

THE
MONTPELIER
AND
CLIFTON HILL

ASSOCIATION
NEWSLETTER

No 10 July 2011



Regency cool
Meet the committee
plus **planning round-up**

Inside this issue A fresh window on the past

Page 2

The Brighton festival fringe tours of our area were sponsored by the MCHA; plus news of the AGM election results.

Page 3

Our planning round-up: estate agents' boards are fast becoming an endangered species; council red tape delays start on converting the Royal Alex; and an update on the Ice Rink plans.

Pages 4 and 5

A blast of fresh air. Do you know how to use your sash windows effectively? The MCHA guide to how your sash windows can help you stay cool throughout even the hottest of summer days.

Pages 6 and 7

Meet your new committee. This is the team that saved the Alex, says new chairman Jim Gowans, but with new plans for the Ice Rink the MCHA cannot rest on its laurels.

Page 8

Say goodbye to one of the blots on the townscape and Gabi Tubbs provides a preview of the forthcoming conservation awards.

Photographic credits:

Cover: Stephanie Pain, page 2: Jim Gowans, pages 3, 4, 5 and 8 Stephanie Pain. Page 8. The photos on pages 6 and 7 were supplied by the committee.

The MCHA Newsletter is edited by Mick Hamer, published by the Montpelier and Clifton Hill Association and printed by The Printhouse, 26-28 St John's Road, Hove BN3 2FB. The Montpelier and Clifton Hill Association is a registered charity, number 267889



UNDER the aegis of the MCHA, Sussex University historian and Brighton resident Geoff Mead led a very successful series of guided walks in Montpelier and Clifton Hill during Brighton's fringe festival in May. Groups of up to

thirty people, including visitors and residents, had the opportunity to discover the architectural, social and even the geological history of the area in the company of one of the city's most engaging and knowledgeable speakers.

AGM elections prompt high turnout

THE executive committee faced an unprecedented challenge at the annual general meeting from a slate of candidates promoted by Roger Amerena, a previous chairman. The contest prompted a high turnout with about 120 people attending the meeting. None of the candidates on the Amerena slate was successful.

The AGM, which was held in St Michael's, was attended by Dominic Travers, a solicitor and expert in charity constitutions with DMH Stallard, to deal with a number of legal issues that had been raised. Mr Travers ruled that Patrick Lowe, who was standing as chairman and secretary for the Amerena slate, was

not eligible to stand because he lived and worked outside the area. So Jim Gowans was elected as chairman unopposed and Corinne Attwood was also elected unopposed as secretary.

In a secret ballot Mick Hamer, the outgoing chairman, beat Francis Tonks for the position of vice chairman by 45 votes to 31, Chris Jackson beat Martin Foster for treasurer by 46 votes to 30 and Alan Legg kept the job of membership secretary, fending off a challenge from David King by 46 votes to 32.

The remaining five committee places were won by Pauline Messum, Lori Pinkerton-Rolet, Ian Thorburn, Graham Towers and Gabi Tubbs.

**THE
MONTPELIER
AND
CLIFTON HILL
ASSOCIATION**

The MCHA executive committee consists of **Jim Gowans**, Chairman, **Mick Hamer**, vice-chair, **Chris Jackson**, Honorary Treasurer, **Corinne Attwood**, Honorary Secretary, **Alan Legg**, Membership Secretary, **Pauline Messum**, **Lori Pinkerton-Rolet**, **Ian Thorburn**, **Graham Towers**, planning group and **Gabi Tubbs**, conservation awards. The co-opted members are **Carol Dyhouse** and **David King**.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS: Single membership is £10 and couples £15, corporate £30.

Planning round-up

Council boards clamp down begins to bite

Campaign successes

ESTATE agents' boards are rapidly vanishing from the streets of the conservation area after a council clamp down that has seen three agents being fined £1000 each for illegal boards.

Estate agents' boards were banned in almost all central conservation areas on 20 September 2010. It is now illegal to put up a "for sale" board in the Montpelier and Clifton Hill conservation area.

But the ban has been difficult to police because boards that had been put up before the ban came into force could stay until the property was sold. In the absence of proof of when a board had been erected the council's enforcement officers often found it difficult to prosecute offending estate agents.

So the MCHA teamed up with the council and carried out the first ever survey of boards in the conservation area in March this year. We found that the number of boards had dropped by half since the ban, compared to the number in 2009, when there were more than 60 boards in the area.

By the end of June the number of boards in our conservation area was down to single figures—only a third of the figure that we recorded three months before in March. Most roads in the conservation area are now completely free of boards. The boards that remain are mostly advertising hard-to-sell properties.

The council has been taking a hard line with transgressors. In



Delay in starting work on the Royal Alex

WORK on converting the Royal Alex is now not expected to start until September after council delays in completing a section 106 agreement. This agreement is a legal document that commits the developer Taylor Wimpey to providing money for community

benefits, such as education and parks. The main cause of the delay was an unexpected last-minute demand by the council for an extra £20,000. After some initial haggling the developer decided to pay up to avoid any further delay.

March, Mishon Welton and Priors were fined £1000 each for erecting illegal boards in Hove. In May, Cubitt and West were fined £1000 and ordered to pay £900 in costs for another illegal board in Hove.

Cubitt and West has now agreed to remove all of its boards, even those that had been put up before the ban and including a rogue board in Clifton Hill. Another estate agent, Spark and Sons, agreed to remove a "for let" board in Powis Grove after being given notice of prosecution.

Ice rink update

THE MCHA has written to Conran and Partners, the architects designing the new hotel for the old Ice Rink site, expressing our disquiet about the scale of their plans.

In principle we are happy to see an upmarket hotel built on this site. But we are concerned about the impact of the plans on St Nicholas' church and Wykeham Terrace.

We told the architects that the council's planning guidance of March 2009 was quite specific about the maximum height of any new development. It said that the site is not appropriate for a tall building (roughly six storeys) and that "four storeys would probably be the maximum acceptable height for the development at its highest point".

Do you know of an illegal board?

All of the legal boards in the conservation area have been registered on the MCHA database, which we have shared with the council. If you suspect a board is

illegal you can either contact the council by phoning 01273-292222 or send an email to the association on info@montpelierandcliftonhill.org and we will investigate.

How to beat the heat

Sash windows provide a blast of fresh air

AS THE thermometer soars and summer at last starts to kick in one of the coolest places to be in Brighton is not lying stretched out on the beach—but chilling out in one of our glorious Regency houses.

In winter, period houses can be draughty, hard to keep warm and the heating bills make the council tax bill look like small change. But in summer they come into their own and are far less likely to need air conditioning than modern houses. This is an important advantage, because it takes twice as much energy to cool a room by one degree as it does to warm the room by one degree.

All the design features of Brighton's period houses—those fireplaces, the draughty sash windows and those thick walls—that make the houses so hard to heat in winter, make them a really cool place to be in the middle of a heatwave.

And the other big plus is that you don't really need to do much to stay cool—provided your windows work and your fireplaces haven't been bricked up. In the long run, making sure the windows work when you want them will be a whole lot cheaper and far more effective than nipping down to Argos and buying an emergency air-conditioning unit.

The fireplaces alone make an impressive contribution to Regency cool. According to the government's Building Research Establishment an open chimney pumps out hot air at the rate of 40 cubic metres an hour. And if you find 40 cubic metres hard to visualise, it is roughly the size of a typical double bedroom. So a room in a Regency house will have a fresh change of air every hour—sucking in cool air and pumping all that hot air out of the chimney.

But one of the key advantages of a period house in a heatwave is the sash windows—provided that they work and that you know how best to use them.

Sash windows were designed to maximise the airflow through a room, pumping out the hot air and sucking in cooler air. But very few people know how to use them to greatest effect. If you walk around the conservation area on a hot day you'll see lots of



Sash windows: the key to a really cool summer

open sash windows. But most people either push up the bottom sash or pull down the top one. Opening just one window isn't terribly effective because the block of cool air that is trying to get into the house is struggling against a block of warm air that is trying to get out.

How to use them effectively would have been second nature to our Victorian and Regency ancestors but it is now almost a completely forgotten science. But research by environmental scientists at London's Imperial College carried out during the heatwave of 2003 shows that it is most

effective to pull down the top sash and slide up the bottom sash so that that both windows are open by equal amounts. It is this balance that is the best way to maximise the flow of air and to cool your room.

Hot air rises, so the warmest air in your room collects just below the ceiling and the coolest block of air is close to the floor. On a typical summer's day the air close to the ceiling can easily be 5 °F hotter than that at floor level. So opening both top and bottom sashes by equal amounts not only allows the warm air to escape through the top of the window but also sucks in cooler air from outside through the bottom of the window. This removes unwanted hot air and also sets up a cooling breeze—the perfect antidote to those sweltering summer nights.

The researchers say that this strategy is most effective during the evening or at night when the air outside has started to cool a bit—provided that it is safe to leave your windows open.

If your house still has its original shutters then they are an effective way of shading sunny rooms and keeping out the summer sun. But if you don't have shutters, then don't despair. Blinds are just as effective at shielding rooms from the sun and preventing your house from overheating.

The final advantage of period houses is their 11-inch thick solid walls. Modern houses are built with well-insulated cavity walls, which are great for keeping in the heat in winter but are not so good at keeping a house cool in summer. Most of the houses in the conservation area are built with bungaroosh, a mixture of broken bricks, flint, chalk and other miscellaneous rubble held together with mortar.



Mind the gap: the efficient way to use a sash window

The ability of a house to stay cool in a heatwave is related to its thermal mass. Solid walls have far greater thermal mass than cavity walls because they are denser. As the sun starts to beat down the air is quick to warm up, but dense solid material like bungaroosh masonry heats up much more slowly and acts as a powerful brake on rising temperatures inside the house.

Five top tips for keeping your house cool

1. Use your sash windows to maximise the ventilation and help to make your house feel much lighter and airier
 2. Use blinds or shutters during the day to shade rooms from direct sunlight
 3. Insulate your loft. It not only helps to keep heat in and cuts your winter fuel bills, but it also prevents the roof overheating in summer
 4. If your fireplace has a cast-iron flap to regulate ventilation, ensure that it is fully open
 5. Switch off lights where possible and switch to low energy bulbs—they emit less heat
- And finally, forget about portable air conditioning. It may seem like a quick fix. But it is not very effective. Hanging an exhaust pipe out of a window may just let in hot air.

A message from the chairman

Jim Gowans on the new face of the association

HAVING been a trustee of the MCHA for the past five years and honorary secretary for the past three, it is my privilege to serve as chairman of the Association for this coming year. I will continue to ensure that the Association pursues its objectives as a charitable organisation, whilst at the same time providing members with the benefits of its social programme.

Those members who attended the AGM in May will recall a difficult meeting. I should like to thank my predecessor **Mick Hamer** for chairing that meeting and also for his work over the past year. Mick now serves as vice chairman and will continue to edit this newsletter and manage the website.

I should also like to thank Dominic Travers, a partner of solicitors DMH Stallard, whose professional advice on the night helped deal with technical issues regarding the conduct of the AGM. The Association is particularly grateful that Dominic waived his fee for attending a meeting that lasted some three hours. I would also like to thank our tellers, Christopher Bennett, Michael Fisher, Judy Tyson and Ninka Willcock for counting the votes and helping ensure that the ballot was seen to be fair and impartial.

My thanks are also due to Geoff Mead, our guest speaker at the AGM. He managed to deliver his illustrated talk "Brighton Beach Kaleidoscope" with



Jim Gowans, the association's new chairman

cheerful enthusiasm and brought welcome relief to proceedings which were otherwise focused on the serious matters contained in the annual report.

The Church of St Michael and All Angels is a magnificent venue. I wish to record the Association's gratitude to Father Robert Fayers for kindly allowing us to use his church on this occasion and for his offer of its use in the future.

Corinne Attwood was elected honorary secretary and returns to the committee after a break of six years. She was actively involved during this time with the campaign to save the Royal Alex and is a committee member of the Brighton Society.

Chris Jackson was elected honorary treasurer. His professional expertise in financial management has been particularly valuable to the Association in the past three years and I am very pleased that he is willing to continue in his role.

Alan Legg was elected honorary membership secretary. He had agreed to be appointed to this position after the AGM in 2010 when the position was left unfilled and has conducted a careful audit of membership in addition to organising the Christmas Party in St Nicholas' Church. Alan is also a participant in the Sussex Beacon Gardengadabout scheme and delivered a talk on the scheme to the Association's members earlier this year. Before I introduce the other members of



Chris Jackson (left), Alan Legg and Gabi Tubbs

the committee I wish to pay tribute to **Richard Killick**, who decided not to stand for re-election this year. Despite the responsibilities of a young family and a demanding job in London he has given some five years as a trustee, contributing particularly to the production of the newsletter.

Five other trustees were elected to the committee. **Pauline Messum** returns to the committee after two years. **Lori Pinkerton-Rolet**, a past President of the British Institute of Interior Design, continues her second term. **Ian Thorburn** has been on the committee since 2004, during which time he has been responsible for membership, publicity and much of the Association's routine administration. **Graham Towers** has been a committee member for three years and a trustee of the charity for the past year. He is an architect and town planner with a doctorate in housing design and played a major role in the Royal Alex campaign. He represents the Association on the Conservation Advisory Group to the City Council and was recently elected the Group's vice-chairman. **Gabi Tubbs** was editor and design editor of two major national lifestyle magazines and has been a committee member for some ten years. She has been responsible for the MCHA Conservation

Award scheme for the past seven years as well as co-editing the newsletter.

Two Association members have been co-opted to the committee since the AGM. **Carol Dyhouse**, a research professor of history at Sussex University, serves a second term as a co-opted member and **David King**, who is a relatively new member of the Association. He is a manufacturer of architectural metal products and is keen to see the restoration of balconies and railings. He has already contributed to the Constitutional Forum and represents a younger generation of members whose participation is especially welcome.

Having saved the Royal Alex from demolition, your committee looks forward to its being restored and converted. There are other major campaigns on the horizon, however, such as the Ice Rink site, as well as many more routine conservation projects, so we have another busy year ahead.

I hope to be able to meet as many members as possible at our annual summer garden party on 9th July and meanwhile thank you all as members for all the fantastic support that you continue to give the work of the Association.

Jim Gowans, Chairman

Top row: **Pauline Messum, Corinne Attwood, Lori Pinkerton-Rolet**
Bottom row: **Mick Hamer, Ian Thorburn and Graham Towers**



Local landmark set to vanish

..And the MCHA isn't even objecting

NO, it's not the towering spire of Saint Mary Mags that is being demolished, but the ugly central heating flue of Saint Mary Magdalen primary school.

Although the school is not part of the conservation area it is surrounded on all sides by roads that are in the conservation area. The flue, which is about 60 feet high, towers over the neighbouring streets and dominates the rear of the terrace of listed buildings on the east side of Hampton Place.

The flue is the exhaust for the school's oil-fired central heating system. But this autumn the school is replacing its oil-fired boiler with gas central heating. The new system will still need a flue but this will be a far more modest construction, extending just a couple of feet above the school roof.

The school hopes that the work will start in September and the contractors will have to remove the flue in stages, by cutting it into sections.



Blot on the landscape: but not for much longer

Conservation awards shortlist

FOUR major refurbishment projects are on the shortlist for the MCHA's annual conservation awards.

A grand building that was once a thriving ballet school a good many years ago, fell into terrible neglect and became an eyesore on the corner of Montpelier Road and Montpelier Terrace. HR Developments, a longstanding property company, has renovated and restored the facade and the magnificent entrance of the main building (bottom left). The company has also landscaped the front garden. In addition, a previously unsightly and neglected Victorian addition at the back of the

main house, has been restored and transformed into a townhouse with its own entrance gate on Montpelier Terrace and steps to the front door.

Two beautiful Grade II listed Victorian villas on Powis Villas (second from left) were part of the former Royal Alex children's hospital and were occupied by nurses. Since they have been bought by property developers River Oaks, managing director Ray Charmak has restored them to their former glory, retaining the beautiful traditional features using skilled craftsmen and the highest quality materials to create two light and airy family homes.

The family house on the corner of Powis Square and Powis Villas (third from left) has been bought and renovated by a young couple, who recently moved down from London. It has been lovingly restored as well as being modernised inside over the past two years.

The Conservation Advisory Group praised the work on this house in Clifton Hill (bottom right) when the group was asked to advise on a planning application to cover the canopy in lead. Over the past seven years this house has been carefully restored with the removal of fake tudor beams on the exterior.

