

SAVE

E-REPORT 23 DECEMBER 2010

DON'T LET THEM BULLDOZE BARRY'S BRIGHTON HOSPITAL



Brighton's Royal Sussex County Hospital, an early and important work by the giant of British architecture, Sir Charles Barry, is threatened with destruction by the area's NHS Trust. SAVE Britain's Heritage has compiled this emergency report as part of a campaign to stop this madness. We are grateful to Adam Turner for his research into the history of the building, and to Barry's DNB biographer, Professor Michael Port, for his eloquent summary of Barry's life and importance.

INTRODUCTION

Sir Charles Barry is a giant among British architects. It should be no more acceptable to demolish a building by Barry than a work of engineering by

Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Barry designed the Houses of Parliament, one of the sublime masterpieces of Victorian architecture. With his clubs in Pall Mall, the Travellers and the Reform, he invented the 19th century Palazzo style which gave Britain, Europe and North America many of its most monumental buildings, not only clubs, but banks, art galleries and public buildings of every kind.

Recently, the richness of Barry's architecture has taken centre stage every Sunday evening in Julian Fellowes enthralling television series Downton Abbey filmed at Highclere Park in Hampshire and transformed by Barry for the 3rd Earl of Carnarvon in the 1840s.

So why is the NHS determined to destroy Barry's major landmark building in Brighton, the Sussex Hospital completed in 1828? As this report shows, Barry's building substantially survives. There are also important later additions which must be preserved, including the Grade II listed chapel, the Victoria and Adelaide wings, the Jubilee buildings and the outpatient department and nurses home.

The purpose of this report is to show that the importance of Barry's Hospital has not been adequately recognised. Brighton, with Bath and Edinburgh, is one of the finest Georgian cities in Britain, and indeed the world. It is equally deserving of designation as a World Heritage Site. Brighton cannot afford to lose a major public building and landmark dating from the 1820s, a golden decade of Regency architecture.

The Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust must be made to adapt its plans for remodelling the hospital. Given that the Barry block and the mid- and late 19th-century buildings occupy a small proportion of the overall footprint of the site, they could easily be retained within an improved and extended hospital.

SAVE appeals to the citizens and residents of Brighton, long justly proud of one of the most beautiful classical cities in Europe, to demand the retention of one of Barry's earliest great public buildings. Our illustrations show how Barry's hospital was cleverly extended by matching wings on several occasions maintaining the bold cornice which gives it such a presence on the Brighton skyline.

SAVE's view is supported by leading Britain's leading architectural historians. Plans drawn up by leading conservation architect Bob Chitham have shown how the hospital could be retained.

Please support the SAVE campaign by writing to the people listed at the end of the report. Earlier SAVE campaigns have saved other leading neo-classical masterpieces - notably the Grange in Hampshire, saved by Michael Heseltine in 1980, in response to public outcry at its neglect.

Marcus Binney
President, SAVE Britain's Heritage

THE THREAT



Barry's façade as existing



The proposed replacement block seen from the west, along Eastern Road

Barry's Sussex Hospital was completed in 1828. His surviving entrance front is a clever composition with the three-bay centre accentuated by flanking narrow bays without cornices, enabling the centre to rise higher than the ends without any conflict of cornice lines.

The scheme proposed by the Trust includes the demolition of Barry's original façade and its replacement with a new block. Not only is Barry's façade of exceptional historic importance, it also forms a striking spectacle from the south. The hospital's elevated position makes it a prominent landmark and the historic elements of the hospital are crucial to defining the special character of the conservation area.

The scheme also involves the destruction of a number of important later additions including the wings added in the 1850s, the listed chapel and other 19th-century buildings.

CHARLES BARRY (1795 - 1860)

Sir Charles Barry was not only the most important architect of public buildings in Britain in the 19th century, but also the best. Whether on the small scale of a library or newsroom, or on the vast scale of the Houses of Parliament, he produced masterly architecture. Schooled in the builder's yard, he had a deep knowledge of building technique that provided a foundation to the innovative designs for which he is celebrated. An extensive and unusual Grand Tour familiarised him at first hand not only with antique Roman, Renaissance and Baroque Italian architecture, but with that of Ancient Greece, the Near East and Egypt. The last indeed made a very profound impression, and elements of his handling of mass may derive from it, although he erected no buildings in that style.



His two great Pall Mall clubs established the Italian sixteenth-century Renaissance palazzo as a model for public buildings, one that he pursued in his remodelling and extension of Soane's government offices in Whitehall, as well as in a number of important buildings in provincial cities. Noble simplicity concealed pondered and finely-judged art. While ensuring adequate internal lighting, he was particularly adept in his balancing of solid and void on the exterior. His designs in Greek Revival style are as masterly, the Manchester Institution for example, in which his control of the façade impresses against the weakness of London's National Gallery (by an acknowledged authority on Greek architecture, Wilkins). There is no superfluity of ornament, but the architectural elements –, columned portico, flanked symmetrically by receding and advancing bays – provide a lively and interesting façade.

Barry's effective handling of the Gothic style has sometimes been obscured by the celebrated skill of his assistant Pugin in devising Gothic ornament. His early churches were governed by the narrow requirements of his clients, but still exhibit effectively picturesque towered west ends; his Birmingham Grammar School was an efficient adaptation of Tudor Gothic to contemporary academic needs; his Houses of Parliament, the largest building of the age, a triumphant evocation in stone of the British constitution. Deep thought informs all his works, and a masterly eye for effect governs them.

Professor Michael Port

TESTIMONIALS

'It is inconceivable that we should lose an early work by the architect of the Palace of Westminster, one of the most famous and admired modern buildings in the western world. His qualities are already apparent in this early Greek Revival building and would be even more so if it were treated with respect and restored as it should be.'

Professor David Watkin, Professor Emeritus of History of Architecture at University of Cambridge

'After so many successful restorations of Victorian public buildings in recent years, from St Pancras Station downwards, the desire to demolish the Brighton Hospital seems extraordinary. This is exactly the kind of building – an important creation by an outstanding architect - that will become an admired centrepiece of any sympathetic redevelopment'.

John Goodall, Architectural Editor of Country Life

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Barry Building is the original part of the Royal Sussex County Hospital, which was founded in 1826, and opened in 1828, over 20 years before the work of Edwin Chadwick and Florence Nightingale began to reform public health in Victorian England. 'Voluntary hospitals' were first established in the early 18th century. These served the sick poor, and were run, like the 'Sussex County Hospital and Sea Bathing Infirmary' as it was originally called, by boards of governors made up of local gentry; they were significant outlets for philanthropy, and could attain considerable visual magnificence. About 250 had been established by the middle of the 19th century, and they formed the core of health care and medical innovation until the launch of the National Health Service in 1948.

Establishing a hospital in Brighton was first discussed in 1813, when an advertisement appeared in the *Brighton Herald* and *The Courier* giving details of a public meeting, with the Earl of Chichester as chair 'to promote the Sussex General Hospital for sea bathing and general purposes'. The meeting approved a plan for the new hospital at a cost not exceeding £12,000. However, in spite of many offers of support, because the country was at war with France, which was immediately followed by a period of economic depression and popular unrest, no further progress was made with the proposal until 1824. Early in 1824, Charles Barry (1795-1860) submitted plans for the new hospital, the price ranging from £8,000 to £12,000 according to the number of beds, and the building materials used.

Due to opposition from fellow architects Wilds and Busby, the principal architectural and building firm in Brighton at the time, it was decided to advertise a competition to design the hospital. However, at a meeting held on 9th April, the committee preferred Barry's plan, which constitutes the central seven bays of the current building, and he was appointed.

Tenders for the erection of the foundations, walls and drains were considered on the 28th June, when the tender for £8,121 from William Ranger, a Brighton builder, was accepted. In September, following advertisements in Brighton and Lewes newspapers, the tender for completing the hospital, also submitted by

Ranger, was accepted. The total cost of the building including the boundary walls, a new road to the sea and a well came to £14,000. The Earl of Egremont laid the foundation stone on 16 March 1826 with the 'Statutes, Rules and Orders' of the hospital being adopted at a meeting of subscribers in January 1828.



The original Barry Building (Brighton History Centre)

In 1837, the hospital embarked on a stage of re-development. Shortly before the death of the Earl of Egremont, he donated a sum of £1,000 to the institution, emphasising that it should be used to expand the hospital. This resulted in the addition of the Victoria Wing. The architect was Mr William Hallett of the Bristol Hotel and Mr Penton was contracted to undertake the building for £2,615 19s 3d. The corner stone was laid on 17th August 1838, and the wing opened on 19th June 1839.

The surplus in the fund subscribed to build the wing was set aside to build another. Permission was given by the Dowager Queen for it to be known as the Adelaide Wing. Work on the extension commenced in May 1840, under the supervision of the architect, Mr Herbert Williams of Bloomsbury. The corner stone of the building was laid on the 13th August and it fully opened in 1841. The cost of the Adelaide Wing, which included expenditure of equipment, was in the region of £4,000.

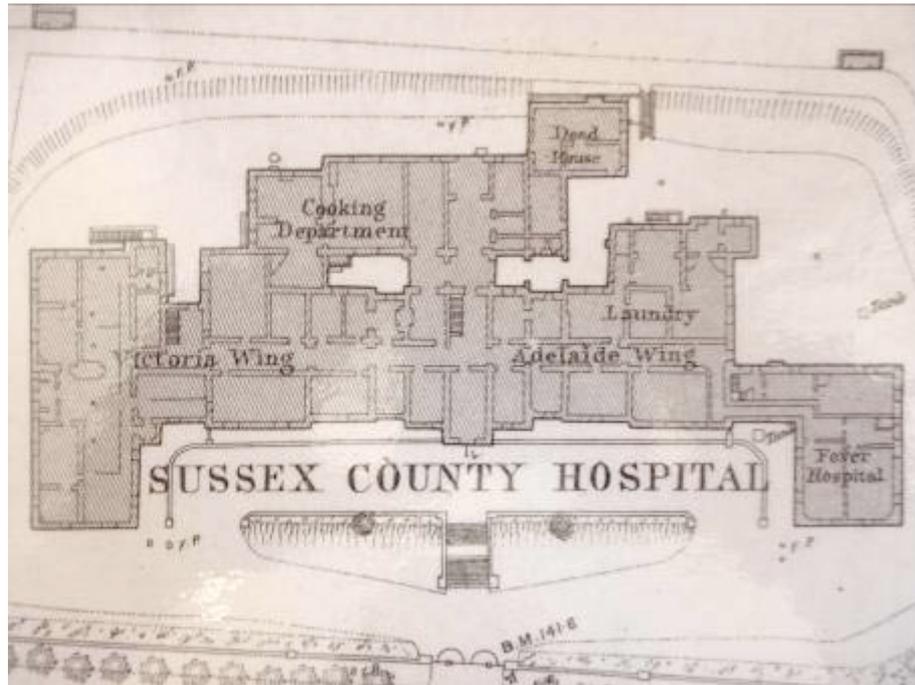


Hospital with Victoria and Adelaide wings c.1841 (Brighton History Centre)

In 1861, ground in front of the hospital was purchased, for £3,000, and a scheme of improvements was also implemented. A two-storied entrance building with an internal staircase was added, as the original steep and narrow steps were painful for some patients to negotiate. Additionally, the kitchens were enlarged; additional accommodation in the outpatient department allowed the separation of the sexes; a staircase was inserted into the Victoria Wing, as the rooms were smoke filled in stormy weather.



The hospital with its 1860-70 extensions (Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton & Hove)



Plan of the hospital in 1875 (Brighton History Centre)

Extensions to the east and west wings were completed in 1853 and the chapel in 1856. These were built to the designs of the architect William Hallett. The Italianate chapel is Grade II listed with a fine interior. It was further embellished in the later 19th-century with oak panelling and marble flooring.

Further expansion was seen with the completion of the Jubilee Wing 1887, funded by monies from the Jubilee Fund and Lady Grant's Fund, at a total cost of £5,805 1s 9d. Other additions included the buildings housing the outpatients' department and a nurses home.



The hospital in the late 19th Century, with kitchen garden to the front (Brighton History Centre)

The new entrance to the Barry Building acquired an ornamental iron entrance porch in 1902, courtesy of Alderman Brigden. In 1912, balconies were erected over three wards to the Victoria Wing and the following year balconies on

Adelaide Wing were added and the Victoria Wing balconies extended. All the balconies were enclosed and external staircases added after World War II.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please support the SAVE campaign by writing to the people listed below:

- Mr Duane Passman
Director of 3Ts, Estates and Facilities
Brighton & Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust
3rd Floor
Sussex House
1 Abbey Road
Brighton
BN2 1ES
- Martin Randall
Head of Planning and Public Protection
Brighton and Hove City Council
Hove Town Hall
Norton Road
Hove
BN3 4AH
- Dr Simon Thurley
Chief Executive
English Heritage
1 Waterhouse Square
138-142 Holborn
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NOTE TO EDITORS

SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment. Earlier SAVE campaigns have saved other leading neo-classical masterpieces - notably the Grange in Hampshire, saved by Michael Heseltine in 1980, in response to public outcry at its neglect.

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