

NEWSLETTER 342

February 2021

Helping wherever we can

It has been another exceptionally busy few months as the Committee continues with its usual work as well as trying to help the local community as much as we can during these difficult times. We continue to run the RSAS Covid-19 Community Initiative for anyone who needs help during this lockdown (more information on how we can help if you need it on our website at https://regencybrighton.com/society/rsas_covid_19_community_initiative/).

One of the positives that has come out of Covid is the number of people with great ideas getting actively involved in voluntary community work. But one of the big problems with lockdowns is that it is impossible for many of these new groups to get access to bank accounts. And without a bank account groups cannot access the funding and resources needed to get their ideas off the ground.

Members will know that RSAS has been around for a *little* while now (since 1979 if you can believe it!), and as one of Brighton's oldest and best established community groups RSAS has been working with the Council to 'sponsor' some of these new groups to help get them off the ground. We believe that by helping those with great ideas get up and running we can better help our members and the local community.

This year's AGM



We are fast coming up on the time when we would usually hold our AGM. Even with the cheering news of the vaccine roll-out, it seems unlikely that we will be permitted under Covid rules to hold a large in-person meeting any time soon.

So, we would like members' views on what to do! One possibility is that we just postpone our AGM until we can safely hold one, even if that may be a while. The other alternative is that we hold a virtual AGM over Zoom. Neither option is ideal, which is why we would welcome your views! Do you have a preference, or an alternative suggestion?

Regardless of whether and how we hold our AGM we really need more committee members! Do you think you could give a little time each month to improving our local area and helping the local community? If you think you could, please contact the Committee and we can give you more details

about joining us. It really can be as big or small a commitment as you would like!

Annual fees

As Members are aware, RSAS membership fees were suspended (March 2020-Feb 2021) to try and help in some small way, households' and businesses' budgets that are already under strain, to cope with the impact of Covid.

The Committee has taken the decision to suspend our fees again during the next financial year (March 2021 – February 2022) for the same reason.



As you know RSAS is wholly funded by your fees and donations and 100% of Members' fees and donations go towards keeping the Society running and local community projects like the garden projects, which you will read about below.

With that in mind we were incredibly grateful for the donations we received last year which helped to keep things running, and likewise would be delighted to receive any contributions for this coming year.

Update on our gardens

City Parks announced on January 4 that all group volunteering in council parks and gardens is suspended because of the current lockdown restrictions. Individual volunteers have been working solo as and when they can, but larger work has been paused for the moment.

Nonetheless there are signs of life peeking up all throughout the gardens with daffodil season upon us.



Daffodils popping their heads out

During this hiatus we have been looking at new ways to fund work on our gardens. Our amazing volunteer gardening team do incredible work across all three of our community gardens. Last year, despite long periods of covid restrictions, they spent an incredible 140 person hours tending our gardens!

But the Regency Square gardens pose particular difficulties. They sit directly over a large carpark, making essential planting more difficult in the shallow top soil. The shallow top soil also leads to challenges with irrigation in hot summer weather,

and the gardens are also exposed to the high winds and harsh salty air over winter given their exposed coastal position. We can't add additional depth of top soil given the concrete car-park structure that sits underneath, and adding an irrigation system would be onerously expensive both in terms of its initial installation and the ongoing water costs that would be incurred.

Over the years our volunteer gardeners and the City Parks Rangers team have become experts in planting with these restrictions in mind! The borders and central bed in the top garden are planted with drought resistant Mediterranean shrubs, which we know can survive in these harsh conditions while making our gardens beautiful.



However, the borders were created some 20 years ago. Many of the shrubs that were planted are reaching the end of their natural life and as a result, gaps have emerged in these beds which are being repeatedly colonised by weeds.

Members will be aware that RSAS alongside Brighton & Hove Council has produced a detailed long-term plan for the overall regeneration of the gardens, based on extensive research of local residents' and

businesses' wishes. (Details are available on our website at https://regencybrighton.com/regeneration_strategy_for_regency_square_document/)

As part of its planning permission the BAI360 is required to provide 1% of its ticket sales revenue to the Council for use to improve the three areas directly adjacent to the BAI360. The Regency Square gardens are one of the three areas that will (eventually) receive funding under this Section 106 planning Agreement.

However, despite urging from RSAS, the Council has yet to release these funds for use on the Regency Square gardens and we understand that the Council has slated in some other projects to be carried out using the Section 106 funding before funds will be released to Regency Square. Since none of these other projects have been started (or even scoped, as far as we are aware), it is clear that Section 106 funding for Regency Square is still a considerable time away....

Meanwhile, we have an urgent need for funding now! So (together with our gardening team) we are working on a funding and planting plan, that will complement the long-term regeneration plan, but with a focus on addressing the specific needs of our gardens today.

The first step is securing funding. Following a fundraising drive RSAS and its members contributed £10,000 to the initial development of the gardens 20 years ago and has supported the gardens with funding ever since. So we are now looking into possible new sources of funding and would like your help. Are you aware of grants, schemes, donations, funding opportunities at a local or a national level that might help with this project? Perhaps your

employer is keen to fund a local initiative? Perhaps you know of a gardening company that may be willing to donate plants or time? If so please contact us to let us know!



Wanted: one magic money tree!

Meanwhile, watch this space for planting plans and volunteer days to get this project underway!

Stones Treat?

Mick Jagger and the boys to play in Brighton again? No, it's a homophone for one of the roads in our Conservation Area that is in a state of flux. The developers have well and truly got their collective teeth into an area fast becoming residential, where once were the backs of Western Road shops.

Eyesores ripe for redevelopment? Gentrification? Character erasure? You can be the judge – here is what is planned for the north side of Stone Street (there's that homophone again).

Twelve years ago a more modern, bland but efficient block of four flats landed at number 15. The aim was for "a scheme of good and sensitive design into this conservation area" to replace the shock of concrete

that was the back of 'Pizza Hut'. Gone though were any actual references to the conservation area character itself; no more soft-wood sliding sash windows, decorative pilasters, segmental bays and parapets.

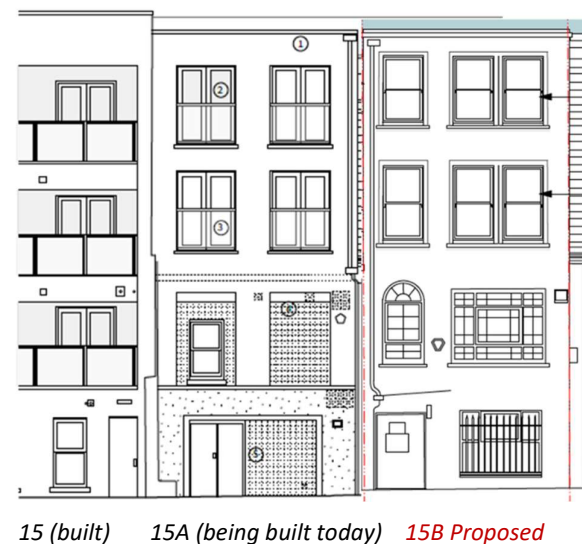


The eyesore that was the back of 'Pizza Hut'



15 Stone Street "sensitive design" 2008

This template of acceptability was blessed by the council and number 15 became any new developer's starting point for Stone Street. Wind forward ten years and a property company called Moretons Investments came along. It bought the shops at numbers 70 to 82 Western Road for £7million. This included all the buildings to the rear of the shops, about half of the north side of Stone Street. Here are two of their plans, alongside number 15 which they also now own:



At the other end of the street, three individual investors have taken up the "number 15 template of acceptability". Their plans are shown here, except that the owner of number 19 has come back for yet more! With a scheme almost the same as 17 and 18 already approved, the owner of number 19 has submitted new designs for approval that would introduce a small sky-scraper. Our Society and a number of neighbours have submitted objections.

The South African War Memorial

We previously reported on the meeting RSAS Committee members Julie Wright and Mary Hunter had with the company undertaking the works. They outlined that the works were scheduled to involve temporary installation of scaffold and careful cleaning and remedial works to the stone and bronze by a specialist conservation sub-contractor.

Badly corroded railings

The memorial looking fantastic!

Council, had two secure motorbike-specific parking areas installed – one **right** next to the entry to the lower gardens! It is time motorbike owners started to use them. The Society is currently working with the Council and parking services to see improved enforcement against motorbikes parking on the square – watch this space for more details.

The Society welcomes our new neighbour - Maldron Hotel Brighton

Yes, we campaigned for less building height and no additions to the Grade II listed Newburgh Assembly Rooms that will become its north entrance – to no avail. Yes, we made sure to broadcast the proposals as much as possible and to encourage public comment. Our successes have been in challenging the initial building design, pedestrian approaches and traffic management. And our investigations revealed the new occupants to be Maldron Hotels many months before it was announced.



However, we have learned the hard way that factors outside the local community's influence determine the outcome of large-scale Planning Applications. On this occasion the overall result will be a positive even if public opinion has been collected and ignored.

Stronger Together

So how should we campaign on planning matters in the future to ensure we get the right result? The work we and other local community groups are undertaking collectively on the Gasworks development in Kemptown provides a new template going forward...



At the time of going to press, our society has joined forces with twelve others in Brighton and Hove in a new campaign: to involve local and national press, orchestrated Twitter broadcasts and direct communications – all **before** developer's drawings become cemented into a Planning Application.

Thirteen Brighton groups, representing the interests of residents from across Brighton, have issued a Joint Open Statement asking developer St William, Berkeley Group and the Brighton and Hove City Council to go back to the drawing board on the Brighton East Gasworks development.

While the groups welcome the use of this brownfield site for a housing development, they are united in

their objection to the St William proposal summarised as follows:

- The **huge over-development** of the site is dominating the surrounding built and natural environment; it poses a potential threat to the physical and mental wellbeing of residents living in and around the development and ignores the desperate need for affordable housing.
- The proposal of a high-rise, high-density development will require **extensive excavations of heavily contaminated soil** and there are serious concerns regarding Berkeley Group's remediation of other gasworks sites.
- The Council's move to create a new Tall Buildings Area specifically for the Gasworks site through a new Supplementary Planning Guide will set a **terrible precedent where policy could be overturned to fit with a developer's needs** over the city or community needs.

Mike Davies, our RSAS officer responsible for planning says:

"For too long the people of Brighton have had big developer and big finance dictate the built shape of our city. Today our societies join together in one voice for the community."

Jeremy Mustoe, Chairperson of **the Brighton Society** says:

"The Gasworks proposals desecrate the city's landscape and urban heritage and fail to integrate socially or visually with the local community. The decontamination proposals are unconvincing."

A spokesperson from **AGHAST** says,

"We support the development of the gasworks site provided it carries no risk of human or environmental

harm. We have grave concerns about the St William development on both accounts."

The Committee is proud to stand Stronger Together in a new form of campaign with:

Brighton Society, AGHAST, Kemp Town Society, Amex Area Neighbourhood Action Forum, Regency Society, Montpelier & Clifton Hill Association, Brighton & Hove Heritage Commission, North Laine Community Association, Rottingdean Heritage, Marine Gate Holdings Ltd, Southdown Rise Residents Association and West Hill Community Association.

Rethink The Gasworks. **Brighton Deserves Better.**

Travel and transport in the city: consultation

Brighton and Hove Council are consulting on transport changes in our area, including on the temporary cycle lanes introduced earlier this year. We are aware that the cycle lanes have generated much controversy, so this is your opportunity to have your say!

The survey closes on the 14th of March so make sure you have your say before then at:

<https://consultations.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parking/onejourneybetter/>



Dog Owners Beware



As our members know, the RSAS Committee love dogs, which is why we were very upset to hear about two rather nasty dog attacks on Regency Square. In both cases it appears that two Staffordshire terriers attacked smaller dogs. In one case the human who intervened to save his dog from the attack was badly bitten.

We understand that both dog attacks have been reported to the dog warden and the police, but if you are walking your dogs on the Square please be careful. And if you witness any worrying behaviour you can contact the council's dog warden. The email address is: animalwardens@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Remember the top green is a dog free zone!

Our Xmas tree challenge!

Back in October we were aware that we would be unable to hold our lighting of the Christmas tree event due to Covid restrictions. However, we were hopeful that we could still provide our community Christmas tree and we looked forward to discussing arrangements for the tree with our usual Christmas tree partners – the Artist Residence, the BAI360 and Sussex Trees – during the month of November.

BUT THEN.....

LOCKDOWN!

Both the Artist Residence and the BAI360 had to close and their staff were furloughed making discussion impossible! A further concern was that although lockdown was due to end on 2nd December without a crystal ball we had no idea whether our partners would be able to open or whether strict restrictions would still apply.



Luckily by 3rd December Brighton & Hove was placed in Tier 2 and the committee supported by our amazing partners (and a lot of goodwill and Christmas cheer!) were able to organise the tree at

breakneck speed and our tree was erected on 10th December. We all enjoyed a week with a sparkling Xmas tree.

BUT THEN.....

THE LIGHTS WERE STOLEN!!!!!!

We do not know who was responsible, but it was quite a shock that someone would do this to our community tree. Not to mention trying to buy new Christmas lights on the 20th of December during lockdown proved.... challenging!

But we eventually located the last available outdoor Christmas lights in Brighton & Hove. And thanks to the BAI360 team who dropped everything to install the new lights, we were twinkling again within a couple of days.

We have received many lovely messages of appreciation from our members about the tree this

year. We know for many people having a tree in Regency Square twinkling away spread at least a little cheer in these difficult times. So it was definitely all worth it!

As always, we thank the Artists Residence, the BAI360 and Sussex Trees for their generosity and prompt action which enabled us to provide a Xmas tree for all to enjoy.



The RSAS detective agency



Ever wondered what kind of requests RSAS deals with on a day-to-day basis? Below our Secretary Julie Wright explains how... emm.... diverse... the requests for assistance can

sometimes be!

Someone has filled out form: Contact Form

This is the message which pops-up in my email when somebody gets in touch with the Society via our website. As Secretary it's my remit to respond. The requests range from the obvious, (what are you

doing about antisocial behaviour in the area?) to the bizarre. This message stuck a chord:

Message:

Hello, my name is Fiona. I lived in Regency Square back in the 1980's. I wonder if you could help me locate the building I used to live at. The only thing I know is that it was called Penny's or Pennies Hotel. If you could point me in the right direction I would appreciate it very much. I would love to show my kids where I lived. Thank you.

More information followed:

Pennies was at the top west end on the side, wish I could remember exactly which building. It was 1982 or 1983 as I was pregnant at the time when my boyfriend Andy and I moved there. We lived at the very top of the building the roof leaked and I remember the seagulls landing right outside the window on a tiny balcony. It was a very long climb up those stairs. The room itself was a bedsit with no toilet. I would make toast and cook pizza on an iron. I remember a young girl who lived near the top end of the building around my age, I was 16, she used to ask to borrow clothes and never returned them!

Detective work underway. I called in the help of our local historian Suzanne Hinton.

Suzanne told me: My only evidence is a comment in a 1984 RSAS Newsletter reporting that Pennies hotel "is now operating as a hostel for displaced persons."

The only hostels are at numbers 14, 15 and 19 Regency Square. In the 1970s number 14 had been separate flats. Number 15 had been the West Pier Hotel, it kept the name of West Pier Hotel almost up to the end of the last century if not beyond.

Number 19 was the Adelphi Court Hotel. It was in the phone book for 1981 but had disappeared by 1983. I can't find any other reference to Penny's / Pennies/ Penneys Hotel but my guess is that it was at No 19.



Regency Square in the 1980s

Having reported our findings back to Fiona I asked her what happened after her stay in Regency Square. She and Andy had 2 children together both boys but sadly Andy left them when the youngest was just 2 years old in 1987. Fiona and the boys moved to Canada 2 years later and have been happily settled there ever since.

If anyone has more to add to the mystery of Penny's/ Pennies/ Penneys Hotel, please let me know!

I have also had an enquiry from the granddaughter of Jackie Penfold who was landlady of The Regency Tavern in the late 80s, asking if anyone has any information about what happened to the pub after Jackie's tenancy ended. She is particularly looking for information about other grandchildren of Jackie Penfold and her estranged brothers, Craig and Richard Penfold.

Please get in touch if you can help, and you can join my detective's club!



Do your own local investigations!

Have you ever wondered about the people who lived at your address in times past? If so, the MyHouseMyStreet website can help. This free resource contains over 100 Brighton street directories, spanning the years 1784 to 1974.

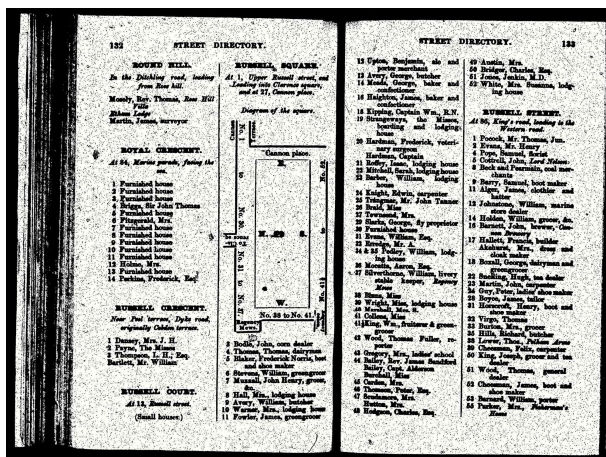
Street directories reveal the main occupant at each property in each street. If the property was a business, the directories identify the trade name or trader.

Directories from the 1840s onwards have the best street-by-street coverage. Some of the earlier directories contain only the names and addresses of 'gentry' and traders, listed alphabetically.

To find out who lived in your home, go to <http://www.mhms.org.uk/content/directories>, select 'Street Directories' and type your street name in the Keyword Search box. For best results, use double quotation marks, eg "Preston Street".

Pitfalls to beware of:

House numbers in Russell Square changed around 1870, when the properties in Regency Colonnade (nowadays the Regency Tavern) were given Russell Square addresses. The street directory for 1854 includes a plan of Russell Square showing the original house numbers.



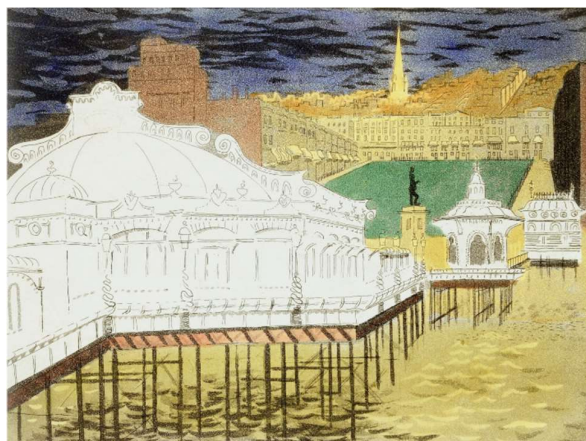
Russell Square house numbering in 1854. The shop in the south west corner of the square was number 41½.

Queensbury Mews was called Lower Regency Mews until the mid-1840s.

Once you know the names of former occupants you can find out more about them, and who else lived with them, by looking at Census records.

There has been a Census every 10 years since 1841 except during WW2. Instead of a war-time Census, a register of all civilians was compiled in 1939. You can view the 1939 register and Census records for 1841-1911 online at www.ancestry.co.uk or www.findmypast.co.uk. The 1881 Census records are free to view, others involve a small charge.

John Piper's Brighton Aquatints



Our gratitude goes to lecturer and local historian Dr Geoffrey Mead and book publisher Tim Mainstone for permission to republish this much abridged version of Geoffrey's book review of: *"John Piper's Brighton Aquatints"* [Mainstone Press 2019, Hardback £30]

... which was originally brought out in 1939 but the 2019 edition has extensive notes and images and comments by art and architectural historians, including the January 1940 *Listener* magazine review by Osbert Sitwell which contains a fine passage on the nature of the town and indeed this book- *"Brighton seems in a manner all its own to combine the ordinariness and the eccentricity of English life...anything might happen in Brighton, a sea-serpent or a miracle..."*

The prints start with the **Royal Pavilion**; an unusual colouring of the image by Piper who has emphasised the lightness of the Portland Stone of the building by setting it against a dark forbidding sky. King George VI, on seeing the picture and probably not

understanding 'artists', commented- *"Very bad luck with your weather Mr Piper"*.

The next image (shown above) which is of an old friend and one in particular I have a close association with. For five years from 1997 I was a tour guide on the West Pier and this view-**Regency Square from the West Pier** was one I had not encountered before. Piper's comments accompanying the picture describe it as *"A dazzling white meringue, brittle and sweet, the pier has none of that delicate efficiency that the old chain pier[sic] possessed...trying to project Brighton's swagger half across the Channel. Regency Square is laid out on the gentle slope immediately behind, and the busy part of Hove climbs the hill behind that."* As with many visitors to the resort the distinction between Brighton and Hove was difficult to discern.

For **'Brighton from the station yard'**, Piper writes - *"This is the first view of Brighton which many visitors get. Perhaps after a stuffy train journey it is disappointing not to find oneself delivered right on the beach, but the view of Brighton's villas climbing the further hill by Kemp Town, beyond the gay jumbled foreground is a compensation."* The view is from the station forecourt area looking down Trafalgar Street, with the massed terraces of the working class areas now known as North Laine and Hanover covering both sides of the central valley.

Embassy Court comes into the following image **'Mixed styles Regency-Victorian-Modern'**. *"This view is drawn looking westward along the promenade to Brunswick Terrace at the point where Bedford Square opens out onto the front....beyond...the recently-built block of flats known as Embassy Court, designed by Wells Coates."* The flats, an icon of the Modern Movement had been constructed in

1935 on an empty plot latterly used as a carpark, but prior to 1931 had been Western House, a 'box-of-bricks' seaside villa, the last of its kind on the seafront.

Finishing with two of Brighton's most distinctive and well-known buildings; the first is **St. Bartholomew's church** described by Piper as "*this extraordinary red-brick pile dominates the busy Brighton streets in the region below the railway station.*" It is a truly enormous structure and is the tallest parish church in the UK, being four feet higher than Westminster Abbey. And finally, '**The Metropole hotel from the West Pier**'; this includes the western half of the neighbouring Grand Hotel both redolent of 19th century seaside splendour and in their respective ways both very 'Brighton' and both full of ironwork ornamental brickwork and technical innovation; the Grand was the first European building to incorporate in its then tremendous height, that American invention, the lift, water powered in this 1864 creation.

Not the cheapest book I have ever bought but one that is worth every penny for the scholarly additions to the original work and for this sumptuous 21st century edition.

Anti-social behaviour in the community

Usually over winter our area sees a respite in anti-social behaviour as there are fewer people in the city. However, we are aware that there has been a significant uptick in anti-social behaviour, petty crime and drug dealing in our area since the latest lockdown began.

The RSAS Committee are working with our local PCSOs and our ward councillors to see what more can be done to address this rising problem.

In the meantime, as always, it is **essential** that we all report all incidents to the police – no matter how small – so they get a clear picture of what is happening in our area. The police have been clear with us: resources will be deployed based on intelligence/reports. So if we do not report incidences of ASB, the police will not be able to deploy the necessary resources.

Rather than hanging on the telephone line, a good way to report non-emergencies is to either email 101@sussex.pnn.police.uk or via the Sussex Police form on their website www.sussex.police.uk/contact/af/contact-us/.

Final thoughts....

We are really heartened to hear that many of our most vulnerable members have now had their first vaccination jab or are booked in to have it. Hopefully an end is in sight to the difficulties of the last year.

As mentioned earlier in this newsletter, our community support initiative is still open and available if you need help during these difficult times and RSAS membership remains free for this year. So if you know of anyone who would like to join, please pass along this offer and ask them to contact any member of the Committee.

As always, we are very grateful to all our members for their ongoing support and generosity despite the difficult circumstances we are all living through.

Thank you all, and stay safe and well

The RSAS Committee

Society Contacts

To contact any member of the committee please use our new committee email:

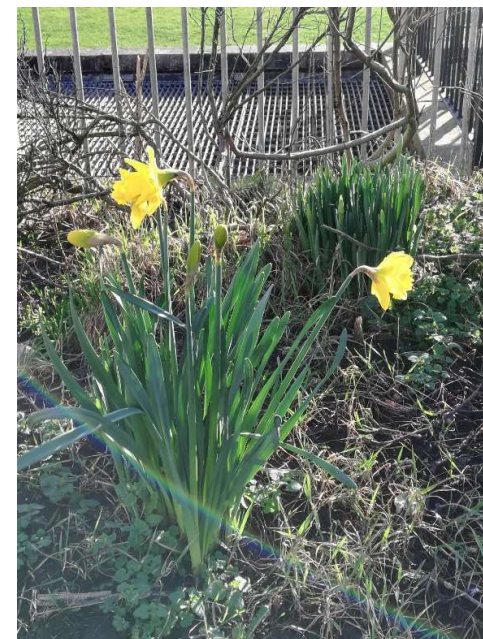
✉ rsascommunity@gmail.com

You can also contact us via:

 <https://regencybrighton.com/contact/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/regencybrighton>

 <https://twitter.com/RegencySquareAS>



More cheery daffodils!