

◆ The Georgian provincial builder–architect and architect

AMON AND AMON HENRY WILDS OF LEWES AND BRIGHTON,
c. 1790–1850

By Sue Berry

Provincial builders and architects designed the majority of urban buildings during the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries and therefore deserve study. Some, such as James Essex (1722–84), Owen Browne Carter (1806–1859), the Bastard family of Blandford and the Smiths of Warwick, had substantial influence within an area.¹ From the later eighteenth century, provincial builder–architects and architects faced increasing competition from men trained in architectural practices in London who were particularly interested in the larger, more prestigious schemes. The Wilds moved from Lewes to Brighton when the resort was expanding rapidly; it was already far ahead of other resorts in scale and social status. Its growth attracted Charles Barry and other well-connected London architects, who were competing against each other as well as against provincial practitioners. Seen in this competitive context, self-taught provincial architects such as the Wilds were remarkably successful.

THE WILDS

The careers of Amon Wilds (1762–1833) and his son Amon Henry Wilds (1784–1857) spanned the years from 1790 to 1855. Amon began the business in Lewes in East Sussex and father and son moved to Brighton in 1817. That the men share the same first name has resulted in confusion; the older Wilds, for example, has been wrongly identified as the partner of C. A. Busby.² Amon junior may have identified this as a problem, for he called himself Henry Wilds in the contemporary press and on prints. In this article he is referred to as Amon Henry.

THE WILDS IN LEWES

Amon Wilds, born in Hastings, arrived in Lewes via Seaford in about 1790 and began work as a carpenter. In 1791–2 he worked on the Market Tower in Lewes (which still stands), having unsuccessfully competed for the contract for its design. Near his yard in Durrants Field he built small houses in East, Lancaster, St John's and Sun Streets (the last of these previously Kemp Street) and Pleasant Place.³

Amon diversified, adding a basic knowledge of architecture to his carpentry and building skills and experience as a small-scale developer. He rated new buildings in Newhaven and competed for

public contracts. In 1808 he contracted to build a footbridge over the River Ouse, and in 1810 fitted out the inside of the munitions store for the local militia. Although in 1811 Amon did not win the contract for the new design for the Crown Court (won by John Johnson of Essex), but he paid £450 for the materials of the old Sessions House after it had failed to reach its reserve at auction and demolished it.⁴

Since by 1806 Amon Henry was 22, he must have assisted his father with projects, but he is not recognised as doing so until 1817. In 1806 Amon rebuilt the nave of All Saints Church for £2500, using a very standard style of the period with two rows of neat windows to light the ground floor and the galleries (Fig. 1).

By 1811, when Amon built the Refuge Chapel for John Gibbs, Amon Henry was about 27 and must have been working with him in the business.⁵ 'Wilds' refaced the frontage of Shelleys (now Shelley's Hotel) in 1812, for which Mrs Shelley paid £200.⁶ In about 1812 they built 1–4 Castle Place for either Thomas (1745–1811) or his son Thomas Read Kemp, then in 1818–19 refaced and probably rebuilt the central pair of houses (which survive) for Gideon Mantell. On the capitals of the pilasters the Wilds used volutes in the form of ammonites, probably as a tribute to Mantell, a well-known geologist and doctor, but also a pun



Fig. 1. All Saints, Lewes, nave, 1806. Amon, possibly with Amon Henry. Source: author.

on their own name. The Wilds then used the same device in Brighton, because it advertised them. They probably saw it in a design book for builders and architects, for the amon volute was invented by George Dance and used first by him on John Boydell's *Shakespeare's Gallery* in Pall Mall in London in 1789 (demolished 1868). The Wilds could not control who used it, so its appearance on a local building does not necessarily mean that it is by 'the Wilds'; other builders and architects could have been using it.⁷

The only work clearly identified as solely by Amon Henry in Lewes is a survey of land on Chapel Hill, done in 1815 when he was 30. In 1817, 'Messrs Wilds' won the contract to design the new Fire Engine House and Record Room for the Borough of Lewes in a heavy neo-classical style, in Fisher Street where the Town Hall stands today (Fig. 2). A public subscription was raised, but was inadequate to fit out

the inside and so the Wilds built the shell for £160. They built baths near the river in Lewes in 1818, their purpose possibly being to demonstrate the waterproof mastic which they made under licence from Christopher Dihl. The Wilds claimed in their advertising of the mastic that it had been used on the 'Chinese pagodas' of the Royal Pavilion and on a windmill on Church Hill in Brighton.⁸

By 1810, Amon was a partner of George and Charles Wille of Lewes, a firm of carpenters who owned wharfs and other land in Lewes and with whom he had worked on development projects in the town. In 1819, after the Wilds's move to Brighton, the trio agreed to increase their commitment to the partnership, using the Willes's yards and wharf in Cliffe as their base, yet in 1820 they dissolved the partnership by mutual agreement. By 1826 Amon had sold all his land and houses in Lewes.⁹ There is no sign that Amon Henry



Fig. 2. Lewes Fire Engine House by Messrs Wilds 1817.
Source unknown: engraving.

owned property in the town, so he was probably dependent on his father for income.

COMPETITION AND THE WILDS IN BRIGHTON, 1817–57

The Wilds moved to Brighton when the resort was growing rapidly whereas Lewes had ceased to expand. Brighton's population rose from 12,012 in 1811 to 24,429 in 1821, and reached 40,634 in 1831 before heading into a long slump so serious that by 1841 the population had risen to only 46,661.¹⁰

The Wilds did not have a monopoly at any point in Brighton and Hove, for there were many other very competent architects who could design in the same styles. William Mackie (c. 1792–1866), a surveyor from London who had worked for Samuel Robinson, designed Regency Square, which was begun in 1818 (a project often wrongly attributed to Amon Henry). Mackie also won the competition for the design of the large town workhouse on Church Hill, opened in 1822. In the early 1820s, 'R. Stanford' of Upper Berkeley

Street in London designed Brighton (now Queen's) Park, and Thomas Cooper, a local builder-architect, designed and built Brighton's current Town Hall (beating the better known H. E. Kendall in the competition for the design), the first Bedford Hotel and Norfolk Square.¹¹ In the mid-1820s, Charles Barry designed several important buildings (such as St Peter's, St Andrew's in Waterloo Street and the now much altered central block of the Royal Sussex Hospital) with William Ranger as his builder, and Dulany House, now Lancaster House on the North Steine. Barry also drew up the unused plan for the Stanford Estate west of Adelaide Crescent.¹² After his brief partnership with Amon Henry, Busby competed against the Wilds and designed the layout of Brunswick Town.¹³ Sydney Smirke designed Brighton's new Custom House in 1829, and also Shoreham's.¹⁴ 'Mr Robinson' visited Kemp Town in connection with the building of a house there for W. L. Wellesley.¹⁵ Decimus Burton drew up the partly executed designs for Furze Hill and Adelaide Crescent, both stopped by the recession of the 1830s.¹⁶ By the late 1820s there was a considerable amount of local expertise. In 1828 the Wilds (who then advertised separately) were in competition with at least 5 other architects and 24 builders listed in the town directory with local addresses.¹⁷

During the slump of the 1830s Amon Henry continued to face competition. George Cheesman (a local man) built three churches in Brighton and one in Lewes, and George Basevi, whose parents lived in Hove, designed the rebuilt 'Old' St Andrew's and St Mary's Hall School.¹⁸ In 1839, there were 15 architects and surveyors listed as living in Brighton.¹⁹

Work in Brighton by Amon and Amon Henry

With so many architects and builder-architects competing against them, most of whom would be able to design in any of the styles the Wilds used, it is risky to claim on stylistic grounds that a building was designed or built by them. Only those for which sound evidence has been found are included here.

The chronology of all the projects for which evidence linking them to either Amon or Amon Henry in Brighton has been found in Brighton is shown in Table 1. Appendix 1 is a brief list of attributed projects with brief explanations of the evidence for their exclusion from Table 1.

Table 1. Projects in Brighton by Amon and Amon Henry Wilds. Projects marked with an asterisk have survived wholly or partly.

Date	Project	Location	Built	Earliest reference
Amon and Amon Henry				
1817	Holy Trinity Chapel	Ship Street, Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Herald</i> 21 April 1817 <i>see text</i>
1818	Mrs Sober's villa	Western Road, Brighton	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1818	Thomas Kemp's villa	Montpelier Road, Brighton	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1819	Unitarian Church	New Road, Brighton	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1819	Alterations Steine Place	Brighton		<i>Sussex Weekly Advertiser</i> 24 July 1819
1822	Tamplin's Brewery	The Level	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 11 July 1822
1822	Albion Hotel	Old Steine, Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 19 May 1822*
1822	Hanover Terrace	The Level, Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 2 May 1822*
Amon Henry and C. A. Busby				
1823	St Peter's Church	The Level, Brighton	No	<i>See text</i> – competition only
1823	Priory House	Western Road, Brighton	Yes	In watercolour dated 1824 Sold Sothebys 2011 <i>see text</i>
1824	Hospital	Eastern Road, Brighton	No	<i>See text</i> – competition only
1824	St Mary Magdalene	Maidenhead, Berkshire	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 29 July 1824
1825	Union Chapel	Ship Street, Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 27 April 1825*
1825	Cavendish Place	Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 3 March 1825*
Amon Henry				
1822	Survey	London Road, Brighton	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1824	Landscaping The Level	The Level, Brighton	Yes	Not by Amon Henry, <i>see text</i>
1825	Hampton Terrace	Western Road, Brighton	No	Print A. H. Wild. engraved by George Hunt
1825	St Mary's	Rock Gardens, Brighton	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1825	Dulany House	North Steine, Brighton	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1825	Western Pavilion	Western Road, Brighton	Yes	Part of Oriental Gardens below*
1825	Oriental Gardens	Brighton	Yes	With Henry Phillips
1825	Survey	Princes Square and Steyne Gardens, Brighton		RIBA 4/16 BG 29 September 1825
1826	Oriental Place	Brighton	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1826	Hampton Terrace	Brighton	No	Print 'Hampton Terrace commanding a view of the Oriental Gardens' AHW drew, G. Hunt engraved
1827	Sillwood House	Brighton	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1826	Rock Gardens	Brighton		<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 31 March, 18 May 1826
1826	Marine Square	Brighton		<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 31 March, 18 May 1827
1827	Western Terrace	Brighton	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1827	Royal British School Brighton		Yes	<i>See text</i>
1827	Seafront Esplanade	Brighton	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1827	Chepstow	Monmouthshire	No	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 15 November 1827, 14 January 1830
1829	Limerick	Ireland	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1829–30	Milton New Town	Gravesend, Kent	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1830	1 Regency Square	Brighton	Yes	ESRO DB/B60/2, pp227, 231
1830	Southover Street	Brighton	Yes	ESRO DB/B60/2, p34
1830	St Margaret's Chapel	Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 11 November 1830, 10 February, 24 February 1831, ESRO PAR 269/4. Additional columns inside to strengthen building
1830	Clandon Regis	Surrey	Yes	<i>See text</i>

Table 1. (cont.)

Date	Project	Location	Built	Earliest reference
1830	Park Crescent	Worthing	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1831	A marine terrace near Worthing	Worthing	No	Only the drawing displayed at the Royal Academy
1831	Plan for St George's Terrace	Brighton	Yes	<i>Morning Post</i> 10 October 1831
1832	Lucombe's Library conversion to a Bazaar	Brighton	Yes	<i>Satirist or censor of our time</i> . 22 July 1832
1832	Anthaeum	Hove	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1833	Hanningtons	Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Gazette</i> 4 April 1833, Corinthian columns to exterior and interior spiral staircase
1833	Brunswick Square	Hove	Yes	<i>Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle</i> 24 June 1833, unspecified minor work
1834	Smithers Estate survey	Preston	Yes	RIBA SE4/16
1836	Clifton Baths	Gravesend	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1836	Town Hall	Gravesend	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1839	Mr Jenkinson's property, survey	Brighton	Yes	<i>Brighton Patriot</i> 23 March 1839
1841	Western Cemetery	Brighton	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1842	Blore memorial	Hove	Yes	In entrance to St Andrew's Church Waterloo Street, Hove
1842	Breakwater scheme	Brighton	No	<i>Brighton Herald</i> 19 February 1842. Exhibited breakwater scheme
1845	Victoria Gardens	Old Steine	Yes	<i>See text</i>
1850	Private cemetery	Lewes Road	Yes	<i>See text*</i>
1850	Breakwater scheme	Brighton	No	<i>Brighton Herald</i> 28 September 1850

Only the projects for which a substantial amount of information has been found are discussed in this article.

Joint work by Amon and Amon Henry in Brighton

The Wilds began to work in Brighton in 1817, took on local apprentices and had a yard from 1818 to 1825 somewhere northwest of The Level and north of their developments on the Lewes Road. Their move to Brighton may have been eased by contact with Thomas Read Kemp, the son of Thomas Kemp of Lewes, who gave them their first commissions in Brighton and with whom Amon had dealt when in Lewes. No evidence was found that they were members of the small lodges of freemasons or of any other links which might have helped them in Brighton.²⁰

During the spring of 1817 'Messrs Wilds' designed and built Holy Trinity in Ship Street for Thomas Read Kemp as a Non-Conformist chapel. The original façade had a portico supported by pillars and was covered with mastic. A small and partly glass-covered dome in the roof aided lighting

and ventilation. The pulpit, described in great detail in a contemporary guidebook, resembled an ornate vase standing on an Ionic fluted column. The Wilds's building was greatly altered in 1825.²¹

In 1818 they designed and built the villa which Thomas Read Kemp erected as his first town house in Brighton, known locally as The Temple. It was part of Kemp's scheme for villas on the high and airy area which spread eastwards from this house, which he landscaped and named Montpelier. Thomas Read Kemp's sister Ann Sober supported him by employing the Wilds in 1817–18 to build her conventionally simple classical villa just east of where Sillwood Road now stands, on the eastern side of what was once her garden. At least two other villas were built, but there is no evidence of their designer.²²

Amon Henry then designed the classical and chaste Unitarian Chapel in New Road with its Doric portico (which still stands). The Wilds probably built it, too, because no-one else is mentioned. The foundation stone was laid in 1819 and the chapel opened in 1820.²³



Fig. 3. Richmond Terrace, Brighton. The Wilds's south end was being built in 1819. The villa separates it from the northern end, which is in a different style. 'A Bird's Eye View of Preston Road' published 1819. Source: Private collection.

The Wilds took the risk of building speculatively in Brighton. They may have built Waterloo Place due east of the church in a style typical of the period, but no contemporary evidence has been found to prove that. They certainly bought land between Richmond Street and the Percy and Wagner Almshouses and built two grand terraces of houses overlooking a series of large open spaces to which the subsequent building of St Peter's Church gave a focal point.²⁴ By 1820 they were slowly building Richmond Place, now overlooking St Peter's Church and The Level between Waterloo Place and Southover Street. North Lodge, Richmond Place was certainly designed by Amon Henry, but both men were probably involved in the design of the rest.²⁵ The first, southernmost block was not completed (Fig. 3). The northern section of Richmond Place, north

of the villa, was more sophisticated (Fig. 4). It has a frieze under the eaves and a balcony running along nine bays of the first floor. Its southern section was demolished in order to build the first Brighton technical college in the 1890s. While constructing the northern section of Richmond Terrace in 1821–2, the Wilds designed and built Tamplin's Brewery, with a classical entrance (Fig. 5). By the later 1820s Richmond Place had become a popular residential area.²⁶

North of Richmond Place, in 1822 Amon and Amon Henry Wilds began North Crescent. Quickly renamed Hanover Crescent, it stands on land accumulated by Henry Brooker, a local solicitor. An undated, anonymous published plan does not name the architect but represents the scheme as we see it today, with one detached villa on the north end and a series of linked villas, seven triplex and



Fig. 4. Richmond Terrace, Brighton, north end. Source: author.



Fig. 5. Tamplin's, Brighton, showing the Wilds's section with the chapel-like block. Source: *Guide to Brighton* n.d. c.1925.



Fig. 6. Hanover Crescent, Brighton. Source: author.

one semi-detached linked villa. The pedimented centre is common to every villa but some have bow-fronted wings (Fig. 6). C. A. Busby probably became involved in the design and layout of this crescent, where the partnership (formed in May 1823) had its office in the North Lodge; a print of about that date attributes the scheme to Busby and Wilds. The development of Hanover Crescent came at a propitious moment, as the Prince's Cricketing Ground opposite the Crescent was enclosed with a flint wall and improved, and Ireland's Gardens were developed. By 1824 the laying out of the road called Elm Grove had begun north of Hanover Crescent, to link the Lewes and London roads to Race Hill and to Black Rock Bottom on the eastern side of Brighton where Thomas Read Kemp was laying out Kemp Town. Brooker wrote into the conveyances for the crescent standard terms for the care of the private road, paths and lawns for which the owners of the houses or their tenants were liable, and stipulated that Riding House Cream should

be used when repainting. Some of the houses were sold to local people for £600 apiece.²⁷

By May 1822 the distinctive front wall and entrance pillars of Hanover Crescent were standing, and in July 1823 three unfinished houses were advertised for sale. In 1824 at least five households lived there, and in the late 1820s it appeared regularly in the social pages. When Charles Hammond, the owner of number 18, was declared bankrupt in 1826, the list of contents was that of a fashionable house. Amon Henry began his career as a local land speculator, selling land to the rear of this crescent for a terrace of small houses.²⁸

In 1822, the Wilds first promoted a building which they called The Royal Rotunda and then built the prominent Royal Albion Hotel on the site of Russell House, John Colbatch having failed to sell the site to the Town Commissioners to open up the view of the sea from the south end of the Steine (now Victoria) Gardens. The Commissioners lacked the authority to borrow the asking price of



Fig. 7. Memorial to Amon Wilds in St Nicholas Churchyard, Brighton. Source: author.



Fig. 8. London (originally Queen's) Road, Brighton. Source: author.

£6000, and could not raise enough money from subscriptions.²⁹

The Wilds's joint work ended in 1825 with the settlement of the legal dispute with Mrs Dulany, discussed below. When in September 1825 the Commissioners advertised for a new surveyor at a salary of £200, Amon (aged 63) was appointed, becoming a Commissioner in May 1830 at the age of 68. His attendance at their main meetings was irregular, but he was active on a succession of sub-committees related to building matters such as the quality of the work on the sea wall along Marine Parade. By 1833 Amon lived at 9 Richmond Terrace and advertised himself as a surveyor, and he died there in September, aged 71.³⁰ His fine memorial in St Nicholas churchyard was probably designed by Amon Henry but again, although this seems probable, no contemporary evidence has been found (Fig. 7). Amon Henry did design the classically inspired wall memorial to Sir Ralph Gore (d. 1842) in St Andrew's, Waterloo Street, Hove on which Lambert, the mason, etched his name which suggests that the design of memorials was one of his interests.

AMON HENRY'S PARTNERSHIP WITH CHARLES AUGUSTIN BUSBY

In 1824, Amon Henry briefly became the partner of Charles Augustin Busby (1788–1834). The agreement

was executed on 2 February 1824 and recorded the commencement of the partnership in May 1823. After about 29 months, it was dissolved on 24 June 1825 when Busby paid all outstanding bills.³¹

During their short partnership, Wilds and Busby competed for prominent projects which gave them publicity, such as the New Church (consecrated as St Peter's) and the Sussex Hospital, but failed to win either.³² In 1824 Wilds and Busby designed St Mary Magdalene at Maidenhead (Berks) in a Gothic style, faced with stone. Amon Henry's early chapels were classical in style, so Busby probably did most of the work on the designs for both these churches. At some point Busby scratched out Amon Henry's name on the drawings for St Mary Magdalene.³³

Dale believed that the Gothic House, later known as Priory Lodge on Western Road, was designed by Amon Henry and Busby. This may be so, since it was depicted standing by August 1824 in a small watercolour by John Constable, and Busby had experience of designing in this style.³⁴ In 1825, Wilds and Busby contracted to rebuild and enlarge the Union Chapel in Ship Street in a classical style, the façade of which survives and is largely unaltered, and the Wilds did the building work. The façade is reminiscent of Busby's Coffee Rooms in Bristol, which still stands.³⁵

Amon Henry was probably the unnamed surveyor who produced the undated plan for the

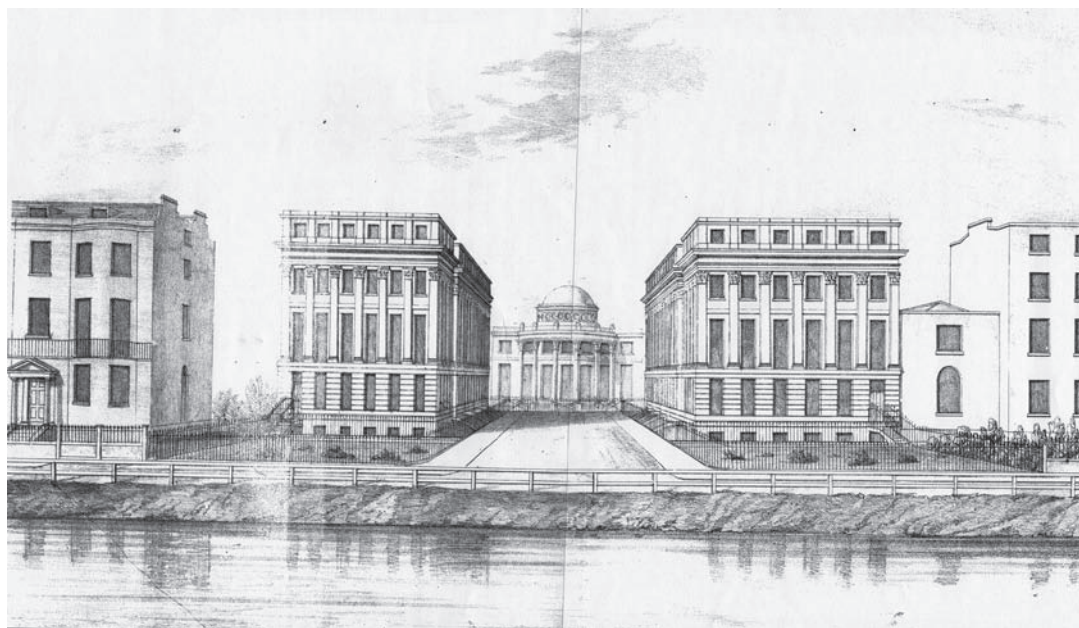


Fig. 9. Cavendish Square, Brighton. Source: Wilds and Busby 'Cavendish Square' Lithograph which was part of their promotional brochure. Courtesy of Mr Henry Smith.

development of part of London (then Queen's) Road for Thomas Read Kemp, who owned land along both sides north of St Peter's Church as far as the modern Preston Circus.³⁶ Although the scheme was first mooted by Kemp in 1819, the date of this development falls in the period when Wilds and Busby were a partnership, so the designs for some of the terraced and detached houses to which builders such as Murrell worked were possibly from the partnership, although no evidence has been found.³⁷ The only detached villa to survive is akin to those in Busby's own book of designs published in 1808, but there are a series of interesting semi-detached houses and a small crescent for which no information has been found. At the time, building large villas along main roads was fashionable; most were set back from the road, as these once were, with gardens to reduce sound from the traffic (Fig. 8).³⁸

A detailed advertisement for Cavendish Place, built on the long front garden of the villa of the Count Antonio in 1825, confirms that it was a joint project. The villa which is the focus of the scheme was not built as shown in the design, but the houses were. They are more delicate in design than Amon Henry's own work a little later in

Oriental Place, and show greater restraint in the use of detail on the façades (Fig. 9). Farther west along the coast, Brunswick Town was solely Busby's work after the partnership ended.³⁹

The partnership broke up before Amon Henry was involved in a public dispute with a wealthy American from Maryland; he involved Busby because the work in dispute had been executed when they were partners. In 1824, Ann Dulany bought two houses which she wanted converted into one; they stood on the site of what is today Lancaster House on the east side of the North Steine.⁴⁰ The work, which involved both of the Wilds, cost her at least £3890. Although some building accounts survive, there are no plans or pictures of this short-lived building, and it is difficult to make anything of the accounts other than to note that the quality of the fitments, which included marble for hearths and bathrooms, clearly suggests that it was intended to be both fashionable and comfortable.⁴¹ Amon Henry's bill (which included Amon's work) was settled in October 1825, but Mrs Dulany then decided that the work was not acceptable.⁴² She had it assessed by Charles Barry and William Ranger, who were building St Peter's Church nearby. They declared (but no

evidence survives for the reasoning that supported this assertion) that the house was unsafe and she should not use it. But by October 1826, 'the house has given away... so much as to be visible even to passers by'. According to the press, the claim against Amon Henry as the architect and project manager was either £5000 or £6000. Charles Barry became deeply involved in this dispute, attending meetings about it with her banker Henry Lloyd and the Wilds. His accounts for the subsequent rebuilding are far more detailed than those of the Wilds, and warrant study.⁴³

The dispute went to court, where Amon, as the builder, testified that Amon Henry rather than Busby had undertaken most of the work on the contract, but that Mrs Dulany insisted on changes. Amon Henry then pointed out that the plans (which do not survive) were signed off by himself and Busby and that, as at the time they were partners, Busby should also be pursued. Busby disagreed, denying that this project was anything to do with him. The jury agreed with Amon Henry, but the court ruled that Mrs Dulany had to begin her case again to include Busby. In August 1827, Mrs Dulany agreed to arbitration and the case was referred to Thomas Joshua Platt (an eminent barrister) to determine the liability, but no evidence of his award has been found. Mrs Dulany then paid Barry and Ranger to make the house acceptable to her and Barry redesigned the façade (which survives), and the interior and buildings to the rear (which do not). His work was completed by the end of 1826, and she died on 30 September 1828.⁴⁴

AMON HENRY WILDS'S INDEPENDENT WORK FROM 1825

From 1825, Amon Henry was without the support of his father. Apart from working with Henry Phillips, a landscape gardener who specialised in rare plants for two projects, he operated alone but no longer practised as a builder. A list of possible schemes by him is shown in Table 1 and Appendix 1. This section deals only with the more substantial, of which only the Esplanade, Victoria Gardens (also called Old Steine Gardens) and the private cemetery on the Lewes Road were completed.

Housing schemes with landscaping by Amon Henry Brighton

By 1825, Brighton had two large, privately owned public gardens, Ireland's and Brighton (now

Queen's) Park. Ireland's Gardens, laid out on land owned by Thomas Read Kemp, struggled from the start and was put on the market late in 1825. It remained unsold despite regular advertisements in the *Brighton Gazette* throughout 1826. Brighton Park (now Queen's Park), also developed at Kemp's instigation to a design by Stanford, was a scheme of villas and a spa (of which only the façade remains). The villas were to be built around the outside of the landscaped park but none was erected until the 1830s. The spa and park were not a commercial success; the lessor of the spa soon owed rent to Thomas Read Kemp.⁴⁵ In this context, the launching of a grand scheme for a garden with a big hothouse seems ambitious.

The Anthenaeum and Oriental Gardens were the project of Henry Phillips, a local landscape designer and an expert on plants, and Amon Henry. The latter also developed Oriental Place and Oriental Terrace, facing the sea, which he advertised as part of this grand scheme (Fig. 10).⁴⁶ A prospectus for the Anthenaeum and Oriental Gardens was advertised in July and August 1825. The building was designed by Amon Henry as a giant conservatory, an acre in extent, heated by steam pipes to house tropical plants. A committee of local worthies including Thomas Read Kemp of Kemp Town, the Revd Henry Wagner (vicar of Brighton) and local businessmen such as Richard Tamplin (a successful brewer) was formed to supervise the project and to raise the capital. To publicise the venture, Amon Henry produced both an aquatint of the scheme, which Hunt engraved, and a model (which has not survived). The cost of the total design, which included a library, was projected as £20,000, which was to be raised by shares of £100 apiece. The design, said by Wilds and Phillips to be based on the 'celebrated Cave of Elephants on the Island of Salsette', would, they claimed, take two years to build. In September 1825 there were sufficient funds to buy land for the project, and its site is shown in detail on a large map of the town published in 1826 by Piggott-Smith.⁴⁷

The choice of architectural style for the buildings in the gardens was unusual. Later Georgian architects, influenced by exhibitions of paintings and sketches by William Hodges in the 1780s and the production of prints by him, the Daniells and others thereafter, had experimented with designs with an Indian style, but clients



Fig. 10. Oriental Gardens, Brighton. Source: A. H. Wilds's 'Perspective of Oriental Place leading to the Athenaeum and Oriental Garden'. Aquatint by George Hunt c. 1825. Source: Private collection.

in general preferred either classical or Georgian gothic designs.⁴⁸ In 1788, George Dance, a friend of Hodges, successfully proposed a façade in an Indian style for the Guildhall in London, and he also used designs inspired by images he had seen of Indian buildings for features of the façades of country houses such as Ashburnham Place (in Sussex). Porden's Riding House for the Royal Pavilion of 1803–8 (not 1805, as is often quoted), Sezincote in Gloucestershire and possibly Hope End in Herefordshire (1810–15, but more Middle East or Turkish in style) are all of around the same period. John Nash remodelled the Royal Pavilion to give it the Indian exterior we see today from 1815, probably borrowing from Humphrey Repton's unused designs commissioned in 1805 by his client, then George, Prince of Wales. A few designs for villas were published with features inspired by Indian prints, such as that published by Aikin in 1808.⁴⁹ The Indian influence claimed by the promoters of the Athenaeum and Oriental Gardens may have derived more from the Royal

Pavilion and the Dome than they admit, in spite of their claims to knowledge of original Indian designs, and was perhaps influenced by the need to make a large glasshouse look attractive and to find a design that might work and be acceptable as a setting for exotic plants.

By March 1825, some of the grounds were laid out and a forcing house was in use in which a rare plant was reported to have flowered.⁵⁰ The Western Pavilion was probably standing, too, serving as the north entrance to the grounds (Fig. 11). Its 'Indian' style picks up the Mughal references in the windows of the building erected for the library and museum, which became Sillwood House, and Amon Henry used it for his later baths at Gravesend.⁵¹ By April 1826 too little money had been raised to build the Athenaeum, and in September the committee met again to consider its erection, but nothing happened. Henry Phillips did not give up the 'Hindoo' theme, returning to it when he laid out the Surrey Zoological Gardens, the largest conservatory of its kind in England and



Fig. 11. Western Pavilion, Brighton, today (11a) and its original frontage to Western Road (11b). Sources: photograph by author. Western Road frontage from unidentified street directory for Brighton c. 1880.

said to be 300ft in circumference. This opened in 1831 and shut in 1856.⁵²

The failed project became Sillwood after it was purchased in 1827 by Sir David Scott, who renamed it after the family's house in Berkshire. In 1827–8, he converted the library and museum building into a residence, with views down Oriental Place to the sea.⁵³ In 1828 he developed the rest of the land, employing Amon Henry to design Sillwood Place and Western Terrace. In 1831 he sold Sillwood, which has been demolished, but the terraces are still standing.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the development of Oriental Place began in April 1826, and by 1828 some houses were occupied. The design of the palace front façades are heavier and more ornate than those of either Hanover Crescent or Cavendish Square, and contain almost all Amon Henry's favourite motifs – ammonites, shells and a heavy pediment (Fig. 12).⁵⁵ The houses were still being built in 1831 when William King, one of the builders, became a casualty of the recession which hit Brighton and Hove.⁵⁶

Worthing

In 1829–30, Amon Henry designed Park Crescent in

Worthing, a substantial but incomplete scheme of linked villas overlooking an open space (Fig. 13) in which four villas were planned; two were built and one, much altered, survives.⁵⁷ The project was probably the victim of the 1830s recession, for in 1836 carcasses were advertised for sale.⁵⁸ There Amon Henry combined use of ammonites and a heavy pediment with more classical motifs. He employed William Croggan to produce the high-quality castings for the herms on the main entrance and the telamones on the porches of the linked villas.⁵⁹

Chapels

Amon Henry's second chapel was St Mary's Chapel, Rock Gardens, Brighton, a proprietary chapel of ease built for a developer whose intention was to sell it.⁶⁰ Designed and built in 1825–6, the building was said to be a replica of the Temple of Nemesis (without any more information as to which one), and was less austere than the Unitarian Chapel in New Road. It attracted worshippers from the wealthy inhabitants of the eastern clifftops of the resort. It was replaced between 1876 and 1881 by the current St Mary's Church, to the design of William Emerson of London.⁶¹



Fig. 12. Oriental Place, Brighton, showing Amon Henry's ammonite pilasters, shell insets above windows and heavy central pediment, typical of his work. Source: author.



Fig. 13. Park Crescent, Worthing, showing the crescent from the west and a detail of a porch. Source: author.

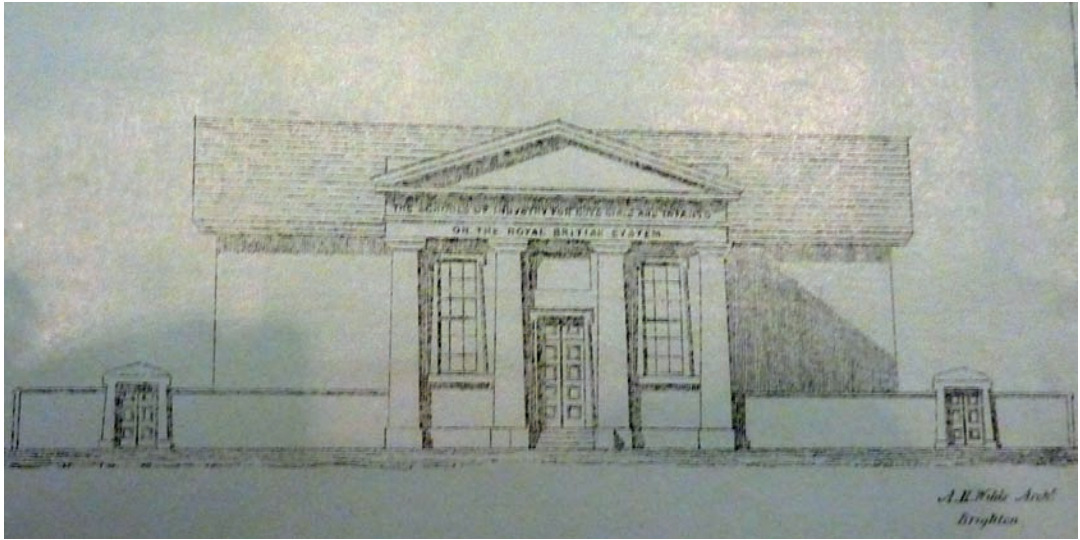


Fig. 14. The British School, Brighton. Source: Brighton Local Studies Centre: Smiths Cuttings – Education.

Country houses

Amon Henry worked on at least two country houses, but no evidence of how he met his clients has been found. In 1829, Amon Henry announced in the *Brighton Gazette* that he was to work on a country house in Limerick.⁶² His client was Sir Aubrey De Vere (1788–1846) who enlarged Curragh (from 1833 Curragh Chase) near Adare, Limerick. The work was done, but the building burned down in 1941. Amon Henry probably produced the unexecuted design for an extension to another Vere house, Adare Manor in County Limerick.⁶³

At the Royal Academy in 1830, Amon Henry exhibited a design for Clandon Regis for the Earl of Onslow. Although work began, the building was incomplete in 1841 but occupied by the family. William Field, who also worked for Amon Henry at Oriental Place and in Worthing, was there in 1831 when he was declared bankrupt, but that was unlikely to have been the cause of the slow progress. This house was rebuilt by Basil Champneys.⁶⁴

Public buildings

Amon Henry won only two commissions for public buildings in Brighton and Hove which were not places of worship: the Royal Albion Hotel (described earlier) and the Royal British Schools. The main reason was probably the large number of competitors. The Royal British Schools were

opened in 1828 in Edward Street, a poor area. The austere and simple building, with its separate entrances for boys and girls, cost the many wealthy local subscribers just under £2000, a sum which included the land. The laying of the foundation stone was marked by a large gathering of local worthies, who watched Amon Henry provide Lord John Russell with the silver trowel and the other necessities for such an occasion (Fig. 14).⁶⁵

The façade of Gravesend Town Hall of 1836 is not unlike those of churches Amon Henry built in Brighton, and he described it as based on the Parthenon, so continuing Wilds's liking for classical references. Amon Henry's interest in Indian-inspired designs for leisure buildings emerged again in his development west of Gravesend in Kent. The large Mughal-style Clifton Baths on the foreshore of the River Thames was completed in 1836 as part of a scheme to turn Gravesend into a spa. Wilds probably designed more than the baths, for he was also working on a scheme at Milton, discussed below.⁶⁶

Landscaping work and road development schemes in Brighton and Hove

Amon Henry did a considerable amount of landscaping in Brighton and also promoted ideas for which he did not win the work. In 1824 he advanced the idea of landscaping The Level, which had been given to the town by Thomas

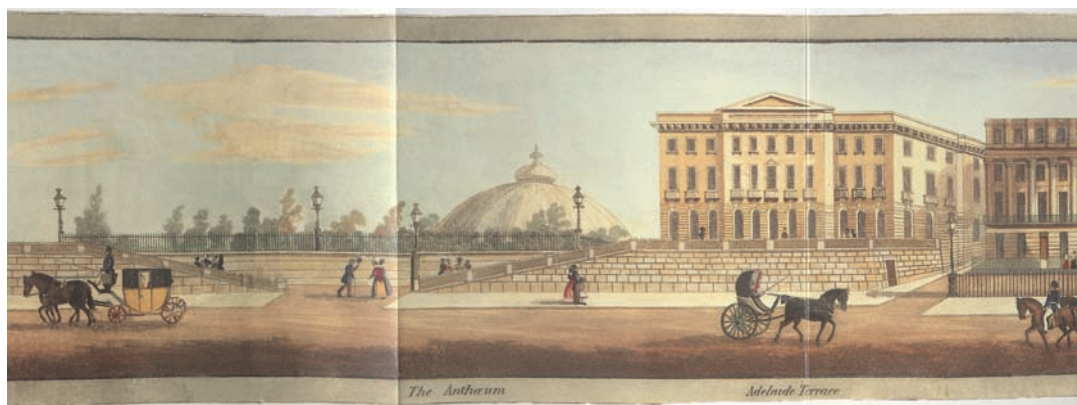


Fig. 15. The Anthaeum, Hove. Source: A. H. Wilds' Diorama 1833, engraved by Mason. Private collection.

Read Kemp and other freeholders of the pastures and commons. Henry Phillips, a local teacher and botanist, then offered to supervise the planting of the many trees offered and Amon Henry withdrew from the project.⁶⁷

Wilds was more successful in his bids to gain other landscape work. In 1827 the esplanade between the Battery House (where the Grand Hotel stands now) and the Norfolk Hotel in Brighton was built under his direction.⁶⁸ But in 1834 he proposed to extend this successful scheme southwards, and recommended a series of 112 shops, above which the esplanade would be built. The south side of the scheme was to be finished in a Grecian Doric style, linking the shops together in a coherent style, with a balustrade above to prevent the public falling off the esplanade. There was opposition to the idea, based on both the likely cost to subscribers and the probable charge on the rates of the running costs.⁶⁹

In 1832–3, Amon Henry joined Henry Phillips to revive the latter's idea of a botanical greenhouse, this time to be called the Anthaeum, built where Palmeira Square (in Hove) now stands. Adelaide Crescent was being built to the plan of Decimus Burton as a continuous curve without provision for a square (that was begun in the later 1840s). The Anthaeum was to stand to the north of the crescent, a point made clear by the press reports but not by Amon Henry's diorama of 1833 (Fig. 15).⁷⁰ Even larger than the unsuccessful scheme at the top of Oriental Place mentioned earlier, the 64-ft-high cast iron and glass structure was 160ft in diameter and covered an acre and a half. The landowner, Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, gave consent for

the scheme to be built on his land, and provided some funds.⁷¹

The iron framework was almost completed in July 1833, and on 27 August the scaffolding was removed before the glazing was started. The frame cracked within an hour or two, and The Anthaeum fell soon after, without anyone being killed or injured – the workmen and the gardener had left. The force of the crash created a shower of sparks and pushed pieces of rib well in to the ground. The collapse was probably the result of the removal of some internal support columns, on the instructions of Henry Phillips and against the advice of Amon Henry, who published a narrative of his dismissal for objecting to their removal. Planting of the grounds had already started, and for a while they were run as Brown's Pleasure Grounds.⁷²

Amon Henry laid out the new parish cemetery west of St Nicholas in 1841. An extension to the churchyard had been opened north of Church Street in 1824, and in March 1832 the parish accepted the gift of a portion of a garden to enlarge it.⁷³ However, by 1840 there was room for only 100 more graves, and the Vestry decided to levy a three-penny rate for the purchase of land on the west side of Dyke Road. There, the new burial ground was laid out in an ornamental fashion with mounds, trees, plants, borders and walks to the design of Amon Henry at a cost of £2524 18s 6d; the first burial took place in 1841. Of Amon Henry's published design, only the catacombs and the gate were built, and they remain (Fig. 16).⁷⁴

In about 1843, Amon Henry suggested that the Old Steine Gardens needed to be improved, with a

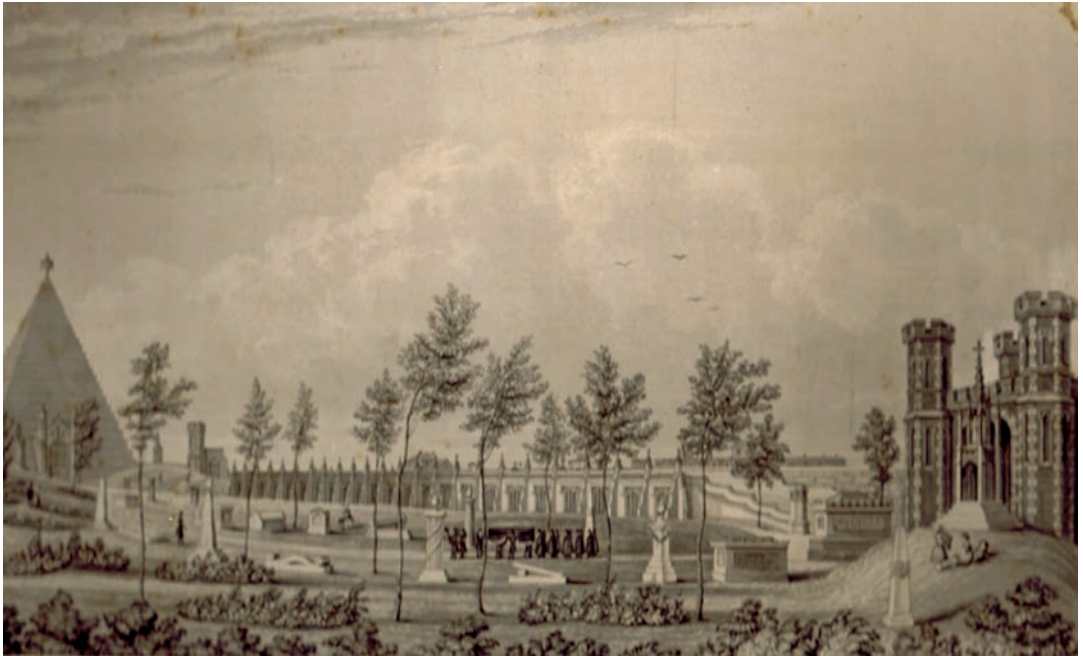


Fig. 16. Amon Henry's (uncompleted) graveyard scheme 1841 for the west cemetery, Dyke Road, Brighton. A section of the catacombs and the gate were built and both are standing. The grounds are now a park. Engraving probably by Amon Henry. Published 1841. Source: Private collection.

fountain (which survives) as its focal point. In 1845, when the Town Commissioners had raised enough money by public subscription, he laid out the grounds as a setting for the new Victoria Fountain. The fountain of dolphins (which survives) was designed by Amon Henry and cost £1000, of which £700 had been raised by November 1845. Williams and Yearsley won the contract to cast it at their Eagle foundry in Gloucester Road, Brighton. In 1846 the basin had to be recast because the first attempt was defective.⁷⁵

In 1849, Brighton was the subject of a very critical report on its public health, published by the Government's Board of Health, reiterated in a series of lectures by local concerned worthies such as Cordy Burrows and Dr William Kebbell. The influential Congregational minister John Nelson Goulty joined with Cordy Burrows to advocate the formation of a company to buy land for a new cemetery well away from the town centre. Amon Henry designed and supervised the work on the landscaping and the buildings in the private burial ground by Bear Road for Brighton Extra-Mural Company. He provided an Anglican chapel, a Non-Conformist chapel, a lodge at the

gate, a receiving house nearby and catacombs (Fig. 17). Work began in October 1850, and in February 1851 Amon Henry's gatehouse to the cemetery was close to completion. He designed in a Gothic style, but the surviving Anglican chapel looks more Georgian Gothic than Victorian Gothic. The first interment was not until November 1851. The cemetery scheme was both timely and prescient, for in February 1854 the Privy Council informed Brighton that the urban burial grounds (in which little room was left) were to be shut after 1 October 1854. This resulted in the construction of the parish cemetery bordering on this cemetery.⁷⁶

Town planning – Kent and Ireland

In 1828 the *Brighton Gazette* mentioned Amon Henry's project at Gravesend, for which he published the grand design in 1829 or 1830. The scheme was in the parish of Milton, between the eastern boundary of Gravesend and the canal running east towards Chatham. The terraces were designed in a classical style and a new pier and landscaped gardens were proposed on the riverside. Only Harmer Street (1836) of terraced houses with shops on the ground floor, Berkley Crescent and



Fig. 17. The Anglican Chapel of 1850 in the private cemetery now part of Woodvale Cemetery, Brighton. Source: author.

Milton Place were built. The Gravesend Freehold Investment Company claimed to have spent as much as £36,000 on Harmer Street. The investors became involved in a court case about expenditure in which Amon Henry, who continued to work on the project, was not involved.⁷⁷

Whilst engaged by Aubrey De Vere, Amon Henry also worked in the town of Limerick, presumably for the same client, and designed improvements to Limerick town centre, but no evidence of accomplished work has been found.⁷⁸

Publication of prints

Amon Henry frequently published prints to generate interest in his projects, but he also drew a diorama of Brighton and Hove from the town centre westwards, which he published with Mason in 1833. It is a major guide to the many buildings depicted on it, reflecting just how much is still standing and easily recognised, and it also shows how close to Brighton town centre the Anthaeum was.⁷⁹

Wilds's other activities

In addition to continuing to design, Amon Henry was a Town Commissioner in the late 1820s, but in February 1829 he disqualified himself by not attending.⁸⁰ In July 1833 he was re-elected but again dropped out.⁸¹ He was a Commissioner again in the late 1840s, but does not seem to have joined any other local bodies.

By 1833, Amon Henry lived in Western Buildings on the far west side of Brighton, where he remained until about 1855; he may have rented the Western Pavilion.⁸² By 1855, he had moved to a cottage *ornée*, Old Shoreham Cottage, Old Shoreham and still advertised as an architect in directories.⁸³ He was buried in the churchyard of St Nicholas, Old Shoreham, where his gravestone survives, but in 2012 it was very overgrown.

Although Amon Henry remained in practice in Brighton during the 1830s, probably because of the slump in work in the resort he worked elsewhere, too. He issued little press releases about his work beyond Brighton and Hove to remind local people that he was in business and had prestigious projects on which to work.⁸⁴ He avoided becoming bankrupt during this difficult period, a fate to which C. A. Busby succumbed, allegedly to the tune of £21,000.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

The Wilds dynasty had a long career in Lewes, Brighton and Hove, and Amon Henry managed to survive the slump of the 1830s by finding work elsewhere, although how he managed this has not been established. His father Amon had finished his building career in 1825 after about 35 years. Amon Henry worked from around 1810 to at least 1850, a career spanning 40 years and lasting almost until he died. He tried many schemes but few were completed; one of his last, the cemetery, is the best example. This combined his interests in landscaping and architecture, a theme common to many of his ideas from 1825. This detailed study also highlights the amount of competition there was in expanding towns such as Brighton during this period, and suggests that, in that context, these two self-trained provincial men did very well to survive in the business for two generations.

APPENDIX 1. UNPROVED

Amon Henry is believed by Dale to have designed Montpelier Crescent, on which work began in 1843 when a newspaper reported that Lillywhite's Cricket Ground was part of the land on which a crescent was being laid out.⁸⁶ It is first listed in the street directories in 1846, when numbers 2 to 27 were included. In 1848, all the houses were listed, which suggests that either the directory was more accurate or the crescent had only recently been completed.⁸⁷ These three-storey linked villas were a mixture of semi-detached with blind windows down the centre of each to disguise the party wall, and triplex. Over the entrances, arches emphasise the position of the entrance. Amon Henry was expert at publicity, and the lack of references in the press to his involvement with this major project is surprising.

Park Crescent Brighton is also attributed to Amon Henry by Dale, and wrongly dated to 1829.⁸⁸ A plan in RIBA provisionally dated 1822 may also have misled researchers, for the simple sketch of the Crescent appears to be superimposed on an earlier survey of the area around the church. There was talk of such a scheme in the early 1820s, but nothing came of it; Thomas Read Kemp, on whose land it would have stood, developed Kemp

Town instead. The scheme was revived on part of Ireland's Gardens, and development of the 48 houses began in 1849; a year later it was described as built. The smaller houses with three floors were built first, and the bigger ones in the centre of the Crescent plus numbers 46–48, standing on the site of the Hanover Arms which was part of Ireland's Gardens, last. Even in 1855 the crescent was not fully occupied.⁸⁹ In 1862, all the houses were listed in a directory.⁹⁰ Numbers 24–26 were damaged by German bombs in 1942 and rebuilt.⁹¹ Again, no contemporary evidence of Amon Henry's involvement has been found.

He may have designed the 12 houses in **Wykeham Terrace**, on the market in 1838, but again there is no contemporary evidence, and Henry Mew, a local builder and designer who also employed this style, is a possible candidate.⁹²

The same lack of contemporary evidence applies to **Victoria Terrace (Hove)** and the terraces and linked villas on **Montpelier Road** north of Church Road in Brighton. All have details similar to those in Oriental Place, which makes Amon Henry a possible architect.

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- ⁷⁹ Brighton Museum reproduction.
- ⁸⁰ ESRO, DB/B60/1, p. 331; DB/B60/4.
- ⁸¹ ESRO, DB/B60/4, pp. 159, 161, 163.
- ⁸² *The Brighton directory for 1833* (Brighton: Burn, 1833), 36. *The Court guide and general directory for Brighton* (Brighton: Folthorp, 1848), 114. *Folthorp’s Brighton directory* (Brighton: Folthorp, 1850), 232. Renumbering is the probable explanation for his apparent moves.
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