

= Park Crescent , Brighton =

Park Crescent is a mid 19th century residential development in the Round Hill area of Brighton , part of the English city of Brighton and Hove . The horseshoe shaped , three part terrace of 48 houses was designed and built by one of Brighton 's most important architects , Amon Henry Wilds ; by the time work started in 1849 he had 35 years ' experience in the town . Wilds used the Italianate style rather than his (and Brighton 's) more common Regency motifs . Three houses were replaced after the Second World War because of bomb damage , and another was the scene of one of Brighton 's notorious " trunk murders " of the 1930s . The three parts of the terrace , which encircle a private garden formerly a pleasure ground and cricket pitch , have been listed at Grade II * by English Heritage for their architectural and historical importance .

= = History = =

The fishing village of Brighthelmston , on the English Channel coast , was built around the point at which the Wellesbourne , a winterbourne flowing off the South Downs , entered the sea . It formed a north ? south valley along which the road and railway line to London were built . The road to London diverged from the road to Lewes , which also followed a valley northeastwards , at an area of marshy , intermittently flooded ground called The Level . By the 18th century , when the village started developing into the fashionable resort of Brighton , this had become a popular site for fairs , sports and general recreation . In 1791 , the northernmost part became the Prince of Wales Ground , a cricket ground which hosted early first class matches and served as the home of Brighton Cricket Club , one of the principal founders of Sussex County Cricket Club 50 years later .

Major changes happened in 1822 after the Prince Regent ? the most enthusiastic player and supporter of cricket among Brighton 's high society ? became king and retired from the sport . The Prince of Wales Ground fell into disuse at this time . Meanwhile , The Level was granted to the town by its landowners , who included influential local clergyman , politician , property speculator and Lord of the Manor Thomas Read Kemp . Union Road was built from east to west connecting the London and Lewes Roads , and the 8 acre (3 . 2 ha) area to its south was landscaped by Amon Henry Wilds and landscape gardener Henry Phillips . The 10 acre (4 . 0 ha) part to the north was bought by a speculator , James Ireland , who built the Royal Gardens ? a multi purpose pleasure garden with a new cricket ground (the Royal New Ground) . The gardens opened on 1 May 1823 .

Cricket remained the most popular attraction throughout the gardens ' existence , but there was a range of activities : bowling greens , a " noble and conspicuous building " with ground floor billiard rooms , refreshment facilities and reading rooms and a walking area on the roof , lawns , a grotto , an aviary , fairground activities , and an artificial lake with a path leading to a maze whose centrepiece was a special swinging chair . A bizarre flying demonstration took place on one occasion , during which a businessman and associate of Ireland claimed he would fly from the roof of the main building to the far side of the gardens . When he merely sailed down a rope wearing a pair of wings and attached to a pulley , the spectators were so unimpressed that he had to escape into the maze to get away from them . The gardens soon began to decline in popularity , and Ireland sold them in 1826 . Under later owners ' oversight , they became overgrown , and the main building soon became unusable . Only the ornamental gate piers and the south boundary wall (on the north side of Union Road) remain .

The gardens and the land surrounding then came up for sale again in the late 1840s . After the opening of the railway line and Brighton railway station nearby in 1841 , the surrounding area developed as a largely working class area of small terraced houses . In about 1849 Amon Henry Wilds attempted to introduce some higher class housing with his Park Crescent development . It was envisaged as a long , horseshoe shaped crescent facing inwards towards the former cricket ground part of the Royal Gardens , which would be a private garden for residents . Work started on the 48 house development , described as Wilds 's " most ambitious scheme " , in 1849 .

The crescent was complete in 1854 , one of Wilds 's final works before his death in 1857 . At first the gardens were managed by a private agent on behalf of the residents , but a committee of residents took over responsibility in 1872 . The 19th @-@ century German philosopher Arnold Ruge lived at number 7 and was chairman of the Park Crescent Residents ' Association . Lewis Carroll 's sister Henrietta moved to number 4 Park Crescent in 1885 and lived a hermit @-@ like existence with several cats for company . She died in 1922 . In 1934 , number 44 was the site of the second notorious " Brighton trunk murder " in the space of a few weeks . On 15 July that year , the body of Violet Kaye , a prostitute , was found in a suitcase in a house in Kemp Street in the North Laine area . Her pimp , Tony Mancini , alleged that he found her dead in bed in the Park Crescent house and transported her to lodgings in Kemp Street out of fear . Remarkable work by defence counsel Norman Birkett kc acquitted Mancini , but he confessed to the murder in 1976 .

Wartime damage to Brighton 's grand squares , terraces and crescents was minimal , and much less than expected ; nevertheless , three houses (numbers 24 , 25 and 26) in the centre of the northern part of the crescent were destroyed by a bomb in 1942 . They were not replaced until 1983 , when the three houses were rebuilt as two , omitting number 25 . The replacements were built in the same style as the rest of the terrace .

The west , north and east sides of the crescent were each listed separately at Grade II * on 13 October 1952 . Such buildings are defined as being " particularly important ... [and] of more than special interest " . As of February 2001 , they were three of the 70 Grade II * -listed buildings and structures , and 1 @, @ 218 listed buildings of all grades , in the city of Brighton and Hove .

= = Associated buildings = =

Park Crescent Terrace was built adjacent to the crescent on its west side . Numbers 1 to 16 Park Crescent back on to the terrace . At its south end , a Salvation Army Congress Hall was built in 2000 by David Greenwood of the Salvation Army Architects Department . The new octagonal building , whose gables resemble those on Park Crescent 's houses , replaced a 1 @, @ 400 @-@ capacity predecessor of 1883 on the same site . Another important local building , demolished in 1930 , was the Gaiety Theatre on Park Crescent Place , which runs northwards from Park Crescent to Trinity Street . It was the Royal Hippodrome from 1876 until 1889 , and held a popular circus . After a short closure , it reopened in 1890 as a theatre specialising in melodrama and music hall performances . It was demolished in 1930 and replaced by flats .

The wall along the north side of Union Road , which cuts off Park Crescent and the gardens from The Level , retains its original (1822) gate piers . It was badly damaged by falling trees in the Great Storm of 1987 , but has been repaired . The original stone lions on top of the gate piers have been removed and replaced with copies . The piers themselves are stuccoed , and consist of a square plinth with chamfering , a square body with arched niches , a prominent gutta above a triglyph , and a cornice with stone lions on top . The gate piers were listed at Grade II by English Heritage on 24 July 1969 ; this defines them as " nationally important [and] of special interest " .

= = Architecture = =

Wilds adopted the then @-@ popular Italianate style for his design of Park Crescent , which has been described as the most ambitious development of his architectural career . It has been criticised for being an unsuccessful composition , " showing ... his limitations as an architect " with the " muddled and disappointing " proportions of the interior (garden @-@ facing) façades . The gabled roofs on each house are large in proportion to the rest of the exterior , giving a " top @-@ heavy " , " busy and awkward " appearance . This contrasts with the simple curves of the rear elevations , facing the streets on the outside . The gables form part of an attic storey which extends from the top of the two- and three @-@ storey houses in the terrace . They are treated as 24 semi @-@ detached villas at the front , but the rear resembles a plain terrace on all three sides . The linking element between the pairs of villas is a series of three @-@ storey towers topped with pediments . These also provide a unifying element between houses of different heights , which has been

described as a mark of Wilds 's ingenuity .

The west and east sides match each other . Most houses have two storeys , but some rise to three ; all have a basement and a three @-@ window range with sash windows . The entrances are in the rear elevation and are paired under single doorcases with cornices , architraves and fanlights . The windows are topped by similar architraves . At the front , facing the garden , the hipped roofs of the main sections have prominent eaves , and the roofs of the tower sections have similar treatment . Number 1 , at the southwest corner , has ground @-@ floor rustication carried round on to its south @-@ facing wall , and its windows are different . Similarly , number 48 ? the end house at the southeast corner ? has a hipped @-@ roofed south @-@ facing wing with a hipped roof , in which the entrance is set in a doorcase flanked by antae . The corner of the house is chamfered and has a blank two @-@ window range . Several houses in the east side of the crescent have dormer windows in their attic space .

The curved north side of the " horseshoe " consists of three @-@ storey houses with three @-@ window ranges . The entrances are again paired , and the windows are sashes with architraves above . Three @-@ storey tower bays separate the houses .