

Video 4, band 2: The Royal Pavilion, Brighton

Nicola J. Watson

Producer: Sarah Carr

Academic consultant: Nicola J. Watson

Objectives

This video accompanies Unit 31 on the Royal Pavilion at Brighton. It is principally designed to allow you to view the Pavilion's exteriors and interiors up close and in detail, so that you can work on the exercises in the print material. To this end, we have tried to give you the experience 'raw', and you are left very much to form your own views about what you see. In this programme you will therefore find that there is an unusual amount of visual detail and very little interpretation. The reason for this is that it is designed to help you learn to look intensively at detail, and you will be doing this in repeated viewings.

After viewing this video and studying these notes, you should:

- be familiar with the exterior façades of the Pavilion;
- have a grasp of the layout and appearance of the principal rooms of the Pavilion in its present state and as it appeared in 1823;
- have some sense of the various uses to which the Pavilion was put during the period 1811–30;
- have some sense of contemporary reactions to the Pavilion.

Before viewing

You will find it helpful to have the Illustrations Book to hand to refer to Plates 31.1–31.11 (watercolours from Nash's *Views of the Royal Pavilion*), so that you can get a better feeling of how each room looks as a whole (the rooms are too big to film in one wide shot), and so that you can get a sense of how the interiors would have looked filled with people. You will also need your remote control pause button!

The programme

In the video you will be introduced to three characters who had rather different relations to the Pavilion, and who have left us accounts of their visits. John Evans was a Baptist minister from Wales, aged in his early 50s at the time he wrote his account. He ran a successful school for upper-class boys in Islington, taking them down to south coast resorts for the

summer vacation and publishing travel-books based on his diaries of these excursions. Evans's *Recreation for the Young and Old: An Excursion to Brighton* (1821) is itself based heavily on John Sickelmore's earlier guidebook, *An Epitome of Brighton* (1815), and upon newspaper accounts of the Pavilion, but he did himself visit the interior as a member of the public. The other two characters whom you will meet, the Comtesse de Boigne and the Princess Lieven, were intimates of the Prince of Wales (who was made Prince Regent in 1811 and crowned George IV in 1820) and were invited to his house-parties at the Pavilion (invitations were extended for about a week at a time). These house-parties were typically augmented in the evenings by members of the high society that frequented Brighton during the two 'seasons', one in the summer and one around Christmas. The Comtesse, a member of the French aristocracy, then in her early 40s, left us some lively accounts of these evenings in her *Memoirs*. The Princess Lieven, aged in her 30s at this time, was the wife of the Russian ambassador, a wit, political intriguer and patroness of the exclusively aristocratic club Almack's. She recorded her experiences of these evenings in letters to her onetime lover, Prince Metternich.

You will be taken through the Pavilion as you would have been had you been a guest at one of the dinner or evening parties hosted by the prince. After a detailed look at both the East Front and the West Front, you enter by the Octagon Hall, moving through to the Entrance Hall (where you would have given your cloak to servants, and perhaps taken a quick peek in the mirror) and so into the Long Gallery, which was essentially designed as a reception area and conversation piece. In the early 1820s George would have arrived with studied informality at around 6 p.m., chatted with his dinner-guests (there were usually around 30 of them) and then led the procession into dinner laid in the Banqueting Room. Music would generally have been played during the meal by a band in the next room. After dinner, it was customary to retire into the Galleries and the Saloon. If there was no musical entertainment, guests would have played cards or other games, chatted, or lounged around. If more guests were expected for a grander musical entertainment, the Music Room would have been opened up and a small concert given. On one occasion such entertainment was provided by the fashionable Italian composer Gioachino Rossini himself.

After viewing

You should now be in a position to tackle the first and subsequent exercises in the print material.

Sources

Below you will find printed versions of the contemporary comments heard in the programme, together with some others, in case you wish to use them in your writing. Some of them deal with the social experience of visiting the Pavilion, others are useful in providing a really detailed guidebook description of features at the time. Their takes on the Pavilion range from the reverent to the scathing, and it is clear that for every visitor charmed by the experience, another was puzzled, bored, annoyed or scandalized.

Note that because the interior decoration of the Pavilion changed in some respects between 1815 and 1823, some of Sickelmore's account (quoted by John Evans) would not have accurately described the later state of the Pavilion; I have therefore edited out those details that were subsequently changed. Even so, the Pavilion as currently restored does not entirely match its state in 1823 as depicted in the John Nash watercolours; the video on the whole tries to concentrate on those parts of the Pavilion that do look as they would have done in 1823.

Location

Brighthelmstone, abbreviated about the year 1770 into the more fashionable appellation of *Brighton*, is situated in 50° 55' N. Latitude, and nearly 3' to the westward of the meridian of London. It lies near the centre of a fine sweeping bay, formed by Worthing Point in the western, and by Beachy Head in the eastern direction.

(Evans, 1821, p.34)

Exteriors

Around the beauteous lawn, gay buildings rise,
There the Pavilion woos admiring eyes; ...
Within, the lofty edifice is grac'd,
With every beauty of inventive taste;
And as each scene admiring we explore,
It seems enchantment all, some magic bower.

(Lloyd, 1809, p.42)

This gew gaw, then, has on its top –
Where sparrows oft are seen to hop,
Some things like those that will afford,
When placed upon a proper board,
Amusement for the leisure hours,
Of those who wish to try their pow'rs

In the sporting game of chess,
 To win or lose, or more or less;
 And some, as true as I'm not Mammon,
 Are like the things used at *back-gammon*;
 Some, too, in shape, are like the bottle,
 Tho' more large in bulk and throttle,
 In the chemists' shops displayed,
 Shewing tints of varied shade.

(Colman, 1824, pp.13–14)

Interiors

The Octagon Hall

The grand entrance to this magnificent seat of Royalty, is westward, under a portico ... From this you ascend the steps into a *Chinese Hall*, thirty feet square, or thereabouts, and twenty-four feet high.

(Sickelmore, 1815, p.38)

The Long Gallery

[The Gallery is] one of the most superb apartments that art and fancy can produce, ... which, for richness in effect, and dazzling brilliance of decoration and design, is not to be equalled, perhaps, in Europe, if the world. It is called a Chinese Gallery, and its dimensions are, in length, one hundred and sixty-two feet, by seventeen feet in breadth. The gallery is divided into five compartments, the centre of which is illumined by a sky-light of stained glass, twenty-two feet by eleven, representing the God of Thunder, as taken from the heathen Mythology of the Chinese, flying, and surrounded by his drums ... At each extremity of this light are the Imperial or Royal five-clawed dragons ... The depending lanthorn has devices on its connected surfaces from the Chinese Mythology, in the most brilliant hues of stained glass ... The ceiling or cove of this compartment, is coloured peach-blossom ... and as it is several feet higher than that of the compartments to the right and left, in the rising space are introduced two Transparencies on stained glass, with bamboo borders. There is also a superb Chinese canopy fixed round, which is level with the lower ceiling, tastefully ornamented with dragons, bells, etc ... The walls of this Gallery are coloured peach-blossom throughout, with niches, figures etc. and light blue emblazonments in the Chinese fancy, such as pagodas, trees, rocks etc ... The extreme compartments to the north and south, are occupied by two perforated iron and brass staircases ...

the balusters are an imitation of bamboo, in ironwork, painted. The staircases are illumined by horizontal skylights of stained glass ... the one at the south end, exhibiting the Imperial five-clawed dragon, surrounded by four bats, and that to the north, the *Fum*, or Chinese bird of royalty ... The furniture ... includes bamboo couches, a rich collection of Oriental china, Chinese figures, etc.

(Sickelmore, 1815, pp.39–42)

First, here's a Chinese human figure,
Large as life, or somewhat bigger;
There are Chinese fields and houses,
Chinese husbands, Chinese spouses;
Chinese palaces and boats,
Chinese men with naked throats;
Chinese groves, and Chinese trees;
Chinese rivers, ships, and seas;
Chinese bulls, and Chinese cows;
Chinese sheep, and boars, and sows;
Chinese sky, and Chinese clouds;
Chinese birds that fly in clouds;
Chinese mandarins and tailors,
Chinese *soldiers* – Chinese *sailors*;
Chinese tassels, pulls, and bells;
Chinese ornamental shells;
And many mythologic beasts,
On which imagination feasts –

(Colman, 1824, p.21)

The Banqueting Room

This most splendid and beautiful apartment ... exhibits grandeur without tawdriness, good taste, as emanating from intellectual cultivation, and, generally, a resistless fascination of effect ... Its situation is nearly at the southern extremity of the Palace, and its dimensions are 60 feet in length by 42 feet wide. The walls are bounded at the height of 23 feet, by a cornice of the most elegant form, apparently inlaid with pearls and gold! On this cornice rest four ecliptic arches, which, with their spandrils, are supported in the angles by four golden columns, connecting themselves with a unique cove, surmounted by a dome rising to the height of 45 feet. This dome is constructed to represent an eastern sky, partially obscured by the broad and branching foliage of a luxuriant PLANTAIN-TREE. This bold feature is expressed as bearing its fruit in all the progressive stages of maturity, from the tender shootings of the early blossom to the rich and glowing mellowness of its most ripe and perfect state.

From its truncated centre Chinese symbols depend, and characterize its apparent use, that of connecting it with the grand lustre, rising 30 feet, and assuming the shape of lotus flowers, the expressive eastern emblem of perfection and brightness ... Its effect is magical: it enchants the senses, and excites, as it were, a feeling of spell-bound admiration on all within its radiance and circle. Other lustres in the several angles, of minor magnitudes, but similarly unique and beautiful, contribute to an effulgence as mild as bright; and which four horizontal windows illuminated from without, above the cornice, perfect an appearance of artificial day. The walls of this apartment are divided into compartments, containing illustrations, by domestic groups of figures, nearly as large as life, of the manners and elegant costumes of the higher order of the Chinese people. These pictures possess great variety, and teem with domestic episodes which are familiar to us; they attach us to them by an appeal to our feeling, for they seem like the reflected imagery of our own minds ... Rising from the chimney pieces to the lower cornice, are mirrors of extraordinary dimensions; these facing each other, though at the distance of sixty feet, repeat all within the sparkling space, producing an effect almost celestial, and giving the semblance of a centre point to the beholder, when situated at either extremity. On either side are folding doors, presenting an elegant imitation of Japan, framed with golden architraves, and surmounted with exquisite specimens in wood carvings in alto relievo [high relief], exhibiting subjects of chimera from the Oriental Mythology, the peculiar animation and character of which induce an idea that they are actually existing in an atmosphere of burning gold! Splendour of light and colour, with a natural and effective disposition of shade, appear to have been a grand and successful aim in this room; and art, guided by sound judgment, lively and polished taste, has availed itself of all sorts of materials to attain the end proposed.

(*Brighton Herald*, 27 January 1821, quoted in Evans, 1821, pp.45–8)

The Music Room

It is scarcely in the power of words to convey an account of its rich and glowing magnificence. The aerial imagery of fancy, and the embellishments of fertile invention, profusely described in 'The Thousand and One Nights', and the popular tales of magic, involving the enchanted palaces of the *Genii*, fall short, in splendour of detail, to the scene of imposing grandeur, and the beautiful combination and effect of myriads of glittering objects, which, in the plenitude of art and refinement of taste, this superb apartment ... displays. It is 42 feet in the square, with two recesses of 10 feet each, making the extreme length 62 feet. In

height it rises 41 feet, to a dome 30 feet in diameter. The dome is gilt with green gold, and ornamented with sparkling scales and fossils, which diminish in size to the centre, and add much to the apparent elevation. In the centre point of this dome is an ornament, representing, in all its vivid tints, THE SUNFLOWER, with others, on a minor scale blended with it, in all the luxuriance of seeming cultivation; and from which ornament or flower depends a glittering pagoda of cut glass, connecting itself with an immense lamp, in the shape of an open lotus or water-lily, surrounded by gold dragons, and enriched by various transparent devices, emanating from the heathen mythology of the Chinese. The dome itself, which appears to have been excavated from a rock of solid gold, is supported by a convex cove, intersecting itself with an octagonal base! It is ornamented with Chinese devices in green gold, upon a light blue and red ground. It also displays eight windows of stained glass, rich in devices of the Chinese fancy, the effect of which is indescribably imposing and brilliant, and which are contrived to be suitably illuminated exteriorly. Descending from the cove's base, a splendid canopy is seen, with carved scrolls, bells, etc ... The canopy ... is supported by columns of crimson and gold; their height from the floor measures 23 feet, and round which enormous serpents are twisted, in all their diversity of colours and terrific expression of animal capability. The walls are covered with twelve paintings, highly finished, imitative of the crimson Japan; the subjects introduced are views in China, principally in the neighbourhood of Pekin; they are of a bright yellow, heightened in gold! They are equal in execution and niceties of finish to the best miniature painting ... The recesses are 33 feet by 10 and 16 feet high; they terminate in the square of the room by a convex cove, representing rows of bamboo, confined by ribbons. The north recess contains a magnificent organ ... it is as much distinguished for its peculiar delicacy of tone as for its prodigious powers ... There are two entrances to this room ... each under a splendid canopy supported by gold columns! Uniformity is tastefully preserved, by apparent entrance doors to correspond, on the sides opposite ... On the east side of the room, light is admitted by five windows, the draperies of which, composed of blue and red and yellow silks, with rich fringes, are supported by dragons.

(Brighton Herald, 27 January 1821, quoted in Evans, 1821, pp.41–4)

Eye-witness accounts of evenings at the Pavilion, 1805–1820s

(As you will notice, and as you would expect over the course of 20 years, evening parties at the Pavilion changed their style and shape.)

I suppose the Courts or houses of Princes are all alike in one thing, viz., that in attending them you lose your liberty. After one month was gone by, you fell naturally and of course into the ranks, and had to reserve your observations till you were asked for them. These royal invitations are by no means calculated to reconcile one to a Court. To be sent for half an hour before dinner, or perhaps in the middle of one's own, was a little too humiliating to be very agreeable ... We used to dine pretty punctually at six, the Average number being about sixteen.

(Thomas Creevey reminiscing about visits in 1805, in Gore, 1970, pp.39, 40)

The Prince never touched a card, but was occupied in talking to his guests, and very much in listening to and giving directions to the band. At 12 o'clock punctually the band stopped, and sandwiches and wine and water handed about, and shortly after the Prince made a bow and we all dispersed.

(Thomas Creevey reminiscing about visits in 1805, in Gore, 1970, p.40)

Oh, this wicked Pavilion! we were there till ½ past one this mornng., and it has kept me in bed with the headache till 12 today ... The invitation did not come to us till 9 o'clock: we went in Lord Thurlow's carriage, and were in fear of being too late; but the Prince did not come out of the dining-room till 11.

(Mrs Creevey to Creevey, 29 October 1805, in Gore, 1970, pp.55–6)

Sheridan [the playwright] entered into whatever fun was going on at the Pavilion as if he had been a boy, tho' he was then 55 years of age. Upon one occasion he came into the drawing-room disguised as a police officer to take up the Dowager Lady Sefton for playing at some unlawful game; and at another time, when we had a phantasmagoria at the Pavilion, and were all shut up in perfect darkness, he continued to sit upon the lap of Madame Gerobtzoff, a haughty Russian dame, who made row enough for the whole town to hear her.

The Prince, of course, was delighted with all this.

(Thomas Creevey, reminiscing about a visit in 1805, in Gore, 1970, p.48)

Everybody meets at dinner, which ... is excellent, with addition of a few invitations in the evening. Three large rooms, very comfortable, are lit up; whist, backgammon, Chess, trace Madame – every sort of game you can think of in two of them, and Musick in the third. His band is beautiful.

(Countess of Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 10 October 1805, in Granville, vol.2, p.120)

Afterwards the Prince led all the party to the table where the maps [of the Napoleonic campaigns] lie, to see him shoot with an air-gun at a target placed at the end of the room. He did it very skilfully, and wanted all the ladies to attempt it. The girls and I excused ourselves on account of our short sight; but Lady Downshire hit a fiddler in the dining-room, Miss Johnstone a door and Bloomfield the ceiling.

(Mrs Creevey to Creevey, 29 October 1805, in Gore, 1970, p.56)

Supper consisted in 'iced champagne punch, lemonade, and sandwiches'.

(Mrs Creevey, autumn 1811, in Gore, 1970, p.89)

The evenings were not in the least formal ... everybody moved about as they pleased, and made their own backgammon, chess or card party, but the walking up and down the gallery was the favourite lounge.

(Lady Ilchester,² February 1816, quoted in Musgrave, 1951, p.78)

The Chinese scene is gay beyond description ... though the extreme warmth of [the Pavilion] might, perhaps, be too much for you ... Everyone ... met at six o'clock punctually for dinner to the number of between thirty and forty, and in the evening as many more were generally invited; a delightful band of music played till half-past eleven, when the Royal Family took their leave, and the rest of the company also, after partaking of sandwiches.

(Lady Ilchester, February 1816, quoted in Hibbert, 1988, pp.480-1)

A numerous company sat down to dinner, composed of the inmates of the palace and of people invited from Brighton itself, for this town is frequented by a brilliant society during the winter months ... The Prince ... had a band of musicians playing horns and other noisy instruments, which gave a maddening performance in the vestibule during the dinner and throughout the evening ... The Prince delighted in it, and often joined in, beating time on the dinner gong.

(Comtesse de Boigne, of visits made in 1817, in Nicoullaud, 1907, vol.2, p.249)

About eleven o'clock the Prince went into a drawing-room where a little cold supper had been laid. Here he was followed only by those whom he specially invited, ladies staying in the house and two or three intimate male friends, and it was then that the Prince threw off all reserve ... His stories were sometimes interspersed with little madrigals, and more often with obscenities

² Lady Ilchester was companion to Princess Charlotte, the Prince Regent's daughter.

... Upon the whole these evening parties, which went on until two or three o'clock in the morning, would have seemed desperately wearisome had they been given by a private individual. But the enchantment of the crown kept the whole company awake, and sent the guests away delighted with the condescension of the Prince.

(Comtesse de Boigne, of visits made in 1817, in Nicoullaud, 1907, vol.2, p.249)

It was night; or rather, intrusive day was excluded; odours burned in all directions; a thousand lamps glittered in the regal hall; ... the table groaned under the weight of massy plate and delicious viands; rich and expensive wines flowed like rivers to slack the fevered lip of intemperance.

(T. Brown (pseudonym),³ 1818, vol.1, p.86)

The etiquette is, that before dinner when he comes in, he *finds* all the men standing, and the women rise; he speaks to everybody, shakes hands with new comers or particular friends, then desires the ladies to be seated. When dinner is announced, he leads out a lady of the highest rank.

(John Wilson Croker, December 1818, quoted in Musgrave, 1951, p.79)

The dinners are dull enough, they are too large for society and not quite crowded enough for freedom, so that one is on a sort of tiresome good behaviour.

(John Wilson Croker, December 1818, in Jennings, 1884, vol.1, p.127)

The gaudy splendour of the place amused me for a little and then bored me. The dinner was cold and the evening dull beyond all dullness. They say the King is anxious that all form and ceremony should be banished, and if so it only proves how impossible it is that form and ceremony should not always inhabit a palace ... The King was in good looks and spirits, and after dinner cut his jokes with all the coarse merriment which is his characteristic.

(Charles Greville, December 1821, quoted in Hibbert, 1988, p.652)

My friend is longing to see the end of this visit. She cannot bear to be embarrassed or bored; it is quite a new thing for her. She is dying to be able to make fun of this little performance with her neighbours; and she gets impatient when she sees me putting up with it all as if I enjoyed it. But really the fact is that I observe scenes worthy of the finest comedy ... it is difficult to derive much intellectual stimulus from a dinner where sauces were the

³ NB: this is an imaginary eye-witness account.

main topic of conversation, and an evening spent playing patience. All my efforts go to smothering my friend's wit – she has promised me to be stupid while we are here. That is in the most orthodox Royal tradition.

(Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 14 March 1822, in Quennell, 1937, pp.162–3)

I wish you were here to laugh. You cannot imagine how astonished the Duke of Wellington is. He had not been here before, and I thoroughly enjoy noting the kind of remark and the kind of surprise that the whole household evokes in a new-comer. I do not believe that since the days of Heliogabalus, there have been such magnificence and such luxury. There is something effeminate in it which is disgusting. One spends the evening half-lying on cushions; the lights are dazzling; there are perfumes, music, liqueurs – ‘Devil take me, I think I must have got into bad company.’ You can guess who said that, and the tone in which it was said. Here is one single detail about the establishment. To light the three rooms, used when the family is alone, costs 150 guineas an evening; when the apartment is fully opened up, it is double that ... I brought my little boy with me; he is charming to the King, but polite to everyone else. He is very nice and adores Chinese grotesques.

(Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 26 January 1822, in Quennell, 1937, p.150)

[My friend] amuses me very much here; she takes no end of trouble not to let the King see that she is bored. However, she told me that she saw there was some use in an evening at the Pavilion; it helped one decide whether one would enjoy eternity or no.

(Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 5 April 1823, in Quennell, 1937, p.253)

Verdicts

To speak of THE PALACE as a whole, it involves the perfection of *British Art*, and stamps on it a character, we doubt not the reverse of secondary, to whatever travelled experience can be qualified to point out as actually existing in any other part of the habitable globe ... England has been reproached by travellers for a want of palaces on a scale commensurate with the grandeur of its monarchy ... the PAVILION is only a royal winter residence, but in proportion to its extent, it may be said to exceed any other of the palaces in the kingdom.

Everything here and throughout the Palace is almost entirely the work of British materials and British hands. It combines a whole that merits and must obtain the admiration of the world.

(Evans, 1821, pp.49, 51)

[The Pavilion] was indeed a masterpiece of bad taste. The most heterogeneous magnificence had been gathered at vast expense from the four quarters of the globe and piled beneath the eight or ten cupolas of this ugly and eccentric palace, the several parts of which displayed not the slightest architectural unity. The inside was no better arranged than the outside, and art was certainly conspicuous by its absence. After these observations, criticism was disarmed. The comforts and pleasures of life were equally well understood in this palace, and when the spectator had satisfied his artistic conscience by criticising the association of so many strange curiosities, much amusement might be found in considering their elaboration and their extravagant elegance.

(Comtesse de Boigne, of visits made in 1817, in Nicoullaud, 1907, vol.2, p.248)

How can one describe such a piece of architecture? The style is a mixture of Moorish, Tartar, Gothic, and Chinese, and all in stone and iron. It is a whim which has already cost £700,000; and it still is not fit to live in.

(Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, September 1820, quoted in Musgrave, 1951, p.81)

References and further reading

- Brown, T. (pseudonym) (1818) *Brighton; or, The Steyne: A Satirical Novel*, London.
- Colman, G. (1824) *The Geuwaw: or Brighton Toy*, London.
- Evans, J. (1821) *Recreation for the Young and the Old: An Excursion to Brighton, with an Account of the Royal Pavilion ...*, Chiswick.
- Gore, J. (ed.) (1970) *The Creevey Papers*, London, Folio Society.
- Granville, Countess Castalia (ed.) (1916) *Lord Granville Leveson Gower; Private Correspondence, 1781–1821*, 2 vols, London, Murray.
- Hibbert, C. (1988) *George IV*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Jennings, L.J. (ed.) (1884) *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the late Rt Honourable John Wilson Croker*, 3 vols, London.
- Lloyd, M. (1809) *Brighton: A Poem ...* London.
- Musgrave, C. (1951) *The Royal Pavilion: A Study in the Romantic*, Brighton, Bredon and Heginbotham Ltd.

Nicoullaud, C. (ed.) (1907) *Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne*, 4 vols, London, Heinemann.

Quennell, P. (ed.) (1937) *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich 1820–26*, London, Murray.

Sickelmore, J. (1815) *An Epitome of Brighton*, Brighton.

Music heard on the video

Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 6: 'The Pastoral' (1808).

Gioachino Rossini, *The Barber of Seville* (1816).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusick* (1787).

Franz Schubert, Trout Quintet (1819).

Illustrations seen on the video

The watercolours are from John Nash, *Views of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton* (see Unit 31, p.29).