

# HASTINGS PIER CHARITY

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## The Development of Hastings Seafront



Hastings Pier and The White Rock Theatre illustration from the 1930s (HPC004.042)



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## **The Development of Hastings Seafront**

### **The Sea Front or Front Line 1930s**

The term frontline seems to have originated from after the first parts of the seafront were built. As the town spread west under the cliffs from the end of George Street around Napoleonic times, the promenade was built for access/promenading etc, but it also had to defend the properties from the sea, which they had been built too close to. It is likely that the building of the long straight Eversfield Place (very close to the sea) from c1835 must have been like building a front line in the war against the sea's gales. So, the 1830s or 40s would probably have been the birth-time of the phrase.

**Early 1927** - The promenade and part of the road at White Rock were reconstructed by Sydney Little, prior to the Prince of Wales visit on April 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Dec 13<sup>th</sup>, 1929** - Hastings Council adopted Sydney Little's Front Line Improvement Scheme, reclaiming land from the sea in order to build the seafront between Marine Parade and White Rock (there was no through road past the Queens Hotel prior to this). The £111,300 project included the world's first underground car park, 846 feet long by 60 feet wide, backed by sunken gardens in Robertson Terrace. Plus, there was a new raised sea wall to protect against flooding. Work started early in 1930 and was finished in late 1931.

**Feb 13<sup>th</sup>, 1931** - Hastings Council agreed Sydney Little's plan to spend £49,200 on improving the promenade between the west end of the White Rock Baths and London Road. This included building Bottle Alley, with its panels of broken glass set in concrete, plus bastions, shelters and seats, and upgrading the sea wall. The Alley was opened on May 12 1934.

**June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1931** - The greatly improved White Rock Baths were opened by Earl Howe; £34,000 had been spent on them, one of Sydney Little's proposals.

**Dec 8<sup>th</sup>, 1931** - The new seafront between Marine Parade and White Rock was opened by the Minister of Health. This was the Front Line Improvement Scheme.

**May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1934** - Bottle Alley, the new promenade linking White Rock and Warrior Square, was officially opened.

**Dec 14<sup>th</sup>, 1934** - Hastings Council agreed Sydney Little's plan to rebuild the promenade and sea wall from London Road to the Bathing Pool. The work was completed by December 1938.

**June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1936** - Opening of the underground car parks between Hastings Pier and Grand Parade by the Transport Minister, Hore-Belisha.

**Dec 17<sup>th</sup>, 1938** - Opening of the Sun Lounge (later called the Marina Pavilion), near the Royal Victoria Hotel.

### **Bottle Alley**

The double-decker promenade that runs from Hastings Pier to Warrior Square, was built in the 1930's and is the only one of its kind in the country. The walls have mosaics created from broken glass and originally there were shutters to protect the walk from the rough seas.

### **Carlisle parade**

This was originally a very narrow part of Hastings promenade, which the seafront road did not follow. There was a cul-de-sac at the Queens Hotel, which meant that traffic passing through the town had to go down Robertson Street, through Wellington Place and a narrow stretch of Castle Street before rejoining the seafront at Breeds Place.

The new road and promenade was built by Sidney Little on land reclaimed from the sea and was opened in 1931. Constructed 70ft thick and stretching for 0.75 miles to join the two existing seafront roads from Pelham Crescent to White Rock. Included in Sidney Little's project was a new Underground Car Park which was built inside the void created by moving the sea wall.

## **Crown House**

Situated at 57 Marina, the Crown House was the first building to be erected in St Leonards and served as James Burton's own villa during the construction of the town. The timber frame of the building was constructed in London and shipped by sea to St Leonards.

The Duchess of Kent and her daughter Princess Victoria stayed in No.57 during 1834/5 and after they left the building was renamed Victoria House. As Victoria was crowned queen the house was renamed again as Crown House and remains this today.

The house has seen varying usage during its lifetime including many years as a social club and then public house. In 2014, the Crown House was turned back into a private dwelling and remains as such today.



Edwardian Hastings from Denmark Place (HPC004.035)

## **Denmark Place**

Denmark Place has always been a popular part of the seafront, situated near the Queens Hotel. This was particularly true in the early 1900's with large pleasure yachts landing on the beach here and offering trips for tourists.

Two of the largest beach launched pleasure yachts were built in Hastings. The New Albertine operated from the beach at Denmark Place and the other worked at Eastbourne. Much like the fishing boats in the Old Town, the pleasure boats were wound up the beach by horse winches called capstans.



### **Grand Hotel / Varulam Hotel**

Originally built as the Grand Hotel opposite Hastings Pier but soon renamed the Varulam Hotel. It was poorly built and fell into disrepair. Varulam Place was demolished to make way for Waverly Court in 1989.

### **Grand Parade**

Grand Parade was built by some of James Burton's workmen as an independent project and was originally called Adelaide Place because Queen Adelaide spent the winter at number 23 in 1837.

### **Guinness Clock**

Guinness made several promotional clocks following the success of the original at the Festival of Britain in 1951/2. The Hastings Guinness Clock was situated on the seafront, opposite the entrance to Robertson Street. The clock soon became fascinating for young and old, featuring music and many moving parts. A rotating sun, bell ringing man, fisherman catching fish from a pond, puppets and monkeys. As a finale, the doors would open beneath the clock face to reveal the Guinness Tree and a parade by the famous Guinness Toucans.

### **Gaiety Theatre**

Designed by Cross & Wells and opened as a private venture by George Gaze in August 1882. Gaze remained in charge until his death in 1904. The Gaiety was converted into a cinema in 1932 and remains as such to this day. Currently the Odeon Cinema.

### **Marine Palace of Varieties /Royal Cinema de Luxe /Deluxe Leisure Centre**

Designed by Ernest Runtz and built to replace a large section of the East side of Pelham Place after its demolition in 1898-99. The Marine Palace of Varieties was believed to be the first theatre in the country with a cantilever balcony so as not to need pillars that would block the audience's view.

The building later became the Royal Cinema de Luxe, and the balcony survived until the late 1960s when the cinema was converted into today's leisure complex. The upper part of the building was converted into a Bingo Club and much of the attractive Neo-Baroque interior was altered.

### **Palace Hotel / Palace Chambers**

The first portion of the Palace Hotel was built in 1885 and replaced the White Rock Brewery which was demolished the previous year. The building was designed by Arthur Wells in a flamboyant classical free style. The second portion (to the East) was built in 1886 and replaced the Seaside & Pier Hotel that was previously next door. The building is now known as Palace Chambers.



Pelham Crescent (HPC085.004)

### **Pelham Crescent**

Some of the seafront and with the Church of St Mary-in-the-Castle standing in the middle. Pelham Crescent and St Mary in the Castle were designed by Joseph Kay in 1824-28, with the support of the 1st Earl of Chichester. A large section of the castle cliff was excavated prior to construction of this fine piece of regency architecture.

The shops that stand in front of Pelham Crescent were originally designed as an arcade with unique wine cellars beneath. Pelham Arcade was part of Joseph Kay's original design for the Crescent and for many years was a fashionable destination for visitors to Hastings, providing music, refreshments and a bazaar.

Demolition of much of the original East side of Pelham Place occurred in 1898/9 to make way for the Marine Palace of Varieties.

A large (32 pounder) Russian Gun, described as a "Crimean Trophy" was on show on the seafront opposite Pelham Place for many years. It was eventually moved to the museum grounds at John's Place and dismantled for scrap during the war in 1939-45.

The prominent Queens Hotel on Hastings seafront was opened in December 1862 on part of the site of the America Ground. The hotel was designed by FH Fowler in a modest Italianate style and proved to be well appreciated by aristocratic visitors.

Originally the building had two cupolas on the roof of the Eastern side, but these no longer grace the building. The hotel also had a much larger forecourt to the front, but this was much reduced to make way for seafront widening.

The Queens Hotel was badly damaged during the 1987 hurricane and was subsequently closed. Remaining derelict for many years and passing through several owners, the future of the building was doubtful. Now restored, the building has been developed into luxury flats called Queens Apartments.

### **Robertson Street**

Built by Patrick Robertson, the Conservative Member of Parliament, who was responsible for the development of this very elegant area in the early 1850's.

Originally built as a residential terrace, Robertson Street was gradually converted into a row of shops during its first 30 years. What is now the United Reformed Church was enlarged in 1885 and originally called Robertson Street Congregational Church.

### **Robertson Terrace**

Robertson Terrace is the row of houses that now includes Debenhams overlooking Carlisle Parade to the sea. It has a Lion and a Unicorn statue at either end, said to have been acquired by Patrick Robertson from Buckingham Palace at the time he built the street in the 1850's.

### **Royal Victoria Hotel**

James Burton built this hotel in 1828 and it was enlarged in 1903. The entrance was originally at the back so guests could avoid the seafront weather.

### **South Colonnade**

Completed in 1828 as a unit of shops situated on the parade in front of the Marina. South Colonnade was the site of higher class shops and had living accommodation above. This once elegant building had degenerated considerably by the end of the 19th Century and was demolished in 1929 prior to rebuilding of the parade in the 1930s.

### **St Leonards Archway / East Lodge Gateway**

St Leonards Archway was built in 1828 and marked the entrance to James Burton's St Leonards. It was situated on Grand Parade to the East of St Leonards. The archway was later commemorated with a large stone on the seaward side of the road.

Council workmen demolished the stone secretly overnight in 1895, much to the horror of local residents. All that remains of the arch today is a large piece of granite by the roadside.



### **St Leonards Parade**

St Leonards Parade was part of James Burton's Colonnade, which was built in 1830. Marine Court now stands in its place. (HPC041.093)



## **Turkish Baths**

This unique building on the corner of West Hill Road and Quarry Hill was built by the Turkish Bath Company Saint Leonard-on-Sea Limited and run as a Turkish Baths from 1863 to 1869 when the company went into liquidation. The building was taken over by the Uplands School in 1871 and used as a girls swimming pool. Finally became a glass making factory in the latter 20th century.

This historic property is currently empty but still boasts a multitude of period features including original Victorian beamed ceiling, pool surround, stained glass windows and staircase. The original pool is still in-tact beneath raised floorboards which were added in the 1930's.

<http://www.1066online.co.uk/hastings-history/hastings-town/>

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