

# DECIMUS

The background of the cover is a photograph of a classical building facade. A golden statue of a woman, likely Minerva, stands on a pedestal in the center. She holds a long staff or scepter in her right hand. Above the statue is a frieze with numerous small figures. The building has multiple windows and a balcony with a balustrade. A flagpole is visible on the left side of the building.

ISSUE 5 - SUMMER 2023

The Journal of  
The Decimus Burton Society



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The Cottage, St Leonards on Sea © Paul Avis

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The Decimus Burton Society was set up to encourage the study and appreciation of the life and work of this eminent architect.

To join The Decimus Burton Society

[www.thedecimusburtonsociety.org](http://www.thedecimusburtonsociety.org)

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# The Journal of The Decimus Burton Society

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**Welcome everyone to our 5th issue of DECIMUS. At the time of completing this issue, the sun is shining, so despite Summer being officially over, it still feels as though it is with us.**

Much of the past 6 months has been spent working with Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society to finalise the business plan for a potential Decimus Burton Museum in the centre of the town. I am sure you will appreciate that a considerable amount of time, effort and resources is required for such a project, and my thanks must go to all those involved. You will find an update on the project in the news section.

The project has attracted a lot of

public interest in Decimus Burton and as a result of the publicity surrounding it, I was invited to talk to two groups of 100 each from members of the Women's Institute. Since the success of these talks, I have also been invited to give a further two talks to other interested organisations. In addition, our Treasurer, David Woosnam, gave a well attended series of guided tours of some of Burton's buildings in Tunbridge Wells as part of the town's Heritage Open Days offering. Thank you David for all your hard work in organising the walks, and to Caroline Auckland, who oversees the Society's social media and promoted them. I must also thank Anne for her work on the website and journal. As a result of all the above, and the coverage

of the project in the national press (largely thanks to another member of the society, Katherine Whitbourn - see the articles in The Guardian and The Observer - "Victorian architecture's lost giant, Decimus Burton, finally regains recognition"), public interest in Decimus Burton has certainly increased during the year. In the past month alone there have been over 100 visitors to our website.

The publicity surrounding the museum project, and the exhibitions and talks that have been held to promote it have also led to a series of interesting contacts for the Society with the potential to help enhance our work, especially in the fields of education and research. For example, acknowledging advances in computer generated

imagery, we have been in discussion with some of our contacts about creating virtual models of Burton's work that would allow researchers, students and other interested groups greater access not only to his projects that are still standing, but also to those that have been lost to posterity. The image below is a computer generated image of Burton's Colosseum in Regent's Park, produced by a resident of a Burton building who visited one of the exhibitions to promote the museum. It depicts one of the architect's lost works and illustrates the potential of virtual models. More layers of detail can be added, giving the viewer the ability to take a walk through of the building, while stopping to focus on specific features of interest, accessing more in-depth



Figure 1 - Computer generated image of Burton's Colosseum in Regent's Park by Ted Holtmark



information. This technology opens up the potential for recreating say Burton's Calverley New Town or Fleetwood developments as they were originally built or conceived, which will enable students and researchers to learn how innovative the architect was in creating communities and built environments well before Town Planning became a formal profession – and importantly, to see how we can learn from the positive experiences of the past to influence our present and future environments for the better.

Paramount in our efforts to promote the life and work of Decimus Burton, the Society has increased its archive of material relating to the architect. We now have an expanding collection of material and are currently working on an application for a grant to help with the archiving of this material so that it can be made available to a wider audience for research and educational purposes. Again, the museum project has assisted with this enterprise, encouraging a number of individuals and organisations to come forward with material or to make offers to donate material to the museum should the project be successful.

Although this year has seen many positive aspects to the Society's work, there have been some

challenges to overcome. Events for members has been one of these challenges, and we still have more work to do in this area. Our committee will be discussing some of the ideas raised to address the challenges, and we aim to report back on these shortly.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue. As always, if you have any suggestions or comments, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Paul Avis  
Chairman

A photograph of Trinity Church in Tunbridge Wells, a large Gothic Revival style church with a prominent square tower and multiple spires. The church is made of dark stone and features large arched windows. A blue door is visible at the base of the tower. The sky is overcast and grey. A white text box is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

# Trinity Theatre & Arts Centre

Trinity Church, in Tunbridge Wells, was designed by Decimus Burton in 1827 in what was described by architectural historian, Professor Mark Girouard, as the “creative Gothic” style. In Victorian times the church was well attended, but in 1974, the Church Commissioners considered the building “redundant to pastoral needs”. It was largely through the efforts of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society that Trinity was saved and converted into a community and arts centre. It is an excellent example of one of Decimus Burton’s buildings being adapted to meet changing needs.

For further information, visit [www.trinitytheatre.net](http://www.trinitytheatre.net).

October 2023

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# HOLFORD HOUSE: REGENT'S PARK

A Mansion of Large  
Extent and Rare  
Magnificence<sup>1</sup>

*By Cynthia Poole*

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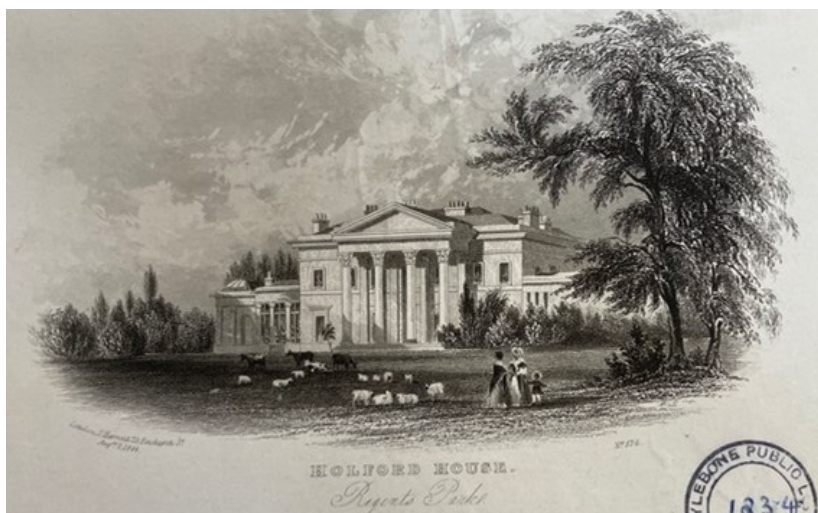


Figure 1. Holford House, Garden (South) Front. Published 1844, but probably much as originally designed. Picture courtesy of Westminster City Archives Centre.

Designed by Decimus Burton in about 1830 and completed by 1833, Holford House (Figure 1) was the last villa to be built in Regent's Park. It was also the largest and most expensive. It stood for 116 years on the high ground in the north-western corner, alongside the Regent's Canal, but has now vanished without trace. This article describes the house: its architecture and its setting within the park; and identifies the various residents over the years.

By the time the house was built, Regent's Park had taken its final form: most of the terraces were complete, and there were already seven free-standing villas in the centre, in an idyllic woodland setting with a lake (Figure 2). By 1826 the Crown Estate Commissioners (CE) had decided that no additional villas would be built, so James Holford, the first owner, must have had an agreement with them before then.

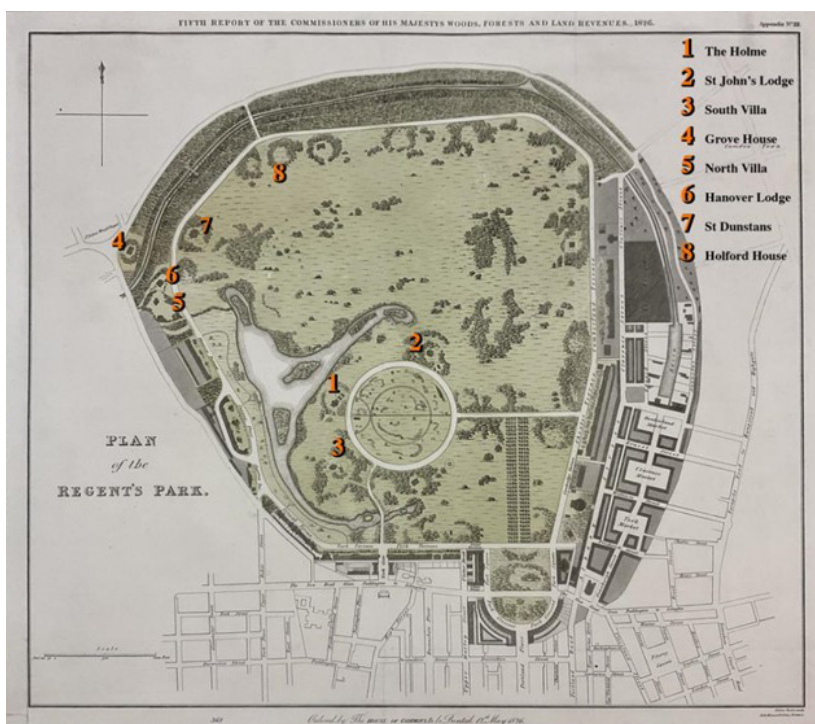


Figure 2. 1826 map by James Basire, showing position of the eight villas, though Holford House was not then built, and is shown slightly east of its actual location. Maps Crace Port. 14.33. By permission of the British Library.



John Nash had originally envisaged the Regent's Canal running through the centre of the park providing picturesque views, but it was realigned along the northern boundary at the insistence of the CE Commissioners, who feared the industrial nature of the waterway would lower the value of the expensive new houses they planned. The Canal was concealed from the park by lavish planting on its steep banks; and a meandering lake was created in the centre of the park instead. The expanding city had already reached the southern extents of the park, so the new villas existed in a unique protected environment that combined a rural ideal with proximity to the city.

Charles Ollier extolled the beauties of the new landscape in 1823:

*'The plan and size of the park are in every respect worthy of the nation ... the trees ... are already becoming umbrageous. The water is very extensive. As you are rowed on it, the variety of views you come upon is admirable; sometimes you are in a narrow stream, closely overhung by the branches of trees; presently you open upon a wide sheet of water ... with swans sunning themselves on its bosom; by and by your boat floats near the edge of a smooth lawn fronting one of the villas; and then again you catch the*

*perspective of a range of superb edifices, the elevation of which is contrived to have the effect of one palace<sup>2</sup>.'*

## The Villas

All but two of the villas in the park were designed by Decimus Burton<sup>3</sup> and generally followed a disciplined Neoclassical approach. All were symmetrically arranged and several had two-storey colonnades on at least one frontage; a certain formality prevailed in all cases. The Holme, his earliest house, designed for his father James, was the simplest: a long block with curved bay and cupola facing the lake and a plain, double height portico on the opposite entrance front. Grove House and the Marquess of Hertford's Villa (St Dunstons) both employed a device of adding lower corner blocks to a higher, main mass, but Hertford's Villa (Figure 3a) was more countrified, with its overhanging roofs, and corner clerestories, while dignified Grove House (Figure 3b) on its raised site was grander and more formal. Grove House had Greek Revival aspects in the treatment of the lower corner blocks and in windows framed with columns inset in niches. South Villa was rectangular with a garden-facing curved bay on the Western end, and entrance and garden porticos balancing each other to North and South.



Figure 3a - Left: The Marquess of Hertford's Villa (St Dunstan's); Figure 3b - Right: Grove House. Drawings by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd in 'Metropolitan Improvements'

The last villa, Holford House - purely Neoclassical - was concentrated on the views; all its most important rooms were lined up symmetrically and very emphatically across the N-S axis to face the southerly garden and park.

Holford House was completed too late to be included in James Elmes' 'Metropolitan Improvements' of 1827, but he clearly knew that there was to be a villa in that spot and devoted five pages<sup>4</sup> to describing the architecture and garden of the

*Cottage-orné* that would be suitable for the location: '*A rural style of architecture, should alone preponderate in a spot of such polished rurality as this before us.*' Elmes' proposed 'cottage' was to include a fine thatched roof, and he saw the house '*overgrown with woodbine, jessamine, honeysuckles, the white fragrant clematis.*' This vision could not have been further removed from the formality and grandeur of Decimus Burton's Holford House, and indeed, from the styles of all the completed villas.

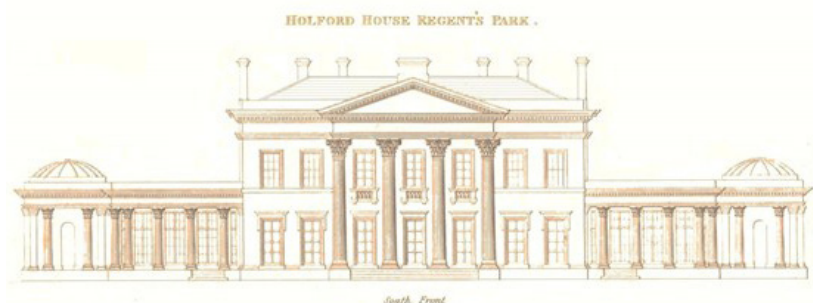


Figure 4. Burton's original design for the south front of Holford House - from an unknown publication, 1935. ©The Trustees of the British Museum, Museum number 1880,0911.949

## Holford House

In 1833, the newly completed Holford House consisted of a square, 2-storey central block with symmetrical single-storey wings to East and West (Figure 4). Matching conservatories with curved ends flanked the central block on the South side and the wings terminated in rectangular pavilions with roofs topped with cupolas towards the South front.

A driveway from the Outer Circle of the park led to the North entrance, a flat-roofed porte-cochère with austere ‘Corinthian’ pillars flanked by square columns on each end. This is almost identical to the porte-cochère entrance of the adjacent Hertford Villa - but Holford House is plainer and

lacks the rusticity of Hertford’s house, with its projecting roofs and stepped composition. The North façade of the central block remained much as it was built until demolition in 1948, and a 1930s photo shows a relatively dour composition (Figure 5) which makes the much grander South frontage somewhat unexpected.

From the North entrance, a vestibule led to a central domed ‘saloon’ and then to the southern drawing room with the garden and park beyond. On the South front, a double height, pedimented Portico was supported by full height columns with elaborate Corinthian capitals. The grand staircase was in the middle of the East side, and the service stair opposite on the West; dining room, morning



Figure 5. Photo of central block and North entrance from CE records c.1932 (file CRES 35/3368) - Courtesy TNA

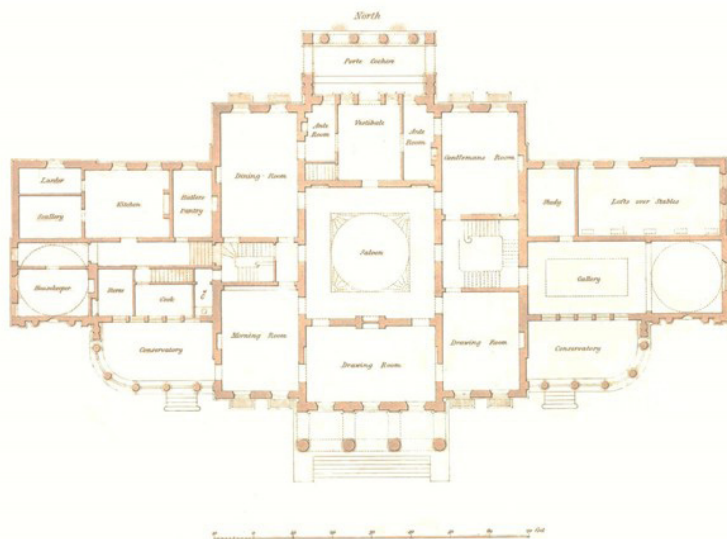


Figure 6. Burton's original plan for Holford House - from an unknown publication, 1935.  
©The Trustees of the British Museum, Museum number 1880,0911.949

room, 'gentleman's room' and another drawing room, occupied the corners of the main house. The matching single storey wings held kitchens and various household service areas in the West wing, and a long gallery with stables and coach house below was in the East wing (Figure 6).

## The Owners

Architectural historian, J. Mordaunt Crook, once observed that:

*'By the 1840s, the social geography of Regent's Park was set firm. The grander terraces were occupied by upper middle-class rentiers, the commercial*

*nouveaux riches; the villas were now the palaces of plutocrats, like Holford and Goldschmidt, and the peripheral areas were filled up with housing for respectable professionals<sup>5</sup>.*

'Plutocrats' accurately describes Holford's neighbours in the other villas. Amongst the thirty or so main occupants during Holford's sojourn, there were bankers, stockbrokers, and businessmen. Some were MPs, some were founders of institutions such as the Zoo, or the Royal Botanic Society, both based in the new park. A few were investors in the canal - and more than half were well-known for their endeavours in the sciences and

arts - for example, the merchant George Bishop (South Villa) made useful contributions to astronomy, and G.B. Greenough (Grove House) was a notable geologist. A number of them were aristocrats, and most were members of at least one of the many prestigious societies that were formed in that period. All of them were well connected and very, very rich.

The owner of Holford House was the wine merchant **James Holford** (1788 -1854). He has been described as living in solitary state attended by many servants. This impression is probably based on a description given by Julia Pitt Bryne in "Gossip of the Century" published in 1892:

*'No near relations of Mr. Holford's were ever spoken of, and while he lived, none that I can remember were ever seen at Holford House, but, as usual, where the carcass is, there the vultures are gathered together, and accordingly no sooner is the breath out of a rich man's body than flocks of claimants suddenly appear<sup>6</sup> ...'*

In fact Holford was part of a large and successful family of traders who had by then achieved 'landed gentry' status. In the 1750s, the family had wine interests in London and Lisbon. For some years they had a partnership with Crofts, handling the Lisbon end in exchange for a share of the

profits. Holford's father, though, moved to Manchester, where the family became cotton traders and manufacturers; at one time James Holford & Co. had branches in several countries, and were the largest British cotton exporters to Russia. James was born in Rusholme, Manchester, but his younger brother **John** was born in Sweden, so it is likely that the Holfords had an outpost there too.

In about 1827, the Holford brothers split the business, leaving **James** in control of the wine business in London (while also moving into railroad financing and banking) and **John** retaining the cotton enterprises in Manchester. **James** became a merchant banker, and was eventually known as '**James Holford of Holford House Esq.**' **John** built himself a mansion in Rusholme, and became 'John Holford of Rusholme Hall Esq.'. By the 1830s their status was underlined by the award of arms. The family crest depicts a greyhound passant sable and the motto, *Toujours fidèle*. These accoutrements eventually passed to John's son, 'Thomas Holford of Castle Hill, Dorset'.

Other family members were still directly involved in both businesses until the 1840s, when they sold most of their interests to their partners. Some of the family lived in and around London: John's son



**John James** in Twickenham, and their older cousin, **John Josiah**, in York Place, Marylebone. There were also relatives in Hampstead. Holford's villa had many bedrooms, so it seems unlikely that James, although unmarried and childless, was always alone in his huge house, especially as he was fond of company.

## Extensions in the late 1840s

Holford's villa, already the largest in the Park, was extended to more than twice its original size - probably in the late 1840s - and the results were palatial. It seems to have retained most of its original design until at least in the early 1840s, given the 1844 J. Harwood print (see Figure 1), although there are indications in that drawing that minor alterations to the East conservatory may have already been carried out. Further evidence for the timing of the extensions is

in the newspaper adverts for the sale of the lease after Holford's death in 1854, which state that the house had 'recently' been extended.

The architect was most probably **Wyatt Papworth** (1822–1894), younger son of the versatile designer and architect, John Buonarotti Papworth (1775 – 1847). As with Decimus Burton and his work for John Ward in Tunbridge Wells, J.B. Papworth undertook a number of commissions in Cheltenham in the 1820s for Pearson Thompson, laying out the Montpellier and Lansdown Estates, as well as terraces, private houses, and even churches, for other clients. His architect sons, who initially worked for him, both became noted in their own right: the elder, John Woody Papworth, was known for a number of publications; the younger, Wyatt, was also a surveyor and antiquarian, and, eventually, curator of the Soane Museum.

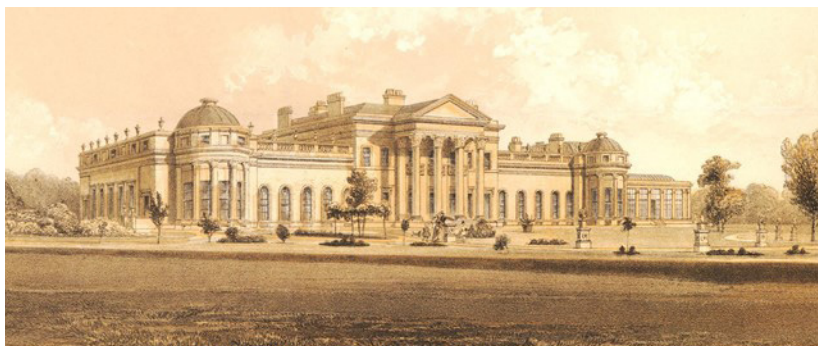


Figure 7. W. Papworth's perspective of the extended building, © The Trustees of the British Museum. Museum Number 1880,1113.4696

There are two surviving drawings by Wyatt Papworth of the extended house: a coloured perspective of the southern aspect (Figure 7) and a ground floor plan (Figure 8). The perspective is often credited to J.B. Papworth, despite the clear signature<sup>7</sup>. It seems unlikely that Wyatt would have produced such drawings unless he were the architect, but how might he have gained this commission? There were, in fact, long-standing connections between Decimus Burton and Wyatt's father: in 1834, both were founder members of what became The **Royal Institute of British Architects** (RIBA); and they were both also members of the RSA<sup>8</sup>. Wyatt worked in his father's office until the latter's death in 1847, which was around the

time the house extensions began in earnest. Perhaps J.B. Papworth had some input into the design, but by the 1840s he was losing his sight, and Wyatt doesn't mention Holford House in his biography of his father<sup>9</sup>.

When the house was extended, the central block remained almost untouched, but the wings became two storey, the southern conservatories were incorporated into the house, and a new block was added to each end - a banqueting hall to the west and a ballroom to the east, with matching curved bays on the garden front, topped with cupolas. New stables, coach house and conservatory were added to the East end beyond the Ballroom. The arrangement reproduces Burton's

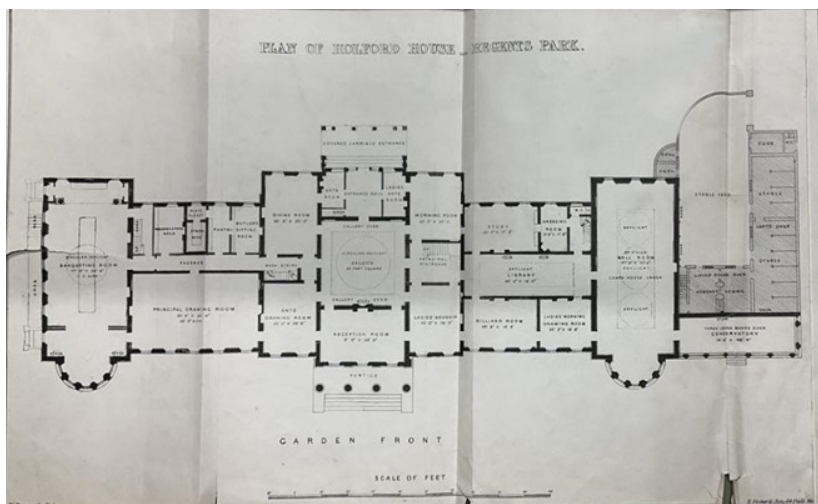


Figure 8. W.Papworth's drawing of the extended ground floor plan, Crown Estate Records (file Work 16/1191, 1932.) Courtesy TNA

original layout, but vastly expanded, and by the 1851 census, Holford had doubled his staff to sixteen to deal with the additional domestic tasks.

He had always entertained lavishly, even before the alterations: there was a ball in April 1837:

*'Holford House, the splendid residence of James Holford, Esq., was thrown open to the fashionable world on Monday night. The spacious saloon, the admiration of the company, was appropriated for dancing, which was kept up till a late hour to the unrivalled strains of Weippert. The well-known effects of Mesdames Blasis, Antony, Signor Puzzi, &c., added to the evening's entertainment'<sup>10</sup>.*

And Julia Pitt-Byrne, writing in 1892, noted:

*'Mr. Holford entertained handsomely. He gave banquets and fetes, for which his house, conservatories, and grounds were well adapted, ( ... ) often filled his ball room with young folks, and occasionally gave fancy-balls to the great delight of those invited: and he became popular accordingly.'*

He collected art, was a patron of the painter John Hilder, and filled his house with sculpture and fine

furnishings, as well as travelling widely in connection with his banking activities.

There was some excitement in October 1850, when Holford House was burgled by a notorious gang, and Mr Paul the butler peppered one burglar with birdshot. During the trial, the holes in his lost hat were matched to the pellet wounds in his head. The villas in the park were quite isolated then, especially at night, and a gang of burglars had been targeting such dwellings for some time. Mr Paul used a fearsome weapon, a pistol with a bayonet, loaded with 3/4 lb of shot and ball. John Hall the coachman was also armed. Holford was in America on business at that time, and missed this drama.

Holford's brother **John** died in April 1850, and in June his eldest son and executor, **John James**, also died, aged 29. In 1851, ten of John's children, along with John James's widow, were sued by the eleventh for not adhering to the terms of his will. When James died in 1854, he left his fortune to the same eleven children, and the previous court case was extended until 1857 to include his will, as various children sued each other. This was probably the explanation of Pitt-Byrne's comment about vultures and a carcass, quoted earlier.

After James' death, the glittering contents of Holford House were sold at auction. This took 15 days and included: 11 carriages, vast quantities of silver, 300 dozen bottles of wine, two pianofortes, and all the furniture and art. The 78-year lease was also offered for sale, the advertisement listing 26 bedrooms, 9 dressing rooms and 1 'bath-room'. House and contents were valued at £100,000 (£14m today).

## Regent's Park College

Given its proximity to the zoo, the newspapers suggested that the building might then become a museum of Natural History, but the Baptist College (Figure 9) in Stepney bought it with the help of Samuel Morton Peto, the railway developer<sup>12</sup>. He had already acquired the defunct Diorama in Park Square East in 1852 and converted it into a Baptist Chapel. Renamed 'The Regent's Park College', the Baptists occupied Holford House until 1927<sup>13</sup>.

The building was badly damaged by the explosion of a 'fly boat' on the Regent's Canal in October, 1874: 2,000 window panes were broken, and the strong-room door was blown off its hinges, but the building was repaired<sup>14</sup>. The College had always been concerned about costs, and started leasing out

the west wing to residential tenants from at least the 1860s. In 1875, there was Alfred Elwes, 'artist of Natural History', and in 1882, A.G. Hastings, cricketer and solicitor, and his wife, the painter Kate Comyns Carr. Hastings, though, was repeatedly bankrupt, so the tenancy was of short duration<sup>15</sup>. He was replaced by James Alexander, a City banker<sup>16</sup>, and then by Joseph Jennens, a Birmingham manufacturer of 'military accoutrements'. 1910 saw the arrival of Maud Allan, famous dancer and actress, who remained until 1942.

During WWI, the Baptist College moved out so that the newly formed 'St Dunstan's' might have an annex for their work with blinded servicemen<sup>17</sup>. The College eventually returned, but they had always aspired to join Oxford University, and in 1927 moved to their current premises in St Giles, Oxford, where they remain.

## Plans for the building in the 1920s & 30s

By then the lease was nearing its end. There was much discussion by the Commissioners on how the house might be used. Several parties expressed an interest even before the College left. In 1923, a group of doctors made inquiries about opening a clinic, but the CE worried that this might include



Figure 9. Interior view of the Baptist College in 1904, the Library, presumably laid out for a lecture.

mental patients. In 1926, a tennis club wanted to build 10 courts on the site. Other suggestions included a folk museum (1932), or a gallery for Old Masters (1934).

In 1935 the Duke of Kent needed a suitable residence but the CE had concerns about his security. In 1936 Loel Guinness, MP and business magnate, enquired about using the whole building as his residence but that would have meant that Maud Allan's revised lease - which ran until 1948 - would have to be bought back - for a significant sum.

Nearby Bedford College, the School Journey Association, and Regent's

Street Polytechnic all wanted the building for accommodation or classrooms, but that was thought unsuitable for the site (the rapid expansion of Bedford College on the South Villa site had displeased the Commissioners as so much building went against their vision for the park).

There was a strong feeling that the public should benefit from any future use, and the idea of a large public cafe was explored with caterers, Ye Mecca Ltd (later known as Mecca Leisure). The CE decided, though, that a huge restaurant might have the character of a "road house", and degrade the



park. In 1938, William Wakefield, MP, proposed an open-air swimming pool/ ice rink, with the house providing related facilities and cafe. CE persuaded him that demolishing the house and gaining extra parkland would be preferable.

But the Great Depression put paid to all of these schemes - and then war came again - soldiers were billeted in the main house by 1939, and allotments were dug all around the outer gardens.

## **Maud Allan**

Maud Allan (Figure 10) meanwhile had acquired the residue of the main lease, but the building needed major repairs which she could not afford. By 1932, there was significant water damage to the central section of the building and the huge chandeliers had to be cut down for safety.

Maud had had a very successful career and was famous for her exotic 'Dance of the Seven Veils'. But in 1918, the MP, Noel Pemberton Billings, published an article which accused her of being a 'lesbian ally of German wartime conspirators<sup>18</sup>'. Allan sued for libel - and lost - which led to the end of her career in Europe, and the beginning of her financial struggles to maintain the house. Various attempts to start businesses, such as

a golf school, and an acting and film school, came to naught. She did start a dance school around 1930 but was unable to finance it.

The CE archives record internal discussions about evicting her and possibly demolishing the building to create more parkland. There was strong political pressure in the 1920s and 30s to demolish all the villas in the park as their leases expired, and return the land to public use. (This echoed parliamentary concerns for the loss of public open space in Marylebone Park 120 years earlier, which is why only eight villas were built.) There was opposition, though, to the demolition proposals from an advisory committee appointed by the Crown Estate in 1937, which recognised Burton's authorship, and thought the house 'a very successful architectural unit<sup>19</sup>'.

In 1934, with the help of Lloyd George, Maud was granted a new 16-year lease on the West Wing and relinquished the remainder. During WWII the rest of the building was commandeered for military use. Maud stayed on in the West wing, but the house became uninhabitable when it was bombed in 1941. She camped there for another year. She was then 69 years old, but nevertheless drove an ambulance in London for a year before returning to America,



Figure 10. Maud Allan as Salome in Oscar Wilde's play.

where she spent 13 years working as a draughtswoman at the Douglas Aircraft Company in Santa Monica. She died in a nursing home in Los Angeles, aged 83.

The house was demolished in 1948, all that remains of it now are traces in the grass, and an absence of mature trees in the area where it stood. The gardens are fenced off from the public areas of the park, and now provide wild woodlands for bats and birds.

## Notes

1. Old and New London, Vol 5. London 1878.
2. C. Ollier, 'Walks Round London. No IV. Marylebone Park' in L. Hunt (ed), Literary Pocket Book (London, 1823) pp. 107-11. Ollier's description was quoted by both James Elmes in 'Metropolitan Improvements' (London, 1827) and John Limbird in his 'Picturesque Guide to the Regent's Park' (London, 1829). The trees he mentions were a deliberate planting from 1814.
3. The others were Albany Cottage (North Villa) by C.R. Cockerell, and St John's Lodge by John Raffield, though Burton was also involved in both at some stage. The two were amongst the more modest of the villas and somewhat quirky architecturally - perhaps the subject of a future article?
4. 'Metropolitan Improvements', pp.52-57.
5. J. Mordaunt Crook, Annual Soane Lecture 2000, pub. 2001.
6. J. Pitt-Byrne, 'Gossip of the Century', Vol.1. (London, 1892). Julia Pitt-Byrne, nee Busk (1819-1894) wrote a number of memoirs about celebrities. She grew up in Tunbridge Wells in Culverden Grove - adjacent to Great Culverden, a Decimus Burton building of 1829.
7. Both the Yale Archive and British Museum suggest a date in the 1830s, presumably assuming that this was Burton's original design, but I have found nothing to suggest that it was as early as this.
8. Originally the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, founded in 1754, and initiator of the Great Exhibition in 1851. From 1833, James Holford was also a member - perhaps at Burton's suggestion.
9. W. Papworth, 'John B. Papworth, Architect to the King of Wurtemberg', 1879.
10. 'John Bull' (Sunday newspaper), 24th April, 1837. Weipperts were a celebrated Dance Band, one of 'Mesdames Blasis' was the celebrated singer, Virginia de Blasis (1806-1838), and Giovanni Puzzi was a famous horn player.
11. He contributed £1,000. The building cost £8,000, plus £1,000 for fixtures and fittings, and £500 for adaptations.
12. The college has no connection to Bedford College which occupies the site of Burton's South Villa.
13. They got £2,500 from the Alliance Insurance Co. The students were due back that day, but term had to be delayed for another four weeks.
14. At one point Kate had to flee to Europe with their two sons until money could be found.
15. Son of the James Alexander who owned Somerhill, the Jacobean mansion near Tonbridge, between 1819 and 49.
16. The 'Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee', founded in 1915 and quartered in the adjacent Hertford Villa. It became

known as St Dunstan's because the Marquis of Hertford had bought the huge clock from old St Dunstan's near Temple Bar, and fixed it to the facade (it was returned to the church in the 1930s).

17. In his publication 'The Vigilante', which was 'Published in the Interest of Purity in Public Life'. He also named Margot Asquith, socialite and wife of the pre-war Liberal Prime Minister. Margot apparently paid for Maud's house until 1928 when her husband died, and she too was left in penury.
18. The committee included Frank Pick, Giles Gilbert Scott and Raymond Unwin. (Crown Lands Advisory Committee, The Baptist College, Regent's Park, 1937, file WORK 16/1191 Crown Estate Records, TNA.).



# DECIMUS BURTON: HIS ST LEONARDS HOME

The Cottage & its history  
as a single residence,  
1847 to 1950

*By Christopher Maxwell-Stuart*

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“The Cottage”, later known as St Leonards Lodge, was commenced in 1847 as a home for Decimus Burton in St Leonards. The sepia photograph (Figure 1), shows the house in its early form comprised off a basement and ground floor<sup>1</sup>. The building was constructed from coursed local ironstone, with freestone dressings, slated roofs with bracketed eaves, hard-fired ceramic ridge and hip tiles, and with stone chimney stacks and octagonal pots<sup>2</sup>.





Figure 1. The Cottage as originally constructed  
(sepia photograph in Hastings Museum)

Also visible in the photograph are wrought iron railings.

Decimus had acquired the leasehold of a large parcel of land abutting his father's estate from the Eversfield Estate in 1841 but delayed the development of it until 1847, following the opening of the Bulverhythe rail terminus in West St Leonards by the London Brighton and South Coast Railway. This extension of the railway provided Decimus with the means to affordably deliver supplies of Welsh slates, Portland Stone, cast and wrought iron fittings, as well as the hard-fired ridge and hip tiles. The spoil from the railway cuttings through the Wadhurst Clay cliffs

conveniently provided ironstone for the external walls.

The Cottage's circa 2 acres grounds are delineated by the green line on the recorded copy (initialled "DB") of the 1873 ordnance survey in Hastings Museum (Figure 2). They merged with the garden of North Lodge, the latter year's residence of Decimus' sister, Jane Wood.

The Cottage was initially constructed to facilitate liaison between Decimus and his younger brother and pupil, Alfred, who by common agreement with his five brothers managed their joint inheritance following their father, James Burton Snr's, death in 1837.



Figure 2. The grounds as recorded in the 1873 ordnance survey (Hastings Museum)

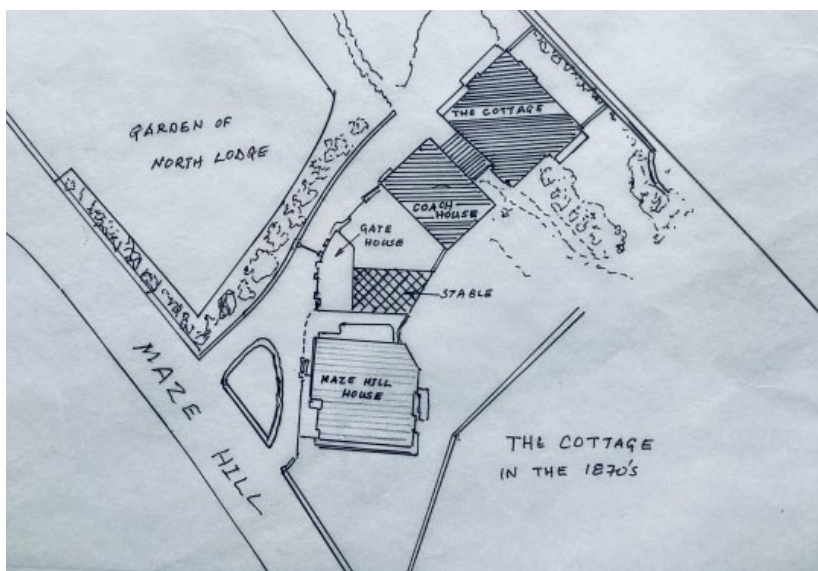


Figure 3. The Cottage's ground in the 1870s

It also made it easier for Decimus to attend the occasional meetings of the St Leonards Commissioners, following the 1832 St Leonards Improvement Act, as well as visiting his four siblings who had made St Leonards their principle residence<sup>3</sup>.

The building remained a single storey residence while Decimus pursued his large practice from his London office and residence at 6 Spring Gardens, Westminster, until 1864 when it was upgraded by the addition of an add storey<sup>4</sup>.

As a bachelor, Decimus had a small household. Consequently, his additions to The Cottage were limited to maintaining security in his absence and for accommodating his horse and carriage. The plans (Figure 2 and 3) are based on the 1873 ordnance survey and later records submitted for Building Regulations approvals identifies the uses of ancillary buildings.

The Cottage had a coach house added to its south-west elevation. That the coach house had a chimney indicates that this annex had living accommodation for a groom. The gated entrance had an adjacent cottage which was originally the residence of the gate keeper, and abutting this was stabling for a horse.

Near the northern extremity of the grounds there was a garden

store and glass house. The gardens extended south east from this in a series of terraces which reflected the gradient of Maze Hill, each terrace being supported by drystone retaining walls constructed from Tunbridge Wells sandstone<sup>2</sup>.

Benjamin Homan's and George Scott's Maze Hill House was a separate residence beyond the boundary of Decimus' land<sup>5</sup>.

The Cottage continued in this state until Decimus' death in 1881 when it became a subsidiary residence of his heir and nephew, Alfred Henry Burton, the only son of his youngest brother and pupil, Alfred. Alfred Henry was born at 64 Marina in St Leonards in 1845 and was educated at Harrow and thence Trinity College Cambridge in 1863 where he was awarded a BA in 1866 and an MA in 1873. He was subsequently called to the bar at the Inner Temple in 1874. From 1867-93 he was clerk to the Charity Commissioner. D.L J.P Hastings and High Sheriff of East Sussex. He was only 36 when he inherited the combined St Leonards estates of James, Decimus and Alfred Burton rendering him a very wealthy person indeed.

The following 4 copies of drawings (figures 4,5,6 and 7) have been assembled by Liam Kelly from drawings in the archives of the East Sussex County Records Office and show plans approved for building

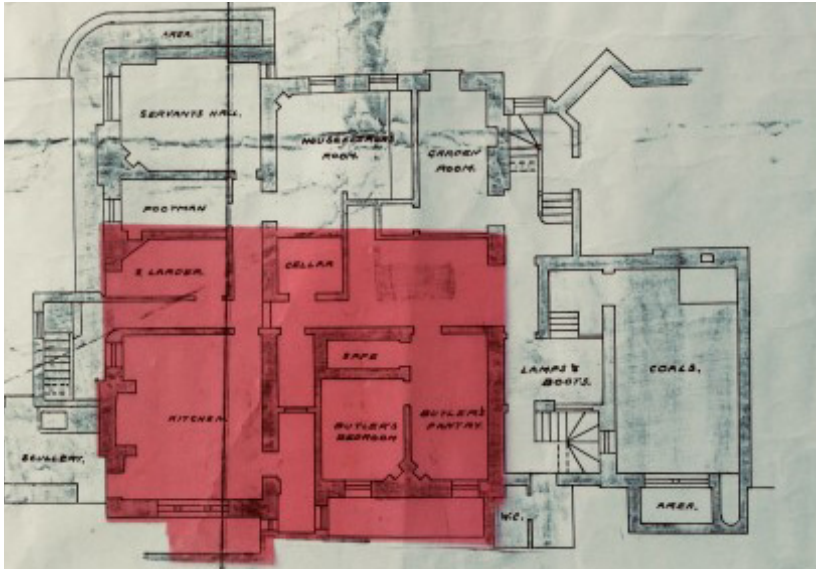


Figure 4. Lower ground floor as extended by Alfred Henry Burton in 1897.

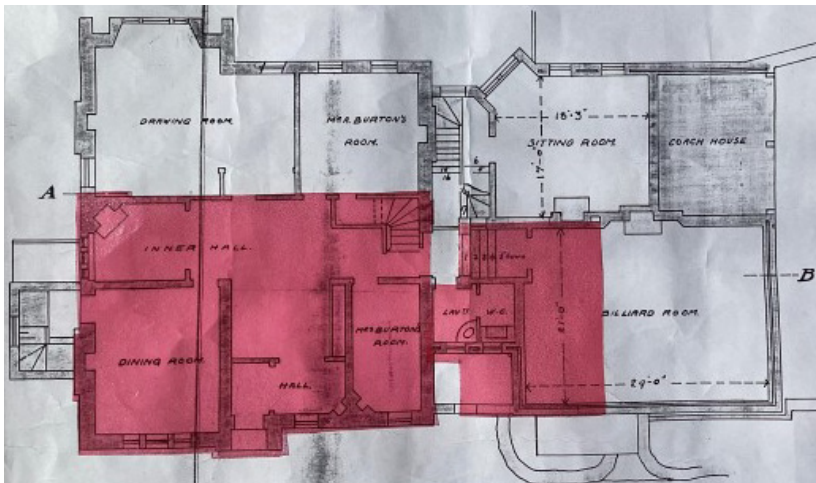
The pink area is that of The Cottage.

Source: Drawings in the East Sussex County Records Office

Figure 5. Ground floor as extended by Alfred Henry Burton in 1897.

The pink area is that of The Cottage.

Source: Drawings in the East Sussex County Records Office





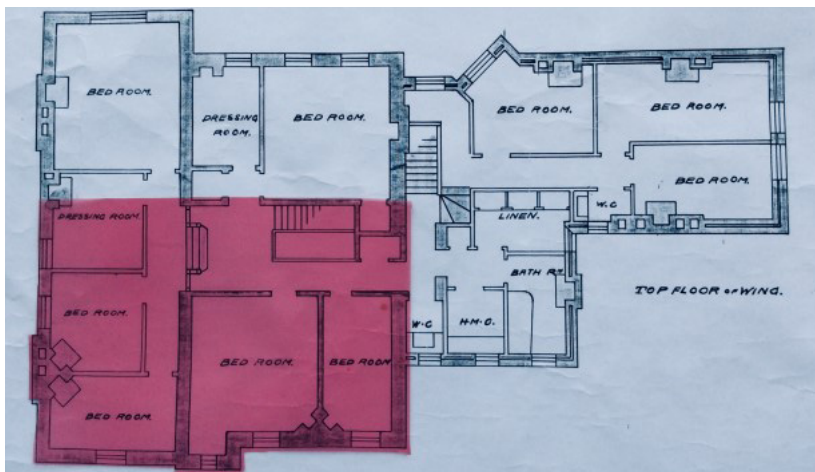
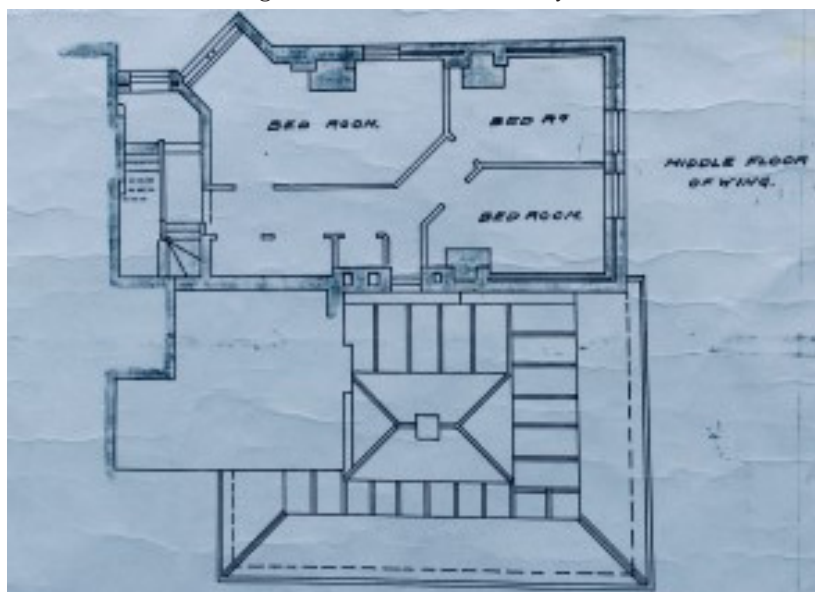


Figure 6. First floor as extended by Alfred Henry Burton in 1897.  
The pink area is that of The Cottage.  
Source: Drawings in the East Sussex County Records Office

Figure 7. Mezzanine floor and billiard room roof as added  
by Alfred Henry Burton in 1897.  
Source: Drawings in the East Sussex County Records Office



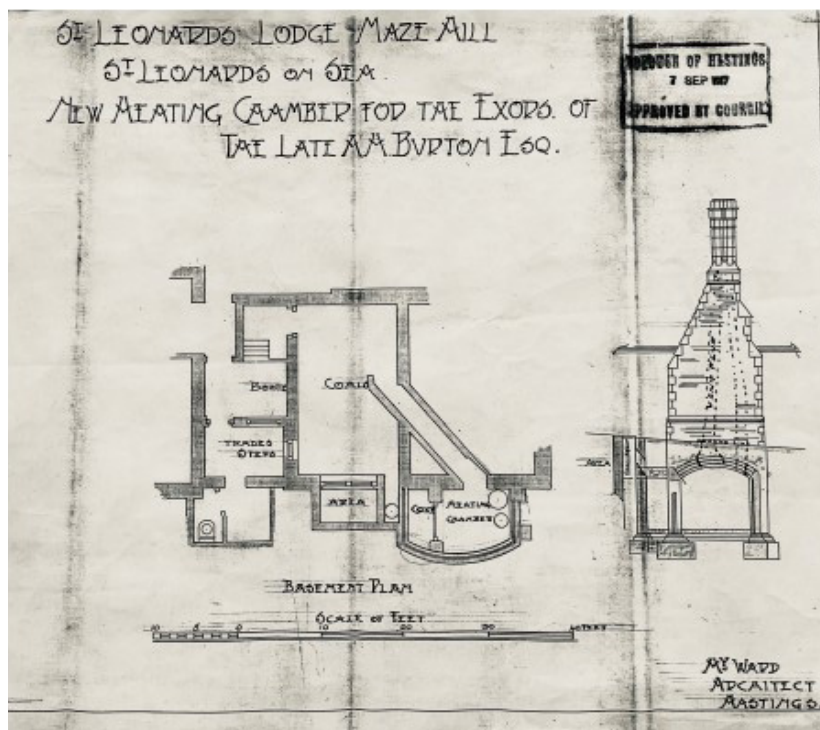


Figure 8. Boiler House commissioned by A H Burton  
Source: Drawings in the East Sussex County Records Office

regulations by Hastings Borough Council. In 1897, Alfred Henry Burton commissioned Decimus' last pupil, Edward John May, to refashion the interior by enlarging the house to 25 rooms with the addition of south-east extensions and a billiard room. The stables were at the same time enlarged and re-sited. The scale of the transformations are recorded in May's drawings.

The final addition which Alfred



Figure 8a. The chimney from the heating chamber in 2022  
(BStLSoc photo)



Henry Burton commissioned was a new boiler house under the south-west corner of the billiard room (see figures 8 and 8a). It was designed by the local architect Henry Ward and constructed a few months after his death in 1917.

Alfred Henry's principal residence was Manson Place, South Kensington – a six-storey building of 17 rooms. The St. Leonards house reflects his status as a J.P and High Sheriff of East Sussex, mirroring his grandfather's James Burton, Mabledon 250 acre estate in Southborough when he was elected High Sheriff of Kent in 1811. The 'upwardly mobile' have always declared their wealth in their extravagant residences but Alfred Henry had another reason to have abodes with many rooms, namely that he had four sons from his 1877 marriage to Ellen Amelia Dickson as the following résumé shows.

The three elder sons were educated at Winchester College and Oriel College, Oxford before proceeding to training as infantry officers:

- Arthur Collingwood Burton born 04.01.1878, 2nd lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards, killed 26.12.1899 in the South African Wars aged 21.
- Robert Cecil Burton (twin brother) born 20.11.1882. Captain in the Rifle Brigade. Died 16.03.1915 of wounds sustained in the battle of Neuve Chapelle aged 33.
- Stephen John Burton (twin brother) born . Major in the Coldstream Guards killed in action 21.07.1917, aged 34.
- Maurice George Walker Burton born Manson Place, 1894 – twelve years later than his twin brothers! He was educated at Winchester College and Trinity College Cambridge where his application to studies had parallels with his great uncle, James Haliburton. In 1914 he enrolled as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Service Corps retiring from the War Office as a Captain discharged "medically unfit". As the surviving son, Maurice Burton inherited Alfred Henry's estate in South Kensington and St Leonards in 1917. He died a bachelor in 1942 in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, London, aged 47. His funeral was in Christ Church St Leonards and he was buried in the family grave at Fairlight<sup>8</sup>.

Maurice's sole addition to St Leonards Lodge was a garage for his Rolls Royce (Figure 9) with accommodation for a chauffeur designed in 1917 by the local architect, Henry Ward, as the reproduction of plans and elevations copied from the building regulations approval in the East

Sussex County Records Office show. The stables, gate house and Maze Hill House were demolished to make way for this. The forked entrance meanwhile was reduced to an angled single driveway and the gates re-sited closer to Maze Hill. The gates were later removed for the WW2 effort and have not been replaced.

Maurice Burton retained St Leonards Lodge as a second residence until March 1929 when he put it up for sale<sup>6</sup>: *“vacant possession 5 reception rooms, billiard room, 15 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, garage for 6 cars and chauffeurs rooms. Delightful gardens*

*of one and three quarters acres”*.

In 1930, St Leonards Lodge was the residence of:

- Lady Hutton, widow of Lieutenant General Sir Edward Hutton
- Marian Granville – single – private means
- Aimee Jackson – single – private means
- and four servants<sup>7</sup>.

These three ladies lived as if nothing had been changed by the 1914-18 war. They remained in the house throughout the 1939-45 war despite the threat of invasion of the south coast, and Luftwaffe bombing,

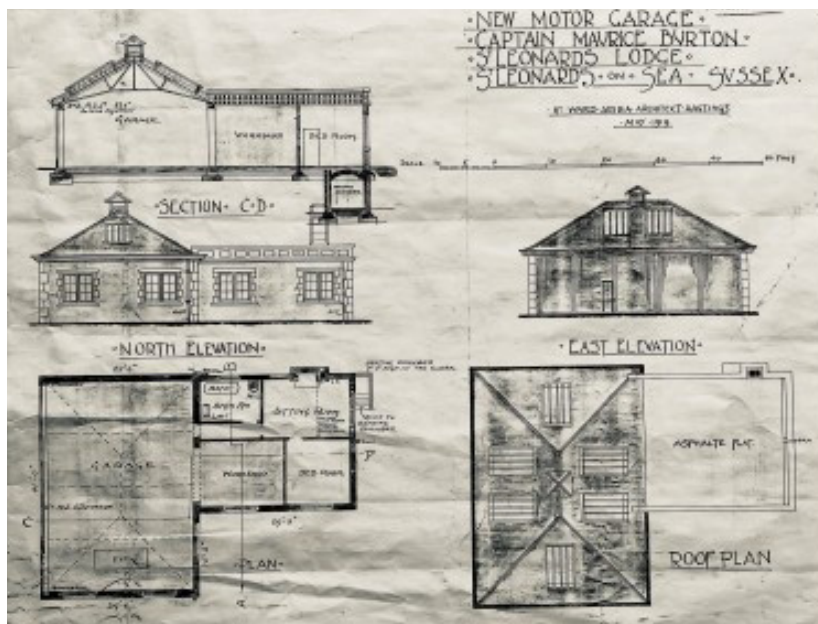


Figure 9. M G Wlaker Burton garage addition  
Source: Drawings in the East Sussex County Records Office

which became intense in 1943-44. Although bombs fell in Kenilworth Road and in St Leonards Gardens no significant damage was sustained by St Leonards Lodge or its garden (Lady Hutton died in March 1950, aged 91<sup>8</sup>).

On 18th March 1950, retrospective planning permission was granted for “change of use from dwelling house to residential school<sup>9</sup>” and in June of that year, the freehold was acquired as the site of Queen’s School, a day school for girls and small boys. This was a niche private school founded by Miss Isabel Kathleen Armstrong (born in Dublin in 1878), initially in Battle and from 1938 to 1950 in Fairlight Hall<sup>10</sup>. She quit that in 1950 because of the high costs of maintenance. In October 1950, the house and furniture were sold separately at auctions<sup>11</sup>.

#### Acknowledgements:

*This summary was composed from research undertaken by the following members of the Burtons’ St Leonards Society: Liam Kelly, Christopher-Maxwell Stuart, Hugh Bryant, and Stephen van Dulken with assistance from archivists at Hastings Museum and East Sussex County Records Office.*

#### **14th September 1967 - Listed Grade II No 1043449**

**“Circa 1845 designed by Decimus Burton who lived there for many years. 3 storey house in coursed ironstone. Basement. Slate roof hipped with wide bracket eaves. Many stone chimney stacks with cornices and octagonal pots. All stone string courses and quoins. Asymmetrical design. Main elevation facing drive has at its centrepiece a massive round-headed door set within a projecting bay. A gable end to left has bargeboards. All windows rectangular. Wrought iron railings to basement. Garden elevation unimpressive. Building now divided into flats.”**

#### Notes:

1. Decimus Burton delayed its construction until he could be assured of supplies of high quality building materials viz Jurassic freestone, Welsh slates, and Staffordshire hard-fired ridge and hip tiles. That ensued when the terminus of the London Brighton and South Coast Railway opened in Bulverhythe West St Leonards in 1826.
2. When James Burton committed building his St Leonards New Town in 1828 the local geology was simply known as the Hastings Beds being clayey, silty sandstones and mudstones of the earliest lowest strata of

- the Cretaceous era. James had quarried the lowest stratum (the Ashdown Formation) of the Hastings Beds after he acquired Quarry Hill, Southborough, in Kent, in 1805 and had his Mabledon residence built there. He learned the hard way in 1829 that the middle strata of the Hastings Beds – Wadhurst Clay – contained lenses of highly unstable mudstone. Decimus, however, was a beneficiary of the ironstone which occurs in lenses in the Wadhurst Clay.. This is a dense hard stone which became abundantly available as spoil from railway cuttings and tunnels. It was the prime material used in Decimus' The Cottage, The Uplands, Baston Lodge and Clone House, 3 Upper Maze Hill.
3. Four of Decimus' siblings lived in St Leonards in at least the latter years of their lives, in houses built by their father. The eldest, William Ford retired to South Lodge when he ceased to manage the Burton Gunpowder Company. Eliza, the third born, remained a spinster, residing firstly in 36 Marina and latterly 5 West Hill Road. The sixth born, Jane, who married the City entrepreneur Thomas Wood, resided for the latter years of her life in North Lodge until her death in 1878. Alfred, penultimate child and sixth son of James and Elizabeth Burton, lived in St Leonards from 1837 and latterly in 64 Marina until his death in 1877. Eliza and Jane devoted their lives to charitable works, notably in establishing the first National School in Hastings Borough. Alfred managed the Burton Estate post 1837 as Chair of the St Leonards Commissioners, later becoming a JP, alderman and a mayor of Hastings.
  4. Specifications dated May 1864 in Hastings Museum details the steps to protect the original house whilst its chimneys and roof are dismantled and the property extended by one storey.
  5. Brighton Gazette July 1834 records this as a speculation of Benjamin Homan and George Scott.
  6. Hastings and St Leonards Observer (HSLO) March 1930.
  7. Electoral Register 1930.
  8. HSLO 1st February 1942 Obituary.
  9. HS/FA/51/00108.
  10. Fairlight Hall "a Gothic castle in the Georgian romantic tradition designed by John Crake an early pupil of Decimus Burton, as the residence of William Lucas-Shadwell 1846-1849" Pevsner and Antrim, Buildings of England, East Sussex, YUP 2012.
  11. HSLO 14th October 1950 "Sale by auction of St Leonards Lodge with vacant possession by order of the Trustees of the late Lady Hutton" and "Sale by auction of the furniture of St Leonards by order of Miss Granville."

# VISIT TO THE COTTAGE

Some photographs the The Cottage taken during a visit by some members of the Decimus Burton Society in 2021

*Photographs by Paul Avis*

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Previous page - The entrance front from the driveway

Above - Ground floor, looking out onto the rear terrace from a reception room

Next page - The Front door from the entrance lobby







Above - Panelling in the entrance hall  
Below - One of the reception room ceilings



Below - Fireplace and window in the entrance lobby looking out to the driveway

Next page - Our guide for the visit at the entrance to The Cottage







# THE IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES

“An archive is a reminder of the past, but more importantly, it is a source of knowledge, caution or inspiration for the future<sup>1</sup>.”

*By Fiona Orsini, Curator*

*RIBA Drawings & Archives Collections*

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The RIBA Library cares for one of the largest and most wide-ranging architectural collections in the world. With over four million items, it represents a huge and unique body of knowledge that is rich and international in its scope. From 15th century books and drawings to photographs documenting architecture around the world today, the collections offer huge global appeal and a wealth of historical detail. Together

they represent the national collection for architecture in the UK, are recognised as a Designated Outstanding Collection and are accredited by the Arts Council England.

When the Institute of British Architects was formed in 1834, the creation of a collection was one of its driving aims. Its purpose was threefold; to be an educational tool for students training to be



Figure 1. Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects, 9 Conduit Street, London, c.1934, prior to moving to its new premises at 66 Portland Place  
©RIBA Collections

architects, a source of inspiration for architects already in the profession and a record of British architectural practice.

Since then, many RIBA Members have donated their own work, practice archives and private

collections. Over the years, students, historians, writers, artists, and practising architects have used the collections to understand the past and plan for the future and they have been written about by world-leading scholars and exhibited around the world.



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The RIBA Collections are available to all and free to access. The collections can be used for many different purposes such as learning about specific architects or styles of architecture, researching individual buildings or projects, discovering built and unbuilt schemes from around the world and understanding the history and present practice of the architectural profession.

Developing the scholarship of the collections is very much a collaborative process and importantly includes the sharing of knowledge and personal time from subject specialists, academics, and enthusiasts. It is often only through their valuable help in assisting RIBA staff that archives can become better informed, organised and more widely understandable through creating handlists and cataloguing.

#### Notes:

1. Arthur Barker (2016), The importance of Architectural Archives, *Journal of the South African Institute of Architects*. pp.6-9

# THE COLOSSEUM

## Burton's lost masterpiece - Part II 1845-1875

*By Paul Avis*

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Since its initial opening in 1829, The Colosseum had been visited by more than a million people. When the property changed hands in 1835, some alterations were made, but these did not maintain its popularity as a tourist attraction, and there were fears that the building would be pulled down and the site developed for housing – forty years later this was indeed to be its fate. For the time being, however, the Colosseum had been purchased by a new investor who employed the designer, a Mr W. Bradwell<sup>1</sup>, to remodel and renovate the entire site, with the aim to re-open it in May 1845.

The Illustrated London News featured an article about the remodelling of the Colosseum on April 26, 1845. In it, there was a description of the “Mountain

Scenery” that had been installed to compliment the Swiss Cottage (featured in our last issue). The mountains (see Figure 1) were described as “the finest specimen of Model Scenery executed in this country”. At a time when travel to Switzerland and Italy was made popular through the exploits of the likes of Byron and Shelly, maintaining the popularity of the Grand Tours, the miniature landscape not only complemented the Swiss Cottage, but reflected the tastes of the day. It also provided a wider audience with the opportunity to experience a flavour of what their heroes were experiencing in the flesh.

You will notice to the left of the illustration a part of the Swiss Cottage (The Chalet). To the right is the snow clad peak of Mount Blanc,



Figure 1. "The Colosseum: The Chalet, Mer de Glace, Mont Blanc etc"  
from The Illustrated London News, April 26, 1845.



Figure 2. "The Glyptotheca, or Museum of Sculpture"  
from The Illustrated London News, April 26, 1845.

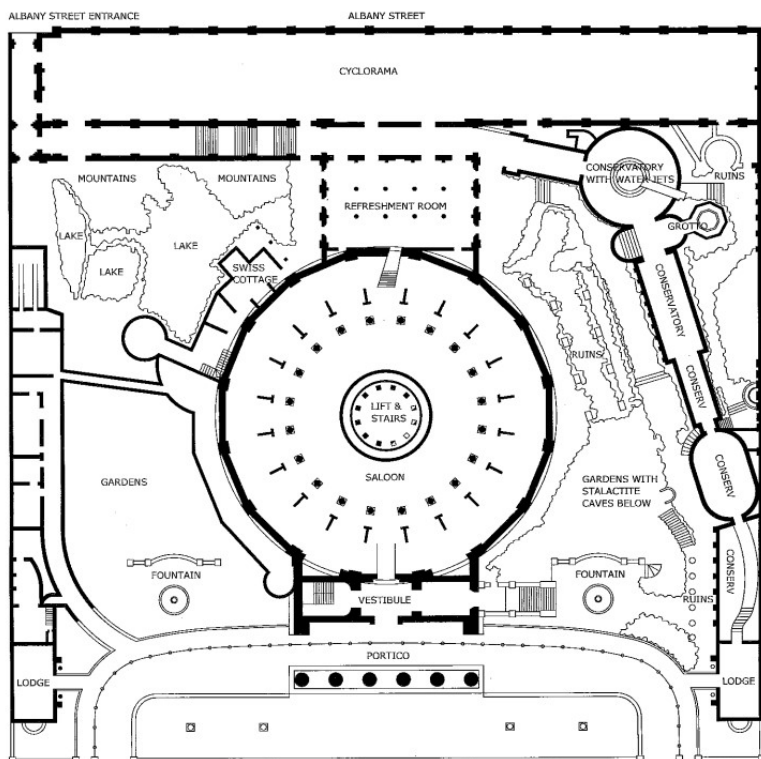


Figure 3. Plan of The Colosseum site drawn by the author after a plan in the papers that accompanied the auction of the building in 1855 by Messrs Winstanley. The Glyptotheca occupied the previous saloon space. Reproduced by author.

with a series of torrents, precipices and lakes in between. How these were achieved in miniature we can only imagine.

The second major attraction (Figure 2) was the Glyptotheca, or Museum of Sculpture, which was an entirely new exhibition, and replaced the temporary tent-like structure in the saloon that had been a feature of the Colosseum when it opened in 1829.

The illustration shows the Museum of Sculpture as a magnificent circular exhibition space with an internal glass dome of “several thousand feet of richly cut glass springing from an entablature and cornice supported by numerous columns.” Above the columns was a frieze that was described as being “enriched with the whole Panathenaic procession from the Elgin marbles, and is continued without interruption throughout



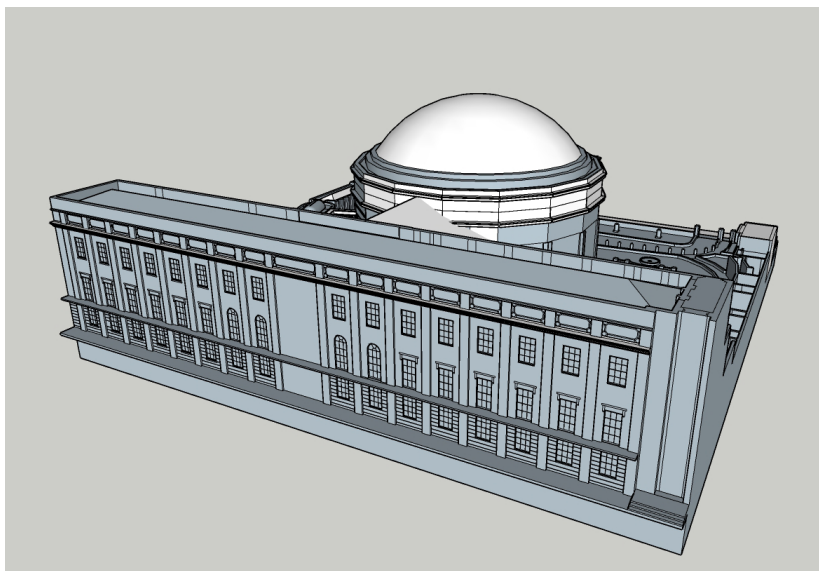


Figure 4. A recreation of the Albany Street entrance to the Cyclorama, by the author.



Figure 5. The Hall of Mirrors – a period print in the author's collection

RE-OPENING OF THE COLOSSEUM, REGENT'S PARK.



Figure 6. One of Decimus Burton's conservatories, remodelled in the Arabesque style – from an illustration in *The Illustrated London News*, 3 May 1845 in the author's collection



the entire circumference of the hall, above which are 20 fresco paintings of allegorical subjects on panels; the mouldings, cornices, capitals of columns and enrichments, being all in gold; modelled by Mr Henning, Jun; painted by Mr Absalom.”

The circular promenade between the columns and exterior walls of the Colosseum, with their niches, provided spaces to display pieces of sculpture from both British and eminent foreign sculptors. The lighting around the sculpture hall was supported by figures “tastefully modelled by Mr Henning Jun.” The ILN article made it clear that Mr Bradwell had executed a clever remodelling of this interior space. From the Glyptotheca, and hidden behind the drapes seen in the centre of the illustration, the visitor still had the opportunity to visit the Panorama of London via either the staircases or “the Ascending Room”, which we are told, was “handsomely decorated in the Elizabethan style”, and was “lit by a stained glass ceiling.” The panorama, or “Grand Picture of London” as it was sometimes called, had been repainted by Mr E.T. Parris. If that wasn’t enough, to keep the freshness of the experience alive, a new panorama of London by Night was added. The night time panorama was essentially the same as the daytime panorama, although it had to be erected and illuminated

every evening after the close of the morning exhibition<sup>2</sup>.

To the east there was a new building facing Albany Street with a new entrance to the site in the top left of the plan (Figure 3). I have attempted to reconstruct the exterior from the information available (see Figure 4). In May 1845 the interior of this building was described as being incomplete.

Once completed, visitors using the Albany Street entrance were led from a lobby round to the basement via a series of descending staircases reminiscent of the entrance to the Vatican. This staircase was lit by several “circles of cut and ground glass by day”, and at night by “26 bronze tripods”. Upon reaching the bottom of the stairs, they were then led to a spacious room supported on columns and “adorned with brilliant glass chandeliers” (figure 5). This was set aside for the sale of refreshments. Glass doors to the north led to the Swiss Cottage, while a similar set of doors to the south led visitors to the range of conservatories, and the promenade.

Decimus Burton’s conservatories were entirely refitted and redecorated in the Arabesque style for the new opening (Figure 6). Described as a “tasteful combination of the Moorish and

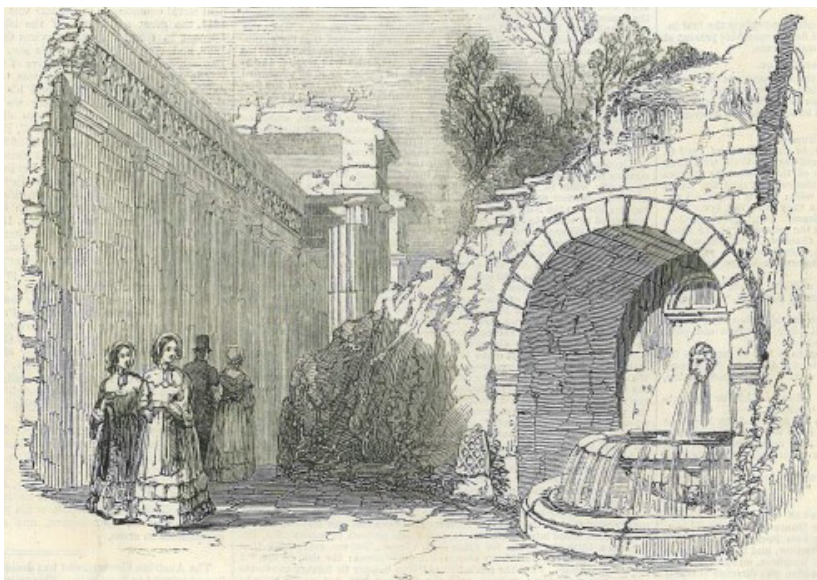


Figure 7. The ruins of a Roman fountain and the Temple of Apollo Epicurus, from *The Illustrated London News* in the author's collection

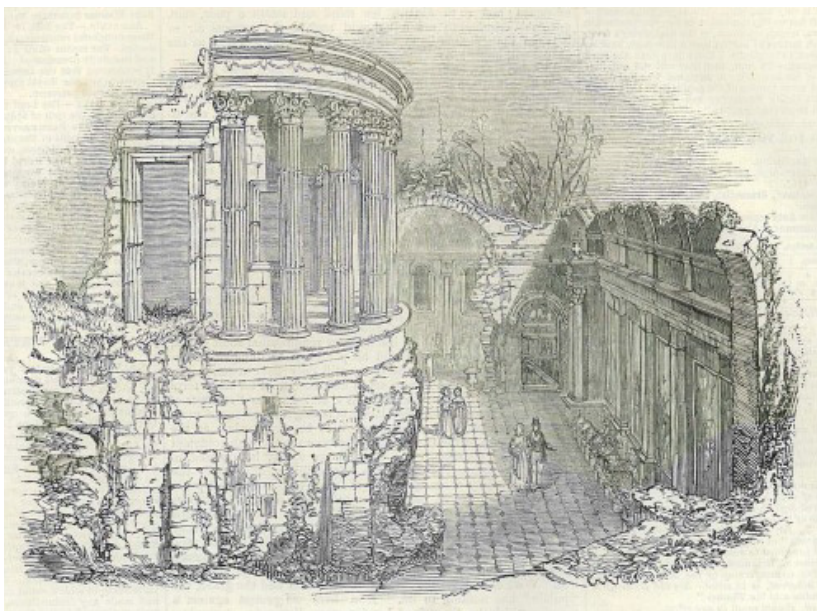


Figure 8. The ruins of the Temple of Vesta from *The Illustrated London News* in the author's collection



Figure 9. Italian ruins from *The Illustrated London News* in the author's collection

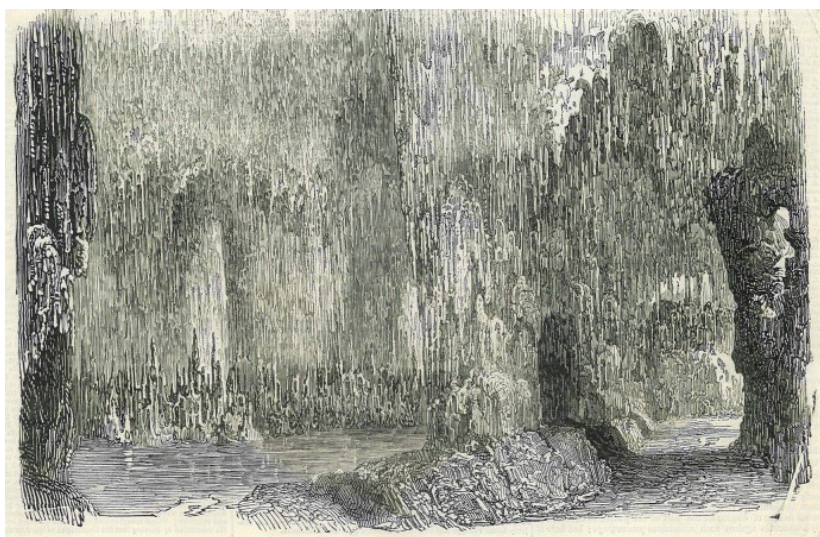


Figure 10. The Stalactite Grotto from *The Illustrated London News* in the author's collection



Gothic” they featured a Gothic Aviary with “gilt carvings, and looking-glass”. Once outside the conservatories, visitors would promenade past miniatures of ancient ruins that the writer says readers might “find reflected in the glowing pages of Lord Byron” (a reference to the author’s “Child Harold’s Pilgrimage”). The ruins were not intended to be exact copies of Greek or Roman Temples, but were intended to instill images of the Temple of Vesta and the Arch of Titus at Rome, and the Temple of Theseus at Athens (Figures 7, 8 and 9). One can’t help but admire the ability of Mr Bradwell to create such an experience within a relatively small space.

Having promenaded the ancient ruins, visitors were invited to enter the collection of caves and grottoes below (Figure 10), with their recreations of stalagmites and stalagmites, designed to conjure up images of the famous caves at Adelsberg. As at Adelsberg, the caves at the Colosseum were entered via a wooden door and from this entrance, visitors would pass through a long gallery to a series of small and large caverns and grottoes, lit by chandeliers, single candles and wood fires. The illusion of height and distance made it a popular experience with the public.

The Illustrated London News gave another review of The Colosseum on 30 December 1848 which featured yet another new attraction to the site, the Cyclorama. Visitors to this attraction would enter the building from Albany Street. Ascending a staircase, visitors would be led first into “the Rustic Armoury” (Figure 11) constructed from wood, crudely carved and decorated with displays of arms and armour. This room served as a refreshment room and ante room to a theatre or Music Hall, in which was shown the Cyclorama or Exhibition of Moveable Paintings. From the illustration (Figure 12) we can see that this space was reminiscent of a traditional theatre, with a series of boxes, a pit and a stage. To the left of the image is a painted scene, and in front of this are four crouching lions on a flight of steps down which spectators would see the picture pass. The walls on either side, and the ceiling, are decorated with paintings of ancient subjects by John Horner. The Cyclorama, itself, was a moving picture showing the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, and was accompanied by music performed on a new instrument, described as “a grand apollonicon<sup>3</sup>”. This music was performed by Mr Pitman, and included the first movement of the Beethoven “Pastorale”. The apollonicon, built by Messrs. Bevington and Sons,



Figure 11. The Swiss Armoury, or Refreshment Room – from The Illustrated London News Dec 30, 1845 in the author's collection .

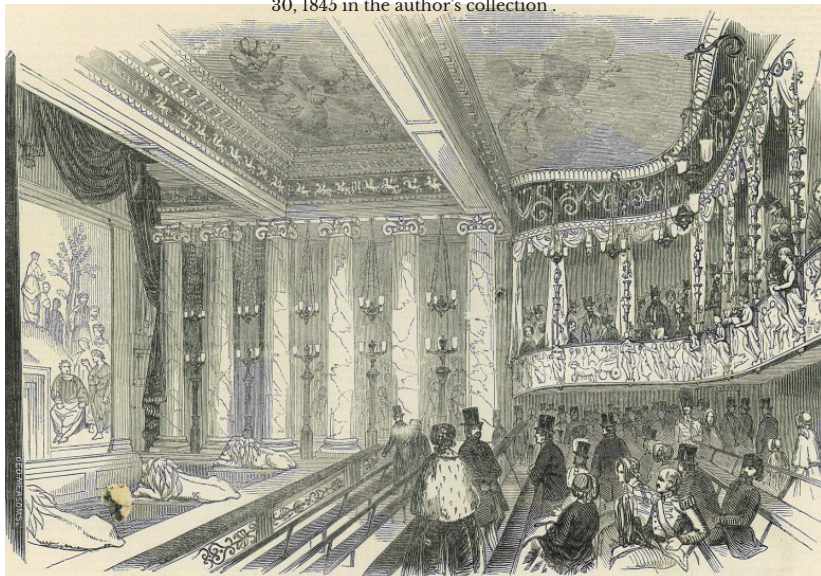


Figure 12. New Theatre, erected for the exhibition of the Cyclorama, at the Colosseum – from The Illustrated London News Dec 30, 1845 in the author's collection



was an instrument that comprised 4 organs, sixteen pedals, fifty-three stops and two thousand four hundred and seven pipes.

Despite the new attractions, the Colosseum's popularity declined, and in 1851, with the success of The Great Exhibition at The Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, its fate was sealed. In 1875 it was finally sold off and demolished with the site given over to housing.

Our final article in the series will attempt to describe how the Colosseum was constructed.

### Notes:

1. William Bradwell had been the chief machinist at the Covent Garden Theatre.
2. The night time panorama was painted on canvas that wasn't fixed to the walls, but had to be raised and lowered by mechanical means.
3. The Apollonicon was a relatively new instrument, first introduced in 1817. It was inspired by the Panharmonicon, an automatic playing machine. Beethoven had composed his "Wellington's Victory" to be played on a mechanical orchestral organ, in 1813, following Wellington's victory over the French at the Battle of Vittoria.



# JOHN HENNING'S PARTHENON FRIEZE

*By Paul Avis*

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Recently, I was fortunate to purchase a miniature replica of one of the most famous Greek friezes, the Parthenon frieze, by John Henning (Figure 1). The single panel, measuring 34cm high x 130cm wide and mounted in a wooden frame, was formerly in the Lord and Lady Sutherland of Houndwood Collection.

John Henning (1771-1851) was a Scottish sculptor, who had earned a reputation for his cameos of personalities such as Sir Walter Scott, attracting the support of Josiah Wedgwood. In 1811 he moved with his wife, Catherine, to London, where he saw the newly arrived Elgin Marbles in Burlington House. Lord Elgin had the marbles



Figure 1. A 1/20 plaster reproduction of the Parthenon frieze signed and dated J HENNING 1818, formerly in the Lord and Lady Sutherland of Houndwood Collection, now in the author's collection

exhibited there before the British Museum was to purchase them in 1816. John Wilson Crocker<sup>1</sup>, was influential in bringing this about, in his correspondence and diaries, published by John Murray in 1884, Murray comments "Mr Crocker gained another success in Parliament during this year by inducing the Legislature to purchase the Elgin marbles, now in the British Museum.....Everybody now acknowledges the almost priceless value of these relics of the Acropolis, but in 1816 it was very difficult to induce the House or the public to regard them as worth the relatively small sum which was paid for them, and which, it was acknowledged, did not suffice to cover the outlay actually incurred by Lord Elgin. Lord Byron had attacked Lord Elgin bitterly for despoiling the Acropolis, but since then it has been almost universally admitted that the marbles of Phidias were only saved

from destruction by a safe home having been provided for them in England."<sup>2</sup>

Elgin had allowed Henning to draw and copy the marbles while they were at Burlington House, a task that was eventually to take the sculptor 12 years, as early on in the process, he also decided to add the Bassae frieze to his work. The Parthenon frieze depicted the annual Panathenaic procession, where every year the Athenians offered a sacred peplos (a body-length womens' garment, made for the Panathenaea festival by a select group of girls, and placed on the statue of Athena during the festival procession. It usually contained images of the mythic battle between gods and giants, and consisted of purple and saffron cloth). The Bassae frieze is from the temple of Apollo Epicouris at Bassae, a village in the heart of the Peloponnese, and represents scenes



**Figure 2.** Detail of Henning's miniature plaster Parthenon Frieze.  
In the author's collection

of Amazons and Centaurs. Both friezes are on display at the British Museum.

For the purposes of the current article, we will be focusing on the Parthenon frieze, as it was this frieze that inspired Decimus Burton and John Wilson Crocker to commission John Henning to produce large scale replicas to adorn their **Athenaeum Club** on Pall Mall (Figure 3). Decimus also commissioned Henning to use a version of the frieze to adorn his **Ionic Screen** entrance to Hyde Park

(Figure 4). The recently purchased plaster Parthenon frieze is a 1/20th reproduction of the original, and is divided into 6 rows, so that each row is approximately 5cm high (Figure 2).

In preparing his sketches, Henning was well aware that the collection of Parthenon sculptures brought back to England by Elgin was incomplete, as a result of the damage inflicted on the Acropolis during one of the many wars between the Ottoman and Venetian Empires. The Ottoman Turks who

**Figure 3.** Detail of Henning's miniature plaster Parthenon Frieze.

© Thomas Erskine







Figure 4 Decimus Burton's Ionic screen entrance to Hyde Park with Henning's sculpture above the central arch taking the form of a freer version of the Parthenon frieze.

© Thomas Erskine

had added Greece to their empire in the fifteenth century, had been besieged on the Acropolis by their enemy in 1687, who hoped to win back the city for the west. During the siege, the Turks had stored an arsenal in the Parthenon in the belief that the Venetians wouldn't want to see the ancient building destroyed. Unfortunately, however, the Venetians fired on the arsenal, causing a tremendous explosion which resulted in considerable damage to the building. It is believed that three of the four walls largely collapsed displacing or damaging many of the sculptures. Only on the west was the frieze intact. Some visitors to the site prior to Elgin's time took fragments of the sculpture away as souvenirs, while locals used other parts of the sculptures and masonry to rebuild their damaged homes and the defences.

As a result of this, Henning had to resort to drawings of the missing sculptures, produced by individuals who had seen them before Lord Elgin removed most of the remainder to England. Many scholars advocate that the most influential of these sketches were produced by the seventeenth century French painter, Jacques Carrey (1649-1726), who made a series of drawings of the Parthenon in 1674. It should be noted, however, that John Henning told Decimus Burton that he referred to sketches produced by Elgin's team of artists and architects.

The Athenaeum Club holds Henning's original estimate to Burton.

This estimate contains the relevant details:

"2 Somers Place West, New Road

28th July, 1828.

"Sir,

"I hereby agree to execute in Bath Stone for the Athenaeum Club, a continued frieze about two hundred and sixty feet in length, to extend round three sides of the Club House erecting in Waterloo Place, the same to be an exact copy of such parts of the frieze of the Parthenon, taken from Marbles in the British Museum as far as they may be sufficient, as the Committee may decide upon, and the remainder of the frieze to be executed and the mutilated parts restored, from drawings which I agree to make from those made of the E.frieze on the spot by the artists employed by Lord Elgin, and from the fragments in the British Museum. The whole to be finished in the best style of workmanship and to be completed within one year from the date of commencement upon the building, and I agree to complete the whole, including all Drawings, Models. Tools, Molds and all Materials whatever, except the stone which is to be fixed ready for use in the wall, and except scaffolding and canvass or other covering over the same, for the total sum of One Thousand Three Hundred Pounds; to be paid monthly as the work proceeds at the rate of 75 per cent. On the value of the work done in the preceding month, in proportion to the amount of the Contract.

"I am, Sir,

Your Obedient Servant,

"John Henning, Junr.

"To Mr. Decimus Burton."<sup>3</sup>

The artists that Henning refers to are probably those mentioned in the “Memorandum on the subject of the Earl of Elgin’s pursuits in Greece”. This book, attributed to W.R. Hamilton, the leader of Elgin’s expedition to document and recover the marbles, was written (and published in 1815) to justify their removal from the Parthenon, and coincided with Elgin’s approach to the government to buy his collection from him. In the book, Hamilton, who had advised Elgin throughout the expedition, mentions commissioning the architect, Mr Harrison, Don Tita Lusiera (one of the best general painters in Europe at the time), Signior Balestra, another architect, and Theodore to prepare sketches, drawings and plaster casts of the sculptures they surveyed. Could this be the team of artists that Henning refers to in his letter to Decimus Burton of 28 July 1828?

Decimus Burton, who was trained in classical architecture under such tutors as Soane and Nash, would have been well aware of the arrival of the Parthenon sculptures at Burlington House. John Wilson Crocker, who had been influential in securing the Elgin marbles for the British Museum had also been influential in having Decimus appointed as the architect for the new Athenaeum Club building. In addition, Decimus’ father, James

Burton, had built the temporary home of The Athenaeum Club at 12 Waterloo Place, and together with his son, had been some of the earliest members of the club.

In 1825 Decimus Burton commissioned John Henning to decorate the top of the centrepiece to his Ionic Screen at the entrance to Hyde Park using a freer version of the Parthenon frieze. In 1828, however, as architect of the new Athenaeum Club on Pall Mall, Burton again commissioned Henning to provide a faithful reproduction of approximately half of the frieze to adorn the top of the building. John Wilson Crocker, a founding member of the club and the then Secretary to the Admiralty, fully supported Burton’s wish to include the frieze in his design. Crocker’s enthusiasm prompted some wit of the day to compose the lines “I’m John Wilson Crocker, I do as I please. Instead of an Ice-House I give you a ....Frieze!”

The Athenaeum Club’s reports on Decimus Burton’s building from 1826 and 1827, contain the following reference to the ornamental frieze – “the Committee had no hesitation in selecting the Panathenaic procession which formed the frieze of the Parthenon as the most appropriate as well as the most beautiful specimen of sculpture which could be adopted. To an



Figure 5. A detail of the 1/20 scale reproduction showing “Hennin F” and “1818” in the seats. From the author’s collection.

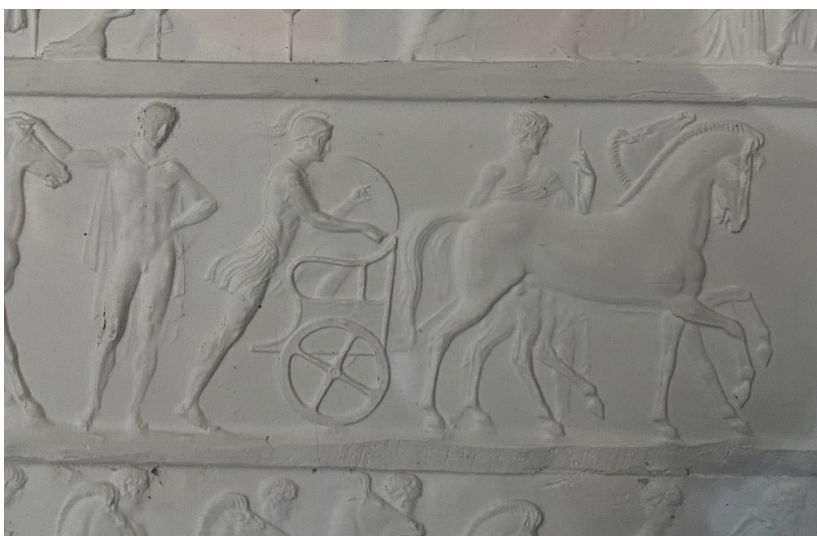


Figure 6. Another detail from the 1/20 reproduction. From the author’s collection.



Figure 7. A detail of Greek cavalry. From the author's collection.



Figure 8. A detail showing bulls at the procession. From the author's collection.



edifice which borrows its name from Athens, intended for the reception of a Society professedly connected with Literature and Fine Arts, they flatter themselves that the celebrated production of Athenian taste, restored as it is here is to a degree of perfection in which it had never been seen in modern times, would not be considered inappropriate.”<sup>3</sup>

Initially, Henning attempted to carve the miniatures in ivory, a medium he would have been familiar with from the miniature cameos he had made. Finally, however, he reproduced the frieze in reverse from slate, from which he would be able to make copies in plaster to be sold to the public. The Greek and Roman Department of the British Museum has the original slate moulds of Henning’s miniatures, along with several sets of the casts themselves, while Ian Jenkins, in his book “The Parthenon Frieze” Published in 1994 by the British Museum Press, contains images of the complete Parthenon frieze made up of photos of the Elgin marbles, along with reconstructions of the missing sections, compiled from Carrey’s sketches and conjecture.

In an advertisement dated “18th December 1820”, Henning declared that the friezes, mounted in their oak frames, “form elegant ornaments for a chimney-piece, or, fitted up in imitation of

volumes are adapted to the library.” Unfortunately for Henning, his miniatures were easily pirated, and what should have provided a lucrative business for the sculptor, generated only a modest income. In an attempt to counter the piracy and claim originality of the work, Henning carved his name, as well as dates and sometimes place of production on the casts. In the case of the frieze recently purchased, the inscription reads HENNING F (for fecit) 1818. Even this action failed to stop the lucrative trade in counterfeits.m

#### Notes:

1. John Wilson Crocker was a founder member of the Athenaeum Club on Pall Mall.
2. quotation from “The Crocker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the late Right Honourable John Wilson Crocker”, published by John Murray in 1884 (pages 85-86).
3. History of The Athenaeum 1824 – 1925, By Humphry Ward. Printed for the Club, London, 1926 (Pages 37 – 38).



# Book Review

“The Last Days of a  
Condemned. From  
the French of M.  
Victor Hugo with  
observations on  
Capital Punishment”

*By Sir P. Hesketh Fleetwood,  
Bart, M.P.*

At first glance, the reader may be thinking why we have included a book review on a subject that focuses on capital punishment from 1840, and what does it have to do with Decimus Burton's life and work.

Victor Hugo's book was first published in 1829, having been written very quickly after he had witnessed an executioner greasing a guillotine in preparation for an execution. The subject of the book, a condemned man, remains anonymous - could it be because the author wants us to feel that “but for the grace of God” he could be any one of us? While waiting for the fateful day he writes down his thoughts, feelings and fears. He describes prison life, and although

we are not told of his crime, there are hints that he has killed someone. As the day of his execution gets closer, the condemned man meets another prisoner who tells him that he was originally sent to prison for stealing a loaf of bread to save his sister's family. The reader can't



Image from Victor Hugo's first edition of  
The Last Days of a Condemned, 1829,  
Published by Gosselin

help but recognise in this man Hugo's future hero Jean Valjean from *Les Misérables*. On the day the condemned man is to be executed he sees his three year old daughter for the last time, but she no longer recognises him, and after desperately pleading in vain for his life, he curses the people who are screaming outside the prison, impatiently awaiting the spectacle of his execution.

Hugo's book was translated into English twice in 1840, with Sir Peter's version being the second. What was different about his translation was that it includes his personal case for why anyone who is against capital punishment should read it, echoing the sentiments of Victor Hugo himself, who had written the novel to express his belief that the death penalty should be abolished.

My interest in this particular book followed research into how the development of Fleetwood came about. Like many great enterprises, Fleetwood's creation as an important new town of the 1830s and 40s was the result of a collaboration of visionaries, and in this case, close friends. Decimus Burton had already achieved a reputation for designing the successful community development of Calverley New Town in Tunbridge Wells, which itself had followed on from his father's new town development of St Leonards,

and their joint involvement with Nash on the Regent's Park development in London. In Tunbridge Wells, Burton's client had been John Ward, who had purchased a large estate which he saw as an ideal business opportunity to develop a site that would attract buyers from those wishing to live in the country within easy travelling distance from the city. At Fleetwood, however, Sir Peter Hesketh Fleetwood, had a different motivation behind his development – that of providing a holiday resort for the less well-off working classes.

The final layout of Fleetwood, as well as the design and composition of the individual buildings, was a direct response to Hesketh's brief. Peter Hesketh was not merely someone who believed in improving the lives of the less fortunate, but was someone who was personally prepared to invest his time and money into improving their lot. His book reinforces his position on the treatment of the working classes - in this case faced with a legal system he believed to be not only unjust and imbalanced, but one whose harsh punishment for crime often achieved nothing when it came to improving society. Peter's sentiments were not unique. In France, Victor Hugo wrote about the treatment of the poor, while closer to home, Charles Dickens, was busy writing novels focusing on the treatment of the less

well off. Dickens, whose own father, mother and siblings had themselves spent time at the Marshalsea debtors' prison in Southwark, was a member of The Athenaeum Club from 1838<sup>1</sup>, and would have certainly known Decimus Burton, who was also a member. It is hardly surprising therefore that the writings of authors such as Dickens would have had an impact on both of Sir Peter and Decimus, who were close friends.

What adds to the interest of this particular translation of Hugo's novel is that Sir Peter dedicates his book to Queen Victoria, stating "Madam, the personal favour which your Majesty has been so graciously pleased to confer on me, in allowing the present dedication, - thus implying a confidence in the probable nature of the work - will not, I trust, be found to have been misused by me, should your Majesty hereafter honour the volume by perusal" - the assumption being that he believes the Queen to be sympathetic to the case in favour of abolishing the death penalty. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were to visit Fleetwood in September 1847 attracting large crowds.

This is an opportunity to read a translation of a less well known short novel with the hindsight of knowing

how it influenced one of the most important new town developments of the early Victorian era in England.

Reviewed by Paul Avis

*"The Last Days of a Condemned. From the French of M. Victor Hugo with observations on Capital Punishment"*

By Sir P. Hesketh Fleetwood, Bart, M.P.  
Published by Smith, Elder & Co., 65  
Cornhill, London, 1840.

#### Notes:

1. As found on page 53 of "History of The Athenaeum 1824 - 1925" by Humphry Ward, printed for the Club, London, 1926



# News

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## *The Decimus Burton Museum Project - update.*

In 2022 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council granted the Civic Society and The Decimus Burton Society a year in which to come forward with a Business Plan for our proposal to create a Decimus Burton Historic House Museum and Archive in the Regency villas designed by him at nos 9 & 10 Crescent Road. The Plan, which ran to 130 pages, was duly submitted to the Council in April 2023, and a presentation was given by members of the project team to the Council's Property Asset Oversight Panel. Councillors on the Panel were impressed by the comprehensive work that had been undertaken, but had concerns, particularly with regard to the Council's current position on finances and staffing. While the Council was supportive of the concept of promoting culture and tourism, it was mindful also of the need to weigh this up against the potential risks associated with such a venture. The Council's response was brief and vague. Consequently, we have asked them for details about their concerns, to allow us the opportunity to address them. We are awaiting these details. Meanwhile, we remain in discussion with the Heritage Lottery Fund, and are currently working on the provision of specific information it has requested. Needless to say, the project can only proceed if it has the support of both the Council and the Lottery Fund, and we are continuing in our efforts to achieve that outcome.



# News

## *Archives - update.*

In our last issue of DECIMUS we reported that a secondary school student from Tunbridge Wells, as part of her school's work experience programme, had assisted in archiving some Decimus Burton material. The programme had included continuing the work that Elizabeth Nathaniels had started on Philip Miller's archive of Decimus Burton material at the RIBA. Since then, Sarah has followed up on her work at the RIBA, as well as work on other Decimus Burton archival material from other collections. The work on Philip's archive, meanwhile, is ongoing.

In addition to Philip Miller's material, Neil Cooke's widow recently donated her late husband's extensive archive on Decimus Burton to the Society. This is an impressive collection of research material gathered over many years and we are currently examining them so we can draw up a plan to preserve, organise and digitise the archive to make it more accessible to those researching the life and work of Decimus Burton.

For those of you less familiar with some of the above individuals, Philip Miller had organised the centenary exhibition on the life and work of Decimus Burton that was displayed at The Building Centre in London in 1981. Elizabeth Nathaniels is a founding member of The Decimus Burton Society who has researched the Burton family for many years and has contributed articles to DECIMUS, and many other notable publications. Neil Cooke carried out considerable research over several decades on not only Decimus Burton, but other members of the Burton family, especially Decimus' brother James who became famous as an Egyptologist. Neil corresponded extensively with Philip Miller on the Burtons and provided him with valuable information for the exhibition.



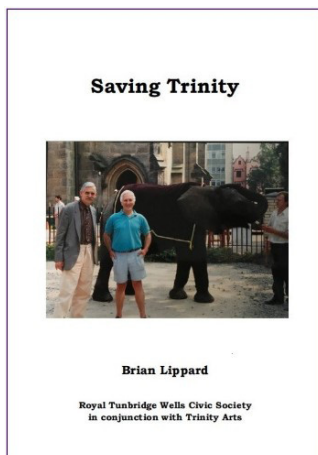
Fig 2 - A Tunbridge Wells student sponsored by the Decimus Burton Society and TW Civic Society helping to sort through Philip Miller's archive on Decimus Burton at the RIBA archives, as part of her Year 11 work placement experience

# News

## *Trinity Theatre – Tower and Heritage Centre update*

The planned opening of the new Tower and Heritage Centre experience at Trinity Theatre in Tunbridge Wells has been delayed until 2024 due to an extended construction timetable.

In the meantime, members may be interested in the recent publication “Saving Trinity – How the town fought to save Holy Trinity from Demolition” By Brian Lippard (published by Royal Tunbridge Wells Civic Society in conjunction with Trinity Arts, 2023, and available through the Civic Society’s website [www.thecivicsociety.org](http://www.thecivicsociety.org) for £4.95 + £1.00 p&p)



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# News

## *Fleetwood Acquisition.*

Earlier this year Fleetwood Museum became the proud owner of one of the earliest Burton houses in Fleetwood, built as part of the Custom House composition in 1839. Apart from the windows and a 70s bathroom and kitchen, the interior is original, complete with washroom and original kitchen. The layout is grand (a scaled version of the Custom House) and has the same floor area of the seemingly grander 4 storey Queen’s Terrace from 1841-2. We look forward to hearing further news on the building in due course.



