Chichester from 1643 to 1645, and a Justice of the Peace until his death in 1655. By contrast, his son was a Royalist, and it was for this reason that the estate was intact at the Restoration in 1660.

The estate was sold in 1701 for £1,600 to John Scutt of Brighthelmstone, whose grandson built Wick House, and whose great grandson, the Rev. Thomas Scutt, sold the estate to Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid in 1830. Five years previously to this, the architect of Kemp Town, Thomas Read Kemp, had entered into an agreement with Thomas Scutt, in the hope of building a Kemp Town West on the land to the west of Brunswick Town, but owing to lack of money this scheme was never realised.

Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid planned to build a new estate of houses, and asked permission of William the Fourth to name the crescent after Queen Adelaide. The architect Decimus Burton was appointed, and work began in 1830. The original scheme was for a single semi-circular crescent, similar to Royal Crescent but much larger, and the first three houses facing the sea, and seven facing the Crescent, were either fully or partially completed by 1832. The style was the then fashionable Italianate, with pleasing proportions and careful classical detailing. The central double-fronted house facing the sea was given an impressive entablature and pediment. Individual balustered balconies were provided to the first floor windows of the three houses facing south, and one facing the Crescent. Eight of the ten houses were given unusual second floor windows formed between the large corbels of the cornice, and thus giving the visual impression of a smaller scale house, though many of these have now been lowered, spoiling the effect.

Due to a general recession in the speculative housing market work stopped in 1832, and was not resumed until 1850, by which time the plan for a single crescent had been abandoned, and that of a square leading out of a crescent adopted. The style was changed and simplified, and the scale increased to produce the much larger houses from No 10 onwards. Work on the Crescent was completed in 1860.

Between 1832 and 1833 a most unusual building was erected on ground now occupied by the top of the Square. It was known as the Antheum (from the Greek *anthos*-flower), designed by Amon Henry Wilds, the architect of Brunswick Town, built with funds provided by Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, and supported by the botanist Henry Philips. The design was a large glazed dome conservatory, on a frame of cast iron ribs and girders, with an estimated 40,000 panes of glass. It was then the largest dome in the world, with a ground diameter of 160 feet, a height of 64 feet, and a circumference of 492 feet. The iron sections were brought to the harbour at Shoreham, and then dragged by teams of horses to the site. The interior was laid out as an exotic garden, with gravel walks, arbours and recesses amongst the cedars, palms and other rare trees, besides tropical and oriental shrubs, and flowers of all kinds. There was romantic rock scenery, a lake with fish and aquatic plants, birds flying amongst the trees, and seating for 800. It was heated using coke supplied by the Brighton gasworks. The opening was scheduled for 1st September 1833, with a band of the Lancers to attend. Admission was to be one shilling, or two guineas for an annual season ticket.

To support the weight of this dome, a central pillar fastened with purlins and diagonal braces was an essential part of the design. Against Wilds' advice, the management unwisely decided to do away with this main structural support. On 30th August, everything being finished, the builder removed the temporary shoring, and the following day the entire structure collapsed. The only person inside, the head gardener Mr Wyatt, narrowly escaped. For over twenty years the tangled wreckage of iron lay where it had fallen, and was visited in 1850 by the architect Joseph Paxton, looking for ideas for his new Crystal Palace.

A map of 1844 shows the Crescent laid out with the first eight houses in place, a gravel pit in the centre of the Square, a piggery on the east side, the ruins of the Antheum, and Ken Nye's cricket ground on the north-east corner by Holland Road.

In 1851 the whole area was included under an Act of Parliament extending the boundary of the Brunswick Square Commissioners to St Johns Road. This body regulated the municipal affairs of the new town, and arranged policing and fire services, administered from the Town Hall in Brunswick Street West. The Hove Improvement Act of 1858 incorporated Brunswick Town into the rest of the new Borough.

St John's Church was completed in 1854, for the use of the new estate, on land given by Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid.

In 1853 work began on the Square. The remains of the Antheum were cleared away, and the heavy Italianate houses constructed, with 'palace fronting' to each of the two ranges. The Doric and Tuscan ordering of the columned porches, the grouping of the upper windows and rusticated detailing were typical of the period, and repeated endlessly across the rapidly spreading estates of west London. By 1862 most of the houses on the west side were occupied, and the work was completed by 1870. The Square was named Palmeira after the title of Baron da Palmeira, conferred on Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid by the Queen of Portugal.

The houses in the Square and Crescent were mostly let by the Wick Estate, administered from the Estate Office at 16 Palmeira Square. Such houses were commonly rented by the large middle and upper class families of the time, sometimes only for the summer season, and needed several permanent indoor staff to maintain the house and family. The servants worked in the basement and lived at the top, with over 100 stairs in between.

A record survives of the servants' wages at 16 Adelaide Crescent between 1864 and 1929. In the early years these ranged from £9 to £25 per year depending on status, and had risen to only £17 to £42 by 1927, sixty years later. Margaret Powell, who wrote *Below Stairs* in 1968, started work as a kitchen maid at 8 Adelaide Crescent in 1922, at £24 per year, with a full uniform to buy costing £2.

Particularly after the First War, families found it increasingly difficult to maintain a large domestic staff, and the market for such rentals declined. The Wick Estate addressed this problem by taking several empty houses together and creating large lateral mansion style flats, and continued with this throughout the period between the Wars, until a significant percentage of the houses in the Square in particular had been thus converted. Many of these large flats survive to this day. The inevitable process of conversion of all but now two houses in the Crescent has resulted in 72 houses becoming 400 separate addresses, and forming part of Brunswick and Adelaide, the most densely populated Ward in Great Britain.

Distinguished residents have included the Duchess of Marlborough at 35 Adelaide Crescent, the Duchess of Cambridge at 36 Adelaide Crescent, the Earl of Munster at 23 Palmeira Square, and Lord George Nevill at 22 Palmeira Square. 24 Palmeira Square was for a time the Lady Nevill Hospital. From 1875 to 1925 a family with the singularly appropriate surname of Bythesea lived at 36 Adelaide Crescent.

During the years after the Second War, towns throughout Britain were suffering major losses of architectural heritage through demolition for 'New Age' developments. In 1945 Hove Council actually passed a plan to demolish Brunswick Terrace and Adelaide Crescent, for replacement with blocks of flats, and as recently as 1966 a plan was considered to remove the Adelaide ramps for road widening along Kingsway. Fortunately, public outcry prevented both.

During the Second War, the post and finial railings surrounding the gardens in the Crescent and Square, which were then for the private use of the residents, were removed for the war effort. Stories abound as to the fate of these railings, one being that they were stored on the quay at Shoreham ready for transport, but having been found to be too low in carbon content were dumped in the harbour. It is certainly true that most such removed railings were found to be unsuitable, but as an exercise in the general war effort it was thought to be unsuitable to make this fact public.

After the War, the Council undertook a poll of the residents to establish if they wished to retain the gardens as private or hand over the maintenance. Unlike Sussex Square and Lewes Crescent, where the residents chose to retain their privacy, general apathy here decided the Council to include the Crescent and Square within their Hove Corporation Act of 1947, and took over the maintenance. A plan of the gardens in 1874, and photographs taken in 1890 and 1938, show splendidly planted and maintained gardens surrounded by dense shrubbery and mature trees. Since then, both gardens have deteriorated, whilst those of Sussex Square and Lewes Crescent retain most of their former glory.

The Floral Clock garden was originally for the private use for the residents of Palmeira Mansions, and enclosed by railings in the same manner as the Square. This too was included in the Act, and the Floral Clock was unveiled by the Mayor of Hove on Coronation Day 1953.

Both gardens, and the Floral Clock garden, were originally perimeter planted with elm trees, noted for their resistance to salt winds, and used extensively elsewhere in Hove and other coastal towns. Unfortunately, Dutch Elm Disease and the 1987 and 1991 hurricanes have wreaked havoc to these trees, and only a very few of the originals now remain. Coastal wind patterns have changed in recent years, and subsequent tree planting schemes have proved unsuccessful.

The front entrance of 3 Adelaide Crescent was for many years graced by the presence of a marble statue on a plinth. A replica of Canova's *Dancing Girl*, it had stood in the entrance to the old Hove Town Hall until rescued from the fire of 1966.