

A Practical Guide to the early Kemp Town Estate

Questions that you would want answered before buying a home today might include the speed of broadband available, the mobile network signal and the availability of parking. No doubt you would already have checked the journey time to work and perhaps the quality of the local schools. The early purchasers on the Estate were more likely to have concerned themselves with the nature of the water supply, the arrangements for disposal of 'night soil' and the safety of persons and property at night. Read here about what they would have found on the early Kemp Town Estate: everything from water supply and sewers to fire, police and ambulances, from gas, coal and street lighting to laundry and travel by horse drawn carriage and the new railways.

The Estate was in the vanguard of many of the improvements of the 19th Century. From the outset, residents were provided with mains drainage when most others were still using cess pits or middens at the back of houses. Residents here shared with the Royal Pavilion a very early supply of gas for lighting and had their streets lit by gas lamps. However, piped fresh water was not available until 1834, and before that water was taken from wells.

Drainage

From the beginning, the sanitary arrangements of the Estate were of an advanced standard. It is clear from the fact that drains run under the houses that they were laid as the houses were built. These drains picked up both the foul waste from WC's, baths and hand basins and also rainwater collected from roofs and paved areas. Waste from each house was carried away to a common sewer under the carriageway in front of the house. The sewers from the Estate discharged directly out to the sea.



Southern Water sewer map of 2002.

Sewers are shown running under the carriageway and falling from North West to South East. Note the sewer laid to pick up rainwater from the carriageway that once connected the two wings of Lewes Crescent still marked.

Before this innovation, chamber pots and middens located at the back of houses were in common use in Brighton as the way of dealing with 'night soil'. It wasn't until 1860 that the local authority decided to construct a sewer system of the type enjoyed at Kemp Town. It was to collect all the town's waste and discharge it through newly built sewers to sea shore groyne and so out to sea.

It is easy to forget that as late as the 1871 the heir to Queen Victoria's throne was, for a time, dangerously ill with typhoid fever as a result of fecal contamination of the drinking water supply. His father's death in 1861 had been attributed to the same cause.

A major improvement was achieved in Brighton when, later, a lateral sewer under the seafront was constructed to intercept all the town's sewage outlets, including the Estate's, and carry it along to the Portobello works, at Telscombe Cliffs, for treatment before discharge to sea.

In a typical house on the Estate, the drain runs from an outside servant's WC in the rear basement, under the back basement kitchens to a central well area where it may pick up the family WC connection upstairs and then on under the main body of the house to an intercepting chamber in the vaults under the front pavement before connecting to the Estate sewer under the carriageway. This arrangement has served the Estate well to the present day even though many more facilities have been connected to the system and much greater flows are generated.

Water

Without a good supply of water, the WC was of little use. Bore holes and wells into the chalk aquifers beneath Brighton provided the water needed, but had the drawback of potential contamination from cesspits and the need to pump water up from a depth. As late as 1868, a resident of Lewes Crescent dug a cesspit to take the waste from his new stables¹ just 100 feet from the houses of Sussex Square.

Before the first piped water supply of 1834, any house in occupation on the Estate would have required access to a well. If street directories are an accurate guide to the occupation of the Estate's houses, only fourteen houses² were occupied before 1834 and these would all have had access to a well. A well can be seen in the basement of the Rock Inn which was built at the same time as the Estate.

From 1834 a piped water supply became available to subscribers. It would have been connected to the kitchen sink and the basement WC and also to an upstairs cistern to supply a WC and wash hand basin. There were no bathrooms as we understand that term today. However, the supply of water

¹ 15 Arundel Place, now part of Arundel Mews, was built for Henry Buckle of 22 Lewes Crescent in 1868

² Seven of Sussex Square's fifty houses, five of Arundel Terrace's fourteen houses and one each of Chichester Terrace and Lewes Crescent's were occupied before the water supply began.

under pressure was, initially, for two hours of the day only and had to be supplemented with water stored in cisterns. Some houses were able to top up their water supply from their private wells by using a manual pump. A constant supply of water under pressure was provided after 1853. In the intervening twenty years the population of the estate had grown considerably.



A coal fired kitchen range

Hot water for washing came from the kitchen range, a large cast iron device for cooking and heating water powered by burning coal. A fire was contained within a central grate with iron hotplates on the top for pots and pans, and ovens either side for baking and roasting. The hot flues gases could be switched to pass over any part of the range chosen. At the back of the fire would be a back boiler, a small tank, connected to a circulating system to indirectly heat a cistern of water for domestic use.

Hot water was carried upstairs by servants to wash stands or hip baths in the bedrooms. Waste water was then carried downstairs again by servants. With pitchers of hot water being carried upstairs to bedrooms and slops being carried down again, along with chamber pots to be emptied each morning, there was an incentive to divert this traffic away from the main family staircase, at least from those lower flights which on visitors might be encountered.



Back Stairs

Typically, a separate service staircase with stone treads, narrower and at a steeper pitch than the family staircase, led up from the basement kitchens to service the ground floor dining rooms, first floor living rooms and then up to rejoin the family staircase leading to the bedroom floors above. At 16 Lewes Crescent, and, possibly at some of the other grander houses too, the back stairs continued from the basement to the very top of the house.

The back stairs was in effect a service duct operated by servants to provide meals, washing facilities, heating and waste disposal, all largely unseen.

Laundry

While the houses had facilities for washing clothes, in 'coppers' out in back basement sculleries, few had drying rooms or grounds. One exception was 16 Lewes Crescent, which had its own laundry and drying room above an extensive stable block, connected directly to the house by tunnel under Arundel Place.

There was a commercial laundry industry in the town, with a concentration of laundries up on Rose Hill beyond The Level, where drying grounds at that elevation caught the breeze. Nearer to the Estate, Wilson's Laundry on the site of the present LIDL supermarket, was available.

Coal

Heating was by coal fires tended by servants who brought coal up from basement vaults and took away the ashes before the family rose each morning. At 11 Lewes Crescent, things improved in the 1930's when Albert Cloake, a prominent manufacturer of cast iron boilers, moved in. He installed a central heating boiler in the basement to supply warm air to the house through floor grilles and up the stairwell. Some wealthy owners installed piped central heating and hot water systems fired by basement boilers burning coal.

Every habitable room had its fireplace, each with a separate flue from grate to chimney pot above the roof. While the coal range in the basement kitchens would be lit summer and winter, other fires were laid as and when needed. Chimney flues were swept regularly to prevent a build up of soot which could cause chimney fires.

An enormous amount of labour was involved daily in getting coal from the under-pavement vaults at front or back of the house, taking it up to set fires in grates around the house, maintaining the supply of coal at the fireside to feed the fires while alight, and afterwards, cleaning away the ashes and taking them down for disposal in dustbins. When domestic service began to disappear after the First War, fewer fires were lit.

Open coal fires remained the principal means of heating until the introduction, of portable electric bar fires and gas fires. Free-standing gas fires or fires connected to flues became a common means of room heating. The dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning were not so well known and accidental deaths common. The dangers of town gas poisoning were, however, so well known

that inhaling town gas became a common form of suicide. Natural gas is not so toxic.

Finally gas central heating superseded most other forms of heating when its installation and running costs became affordable from the 1960's. Coal fires became a thing of the past. From 1974 large areas of central Brighton were declared 'smokeless zones'. However, it remained lawful to burn fuels in this area and some residents still have open fires.

Gas

The availability of town gas was attractive to clients of Kemp's development, there being a gas works nearby from 1819, well before the Estate was constructed. The Royal Pavilion was already lit with gas from the Kemp Town works. Coke, a by-product of the works, had been used to heat the spectacular but ill-fated Antheum, the vast circular glasshouse built at Hove in 1832, which later collapsed.

The gas works was built just beyond the boundary of the town in order to avoid a levy on its principal raw material, coal. All coal brought into the town attracted a levy of the 6d a ton. Coal shipped from coalfields in the North East was beached at Black Rock and, in 1824, a tunnel dug from the beach to carry the coal by wagon directly up to the gas works³.

At an early meeting of the Kemp Town Enclosures Committee, those attending, almost all of whom were involved in the development of houses on the Estate, expressed concern that bright glaring light emanating from a new process at the gas works would affect the amenity of the Estate. As no further reference was made to these concerns, we can assume they were overcome. All gas production transferred to Portslade in 1885 and the Black Rock site has been used for the storage of gas ever since.

The Black Rock works was operated by the Brighton, Hove and Worthing Gas Company and in later times, its chairman Arthur Paddon, lived on the Estate. He was a barrister and engineer, and prominent nationally in the gas supply industry. He must have enjoyed living on the Estate, for he lived successively at three different addresses: 21 Lewes Crescent from 1917, 18 Sussex Square in the 1920's and 10 Chichester Terrace in the 1930's.

Despite the availability of gas for light from fixed gasoliers, portable candles were still used to light your way to bed and portable oil lamps remained very popular throughout the Victorian era. The care of oil lamps remained high on the list of daily duties for servants.

The use of gas for cooking, heating and hot water came much later, from the turn of the 20th Century.

³ The tunnel's construction described in *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine*, 1824



Advertisement of 1913.

A G Cloake lived at 11 Lewes Crescent

Street Lighting

Brighton was an early adopter of gas street lighting and had installed some gas lighting from 1824. Thereafter the number of gas lamps continued to increase. In 1827 the Town Commissioners agreed to provide 36 lamps in Kemp Town with another six along Marine Parade. It is likely that gas lighting was installed on the Estate from around that time. Gas lamps were later converted to use electricity. Two early lamp standards survive in Lewes Crescent, along with eight others in Sussex Square. All are protected by listing.

Electricity

Brighton was one of the first towns in the world to adopt electricity. In December 1881, Robert Hammond, demonstrated the new electric light in Brighton for a trial period. A number of shop owners wanted to use electric light and this enabled him to put the venture on both a commercial and legal footing. The Hammond Electricity Supply Co. was launched and in 1887 the supply was made available for 24 hours per day.

The well-to-do people of the Estate would have been among the first to afford the installation of electricity and the expensive light bulbs required for lighting rooms. It was some time before electricity became used for other domestic conveniences, such as cooking stoves, vacuum cleaners, hair dryers and so on.

Post

From early in Victoria's reign a national postal service operated and as demand expanded, the service developed to provide several collections and deliveries each day. Correspondents were able to exchange messages around the country, often, within the same day. The original Victorian post boxes on the Estate, with their small apertures were replaced to accommodate larger items of mail. For the same reason, most of the original letter boxes on street entrance doors have long since given way to openings that will take larger items. The post box at the corner of Sussex Square and Eastern Road is from the reign of Edward VII.

Telephones

Letters and postcards remained the main form of communication, with telegrams for urgent messages, until the late 1950's when more widespread use of telephones, and later e-mail, began to supplant letters.



Promotional postcard for National Telephone Company, c 1907, showing the main exchange in Duke Street.

The first telephone exchange opened in Brighton in 1882 and by 1885 there were 138 subscribers. At that time local telephone networks allowed subscribers to speak only to other subscribers in their local network. The country's first trunk line was opened in 1884 between London and Brighton. It enabled Brighton subscribers to talk to any telephone subscriber in London, and Brighton subscribers were listed in the London directory. The Brighton network was acquired by the Post Office in 1906⁴.

The system of trunk lines developed to enable subscribers to call anywhere in the UK. All calls were, of course, routed through an operator at the local exchange and another at the exchange at the recipient's end. Local calling was automated locally in the mid 1920's but trunk calls still had to be routed through the operator until subscriber trunk dialling (STD) was introduced in the 1960's.

Kemp Town residents were prominent amongst the first subscribers to the telephone service. The subscriber at Kemp Town 6912, who in 1910 still habitually wrote once or twice a week to his parents, refers in one of his letters to his small son's telephone conversation with his grandfather in Glasgow, in a manner that suggests that this was still a remarkable event at the time.

Shops & Deliveries

Shops were established in Rock Street behind Lewes Crescent West Side from the outset. As late as 1940, Rock Street was still able to offer the services of a chemist, grocer, butcher, newsagent, hairdresser, greengrocer, fishmonger and tailor along with a general store and two pubs.

It was common practice for shops to deliver to the homes of their most valued customers. Many shopkeepers would run accounts with their well to do customers; accounts which were notoriously slow to be settled. In effect shop

⁴ Fisher, David, *Telephone technology in Brighton and Hove: the early days*, My Brighton and Hove website, 2006

keepers provided credit to their middle class customers. The shops in Rock Street would send a boy around at short notice to deliver anything they had to offer.

Refuse Collection

Waste in early Victorian towns comprised largely coal ash from domestic fires. This residue was in demand for both brick making and as a soil conditioner. In response, parish vestries began to let contracts granting exclusive annual franchises to private contractors, both to collect 'dust' and to sweep the streets. The contractors also established 'dust-yards,' where separated materials were sold for various end-uses. Nothing went to waste. The dust market peaked around the 1820s and was already in decline by 1850, when the sanitation movement was beginning to make an impact. Responsibility for refuse collection and disposal was placed upon local authorities by the 1875 Public Health Act. Thereafter they were responsible for the regular removal and disposal of refuse and required households to put waste into 'moveable receptacles'⁵. From then on weekly bin collections and periodic street sweeping by the council became the norm.

Law and Order

In January 1821 the town was divided up into eight beats or watch districts, each area having a box for the watchman. In 1823 the Watch force consisted of sixteen men under the control of two superintendents based at the old Town Hall, in Market Street. The uniform of the watchmen was top hat, black tailcoat and white trousers and each was armed with a baton and a rattle. Until 1829 they had to call out the hours and the weather.

The stout street doors of the Estate's houses and the way the windows could be shuttered and barred speaks of a time when civil disorder could be expected. In 1831, at the height of unrest around the country following the rejection of the second parliamentary reform Bill by the Lords, the police force here was insufficient to deal with any civil disturbance. The High Constable sought help from local tradesmen to prevent what they thought to be an imminent attack on the homes of local Tories in Sussex Square, George Dawson MP, The Marquess of Bristol and Lawrence Peel. Tradesmen walked to the Estate in pairs so as not to provoke excitement and gathered here in numbers sufficient to deter attack. With the passing of the Great Reform Bill in 1832 and the extension of the right to vote to property-owning men, the risk of revolution passed.

In 1838 men recruited to make up the first fully professional police force⁶ were based at the New Town Hall and replaced the watchmen. The force of 30 under a Chief Constable, included one night constable. The force grew to 61 by 1854 and in that year came under the control of the Watch Committee of the newly formed Brighton Borough Council. One of the first decisions the

⁵ Herbert, Lewis: *Centenary history of waste and waste managers in London and South East England*, Chartered Institute of Wastes Management, 2007

⁶ Rowland, David, Brighton Borough Police 1838 - 1967 www.oldpolicecellsmuseum.org.uk

Council made was to increase the size of the police force by a further ten men and to appoint a police surgeon and a plain-clothes detective.

Order was kept in the gardens and esplanades by a constable employed by the gardens committee until 1908⁷.

Fire and insurance

At the beginning of the 19th century, such fire engines and crews that existed were provided by voluntary bodies, parish authorities or insurance companies. The local authority was made responsible for fire fighting by the Local Government Act of 1894.

A fire service of some sort must have existed locally for when in 1823 fire engulfed the uncompleted house at 3 Lewes Crescent, the fire was fought by firemen with a fire engine⁸. Two years later on 12th September 1825, fire broke out at Portland House which was being built for Major Russell, on the eve of its completion⁹. The building was not insured and Major Russell had to bear the entire loss himself. Other investors took a more cautious approach; records of the Sun Fire Office for 1831 show that William and Thomas Cox of Charlotte Street W1 had insured 19 Lewes Crescent against fire damage.

Worship

As the Estate was a long way from Brighton's parish church of St. Nicholas and the other chapels in the town, T R Kemp built St George's Church in St. George's Road for the fashionable tenants he hoped to attract. The Rev James Stuart Murray Anderson, Chaplain in Ordinary to Queen Adelaide from 1833, became the minister at St. George's. The Queen's attendance at St. George's ensured that the church was well patronised. The Rev Anderson lived at 12 Arundel Terrace.

In 1849 St. Mark's Church at the corner of Church Place and Eastern Road was completed and its nearness to the Estate meant it superseded St. George's as the Estate's church. The Rev Edward Elliot was appointed perpetual curate in 1853 and came to live at 11 Lewes Crescent. Both clergymen served as the honorary secretary to the gardens committee.

Education

See Simon Smith's comprehensive piece on schools elsewhere on this website

Health

The County Hospital, erected upon land given by T R Kemp, opened in June 1828. The hospital, which operated entirely on voluntary donations, could accommodate 72 patients. It is interesting to note that when Richard Sherriff of 10 Lewes Crescent suffered a broken leg and collar bone in an accident of February 1852, it was to his home and not the hospital that he was carried on a litter. The hospital was exclusively for the poor who could show that they

⁷ Dale, Antony, *The History of the Kemp Town Gardens, Brighton*, KTE 1994

⁸ Dale, Antony *Fashionable Brighton 1820-1850* Country Life 1947

⁹ Carder, Tim, *The Encyclopaedia of Brighton*, East Sussex County Council 1990

were not able to pay for their treatment. Planned admissions needed, in addition, a letter of recommendation from a subscriber or benefactor of the hospital¹⁰. Richard Sherriff was not at all poor and would have been attended at home by a physician or surgeon.

There were always physicians listed in local directories but never on the Estate, whether because of the covenant prohibiting business on the Estate or whether physicians living here wished to keep their work and home separate. Dr Dawson who was listed as a physician at his surgery at Second Avenue, Hove, was not so described at his home, 9 Arundel Terrace, where he lived from 1870 to 1891. Similarly, Dr. Thomas Hawksley, who had a fashionable practice in Mayfair chose not to advertise his presence as a physician in the Brighton local directories. He lived at 20 Lewes Crescent. It was not until 1899 that a surgeon, Frederick Wood FRCS, of 12 Lewes Crescent, advertised his presence on the Estate.

No dentist was registered at an address on the Estate until 1964 when Frederick Allan set up his surgery at 9 Arundel Terrace.

It is interesting to note that although there was sporadic local ambulance provision around the country there was no universal service until the NHS was formed in 1947. At the time of Richard Sherriff's accident of 1852, he was brought home on a 'litter', which could mean a door carried by four men or a platform on two wheels, pushed by a man. Most emergency cases requiring surgery were due to accidents, and these were transported in cabs, carts and stretcher arrangements. Rough handling exacerbated many injuries. A leading article from the British Medical Journal of 1860 tells of the famous surgeon Percival Pott, who had sustained a broken leg by falling out of his carriage. Lying on the ground, he fought off well-intentioned helpers with his stick. He refused to be moved until a door could be provided to carry him home for treatment.¹¹

Transport

In 1833 the packet boats, *Talbot* and *Eclipse*, left the Chain Pier (1823) for Dieppe weekly in winter and twice weekly in summer. The sailing took between 8 and 10 hours. When the railway to Newhaven opened in 1847, the ferry services transferred to the natural harbour there, to be operated by steamships.

A guide of 1833¹² tells us that Brighton had between two to three hundred carriages for local hire, mostly four wheeled. They could be hired by the hour for between 1/6d and 2/6d an hour.

Those who owned a carriage would need a coach house for the horses and carriage and to house the staff who operated them. The mews now known as Kemp Town Place, was built as part of the estate but later as more and more

¹⁰ Gaston, Harry, *Brighton's County Hospital 1828-2007*, Southern Editorial Services, 2008

¹¹ Pollock, Alexander, *Historical Perspectives in the Ambulance Service*, a chapter in *Ambulance Services*. Wankhade &, K. Mackway-Jones (eds.) Springer, Switzerland, 2015,

¹² Parry, John Dowcra, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Coasts of Sussex*. 1833

households arrived further mews were constructed around the perimeter of the Estate, for example, at Sussex Mews behind 1-10 Sussex Square and adjacent to it, Clarence Mews. Arundel Place was developed with individual stables and mews built for households on the estate. As motor cars replaced horse-drawn carriages after the First World War, coach houses became garages or put to a whole range of other uses.



Clarence Mews, Eastern Road, opposite St. Mark's Church in the early motor age.

The long distance coaching system was developed to convey mail from Brighton to all points west, north and east. Mail coaches each took four passengers. During the early years of the Estate, rival coaches competed on the route to London from the Old Ship Hotel. The *Red Rover* could do the journey to London in only 4 ½ hours, but a more leisurely journey through the countryside was offered by the *Item* coach, taking 6 hours, by 'a pleasantly diversified route'¹³ When the railway to London opened in September 1841, the journey took little more than an hour and coaching declined rapidly.

The arrival of the railway stimulated the trade in one horse local bus routes to connect with local railway stations. The first regular bus service ran between the Kemp Town Estate and Brighton Station and around 1850 the first regular horse-drawn bus service began between Kemp Town and Hove, thus establishing the basis of the present No.7 and No.1 routes, although much extended and altered since their inception. Motor buses replaced horse drawn buses to Kemp Town in 1904. Brighton's trams give way to trolleybuses in 1939 but these were withdrawn by 1961.

The Kemp Town railway station opened in 1869 where the Freshfield Road trading estate is now. Passenger services lasted from there until 1932 with freight continuing until 1971.

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¹³ Musgrave, Clifford, *Life in Brighton*, Hallewell, 1970