

BRIGHTON, 1580-1820: FROM TUDOR TOWN TO REGENCY RESORT

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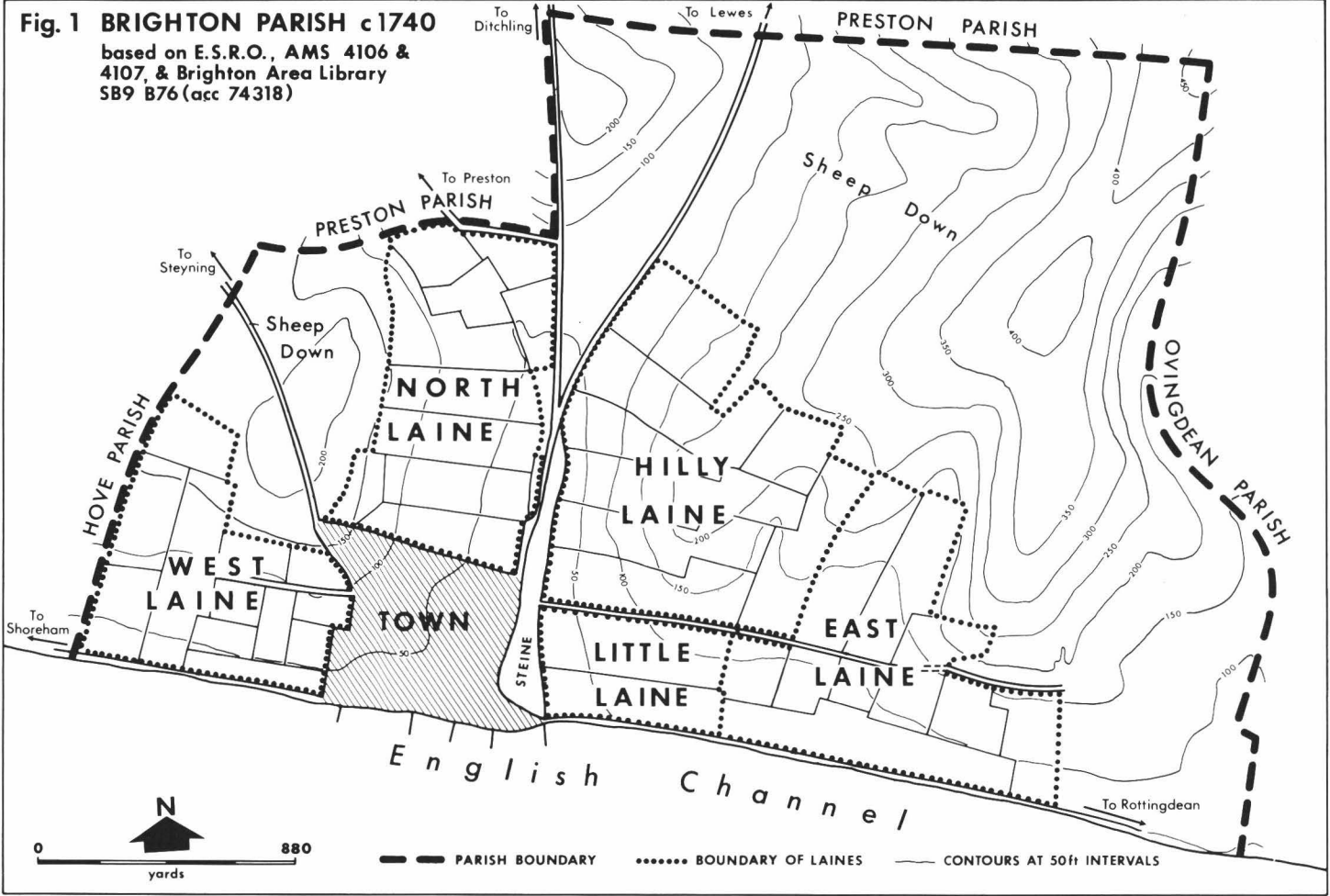
Four phases in the economic and physical development of Brighton (East Sussex) are identified. (1) Between the later sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, the town grew and prospered through fishing, particularly in the North Sea, with cargo carrying as a secondary employment. (2) In the later seventeenth century Brighton boats withdrew from North Sea fishing, in part because the town's foreshore was being eroded by the sea. Cargo carrying became of relatively greater importance, but could not prevent loss of population and falling material prosperity. (3) From the 1740s visitors to the town in search of cures for their illnesses and of recreation brought a reversal of fortunes. Much new employment in services was generated, and extensive rebuilding and infilling occurred within the town's long-established boundaries. (4) In the 1770s, the town broke these boundaries and suburban development began. Until the 1820s the form of this development was strongly influenced by the pattern of the existing open field system.

At the end of the eighteenth century Brighton was the premier health resort in Britain, basking in the patronage of the Prince of Wales and experiencing growth quite as startling in its rapidity as that of any contemporary manufacturing town. But the escapades of the Prince and his circle have dominated the literature on the town, and notwithstanding E. W. Gilbert's fine study, *Brighton, Old Ocean's Bauble* (1954), little attention has been given to the settlement before it emerged as a mature resort, or to its economic life. In this paper we therefore examine the town's economic and physical development, both in the era of Prince George's patronage and in the preceding two hundred years. The choice of starting date is determined by the poverty of materials available before the later sixteenth century. Necessarily the materials used differ from century to century, so a uniform approach cannot be adopted; furthermore space precludes either discussing the characteristics and limitations of those materials or drawing comparisons with other contemporary towns.

The paper is arranged chronologically around four phases of Brighton's history between the later sixteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. The first extends to the mid-seventeenth century, during which the town seems to have grown in population and prosperity; the second is the following hundred years which saw both decline; the third marks the first stage of recovery and in fact dates from the 1740s; and the fourth saw the more rapid population growth and physical expansion of the 1780s and later.

1. *A flourishing seafaring town*

The ancient parish of Brighton extended over some 1,600 acres on the dip slope of the South Downs, where the Downs reach the English Channel. It is orientated roughly east/west and is narrower at the west than at the east end. As the trend of the Downs is from north west to south east, the eastern parts of the parish are generally higher than the western and reach 450 feet above sea level (Fig. 1). The Downs are cut by a coombe, or valley, which now carries the Lewes road and



which merges about a mile from the sea with another coombe, carrying the London road and lying in Preston parish. Now known as the Level at its north end and as the Steine further south, the coombe used to hold an intermittent stream fed by springs in Patcham and Falmer, and to slope down to the beach at the Pool. The chalk which is the sub-stratum over most of the parish is covered by Coombe Deposits in the bottom of the coombe and on the lower slopes of the Downs.

Until the later eighteenth century, the town, where all the parish's inhabitants lived, was bounded by the Steine, the rear of North and West Streets, and the high tide line; the parish church of St. Nicholas therefore lay outside the town's north west corner. In 1566 this settlement was reported to have 200 households, which probably represented a population well in excess of 1,000 because baptisms in the parish register averaged 54 a year between 1565 and 1575.¹ A birth rate as high as 45 per 1,000 alongside a marriage rate of 13 per 1,000, is plausible, especially if Brighton was badly hit by the influenza of the late 1550s and by the plague which was present in the town in 1563, and implies a population of around 1,200 in 1570.² The epidemics of 1587-88 and 1608-10 must have reduced the population: the parish registers are deficient, but the grants of probate and administration for Brighton residents' estates in those years in the archdeaconry court comprised 49 and 57 per cent. of the totals in their respective decades.³ The overall trend, though, was steeply upwards. Between 1611 and 1640, recorded baptisms exceeded burials by 70 per cent., and a writer in the next century asserted that in about 1630 there were nearly 600 families. In 1657 the case for uniting the benefices of Brighton and Ovingdean was supported by the statement that Brighton consisted of about 4,000 souls. Though this estimate may have been deliberately generous, it is not inconsistent with the Compton Census of 1676 which gives 2,000 adults, equivalent to perhaps some 3,300 total population, for by 1676 the population may have been on the decline.⁴

Thus there is sound evidence that Brighton's population grew at least three fold between, say, 1570 and 1660. This rate of increase was far in excess of that for the county of Sussex (which surrounded Brighton for over 20 miles on its landward sides): Sussex seems to have had roughly 60,000 inhabitants in 1524-25 and 90,000 in both 1603 and 1676.⁵ None of the other larger towns experienced more growth than the county as a whole: Chichester grew from 1,700 to 2,200 between 1524-25 and 1676, Lewes (excluding Cliffe) was fairly constant around 1,500, Hastings grew from 1,300 in 1565 to 1,800 in 1676.⁶ Indeed, Brighton was the most populous settlement in Sussex by the mid-seventeenth century.

The economic basis for the growth in population was employment in seafaring activities and particularly in fishing. Between 1541 and 1640, 142 Brighton men left wills which were proved in the Lewes archdeaconry court and in which they stated their occupations.⁷ Only 11 per cent. of the adult males whose burials are entered in the parish register between 1588 and 1640 were also among these testators, so the following analysis is based only on a small proportion of the population. As 95 per cent. of those in both records were described in the register as householders or parish officers, they were not a random sample, but as the established and skilled residents of the town they no doubt included the employers of the unskilled and reflected the main features of the town's economy. Nearly two thirds (64 per cent.) of the testators described themselves as fishermen, and a further 3½ per cent. as mariners or sailors. The proportion fluctuates from decade to decade, mainly because after 1600 more testators were in agriculture as yeomen, husbandmen, and shepherds. But the actual number, let alone proportion, of inhabitants directly dependent on agriculture is unlikely to have increased, as the system and extent of cultivation, sheep-corn husbandry over 570 acres of open-field arable and 860 of pasture, seems to have been unchanged⁸ and, on the analogy of neighbouring parishes, would have supported a population of less than 200.

The remaining 18 per cent. of testators were in a range of occupations which, with the exception of shipwrighting, could be expected in any southern English town: butcher, brewer, miller, maltster, tailor, shoemaker, weaver, carpenter, mason, cooper, blacksmith, innkeeper, mercer, and labourer. This limited range of crafts and trades all served the seafaring and farming families, and for more specialised services Brighton looked to Lewes, the seat of civil and ecclesiastical administration for the eastern parts of Sussex, whose testators between 1591 and 1640 included a goldsmith, vintner, barbers, sadlers, glassman, cutler and grocer.

Much information about the fisheries in which Brighton's boats and masters engaged is given in the 'Ancient Customs', set down in 1580 to resolve disputes about contributions towards the town's common expenses.⁹ Eight fisheries or 'fares' were identified and Fig. 2 shows how they interlocked through the year in relation to both time and size of boat. Cock, drawnet, harbour and

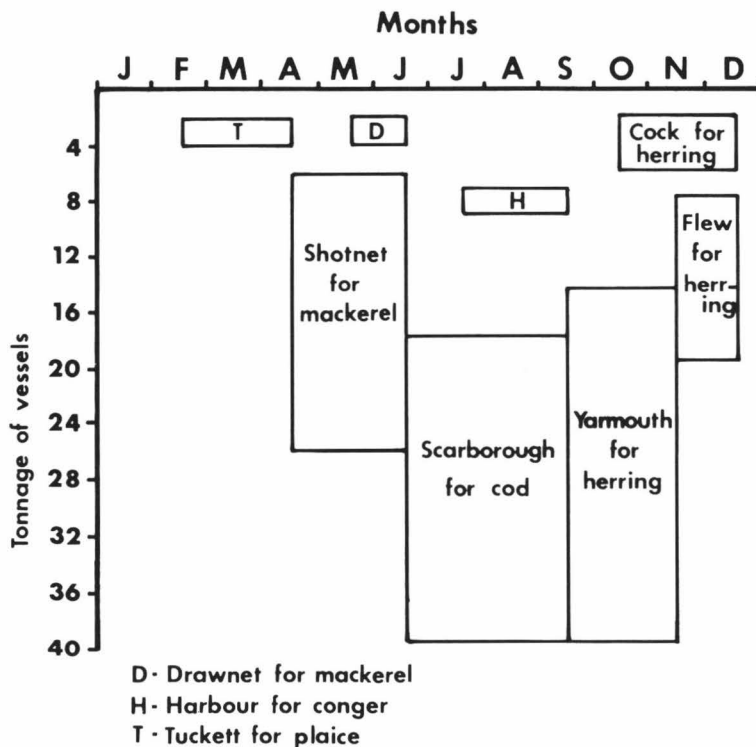


Fig 2 THE BRIGHTON FISHING 'FARES' BY TIME OF YEAR AND SIZE OF VESSEL

tuckett fares were inshore; flew and shotnet were at a distance in the English Channel; Yarmouth and Scarborough fares were in the North Sea. Boats of the size for fishing inshore could be found at many coastal settlements in Sussex, and it was participation in the distant fisheries which distinguished Brighton from its neighbours. Among those Yarmouth fare was the most important, outpacing the others in size of boat, men employed and earnings. The sale of fish taken in it was called, in 1566, 'the chief gain that the fisherman hath here to maintain himself and his household throughout the whole year.'¹⁰ These fares took a sizeable proportion of the men away for several

months: in 1570, 137 men, or perhaps a third of the adult males, were away at (the less important) Scarborough fare,¹¹ and the timing of marriages followed the fishing year rather than canon law, with precisely half the marriages recorded between 1561 and 1650 being performed in the three months of November, December and January, after the Yarmouth fare (in neighbouring agricultural parishes marriages peaked in July and October). As the catches, with the possible exception of the last one, were landed and sold on the East Coast, the North Sea fares did not generate specialist occupations at Brighton in preserving and distributing fish, at least on the evidence of the surviving records.

Brighton boats also carried cargo. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, 40 and 20 per cent. of the cargoes entered in a sample of Port Books for New Shoreham (which included Brighton) and Newhaven respectively were carried in vessels belonging to Brighton.¹² These cargoes were mainly outwards and made up of corn, timber and iron destined for London and Kentish ports, though some went as far afield as Plymouth and King's Lynn. Only 13 of the 70 masters named can, even tentatively, be identified among the testators who stated their occupations, but in 11 cases these were 'fisherman', in one 'mariner' and in the last 'yeoman'. More cargoes were carried when fishing was (as shown in Fig. 2) at a low ebb. In the sample Port Books, 40 per cent. of cargoes in Brighton boats were entered in January to March; a second peak occurred in June and July (28 per cent.), suggesting that the Scarborough fare was relatively unimportant, but only two per cent. of the cargoes were entered in September and October, during the Yarmouth fare. This evidence points to boats which were primarily for fishing being used also for freight at other times of year, as does a survey for the Privy Council in 1582. This listed 36 vessels of 10 tons and larger belonging to Brighton.¹³ The Port Books for 1588-89 (the nearest year for which they survive) record 32 different Brighton boats of similar size (and two other smaller ones) entering or clearing Shoreham or Newhaven.¹⁴ That year was a busy one, so it may have been only in a good year that most boats of the size which joined the distant fisheries also found cargoes. But the inshore boats either were confined to fishing or carried cargoes exempted from entry in the Port Books.

When carrying cargo the boats needed smaller crews but there must have been work on shore during the winter repairing nets and making up new ones. Peaks of demand for labour nevertheless remained: residents of inland villages are occasionally found in the Yarmouth fishery, while Brighton fishermen helped with the harvest. Clement Brock, a journeyman shoemaker, left all his possessions to his master, William Feilder, because he often went to sea and when he returned he always took Feilder's home for his own.¹⁵ But dual employment seems not to have extended to the masters. Small enclosures which could be farmed as a sideline were notably absent on the Downs, and only one Brighton fisherman bequeathed land which he farmed himself, probably less than four acres plus pasture for 15 or so sheep. Conversely none of the craftsmen, other than a shipwright, made specific bequests of shares in vessels or of nets, while these were mentioned in most fishermen's wills.¹⁶

'Barks' were usually owned in shares of a quarter, a third or a half and were presumably the vessels in the distant fisheries, while a small boat usually had a single owner. A few owners had shares in two barks. Ownership of nets was more widespread. The shipowners were not expected to equip the boat with a full complement of nets. Crewmen might bring their own nets, and land bound people, such as widows and minors, put nets to sea as a form of investment.¹⁷ A boat of 20 tons in the Yarmouth fare carried some 80 nets, but bequests of one, two and three nets were common. The profits of a fare were divided up according to a refined system of shares, the number of shares

depending on the size of the boat, the number of crew and the number of nets, with one share divided between the vicar ($\frac{1}{2}$), the churchwardens ($\frac{1}{4}$) and the master ($\frac{1}{4}$).¹⁸

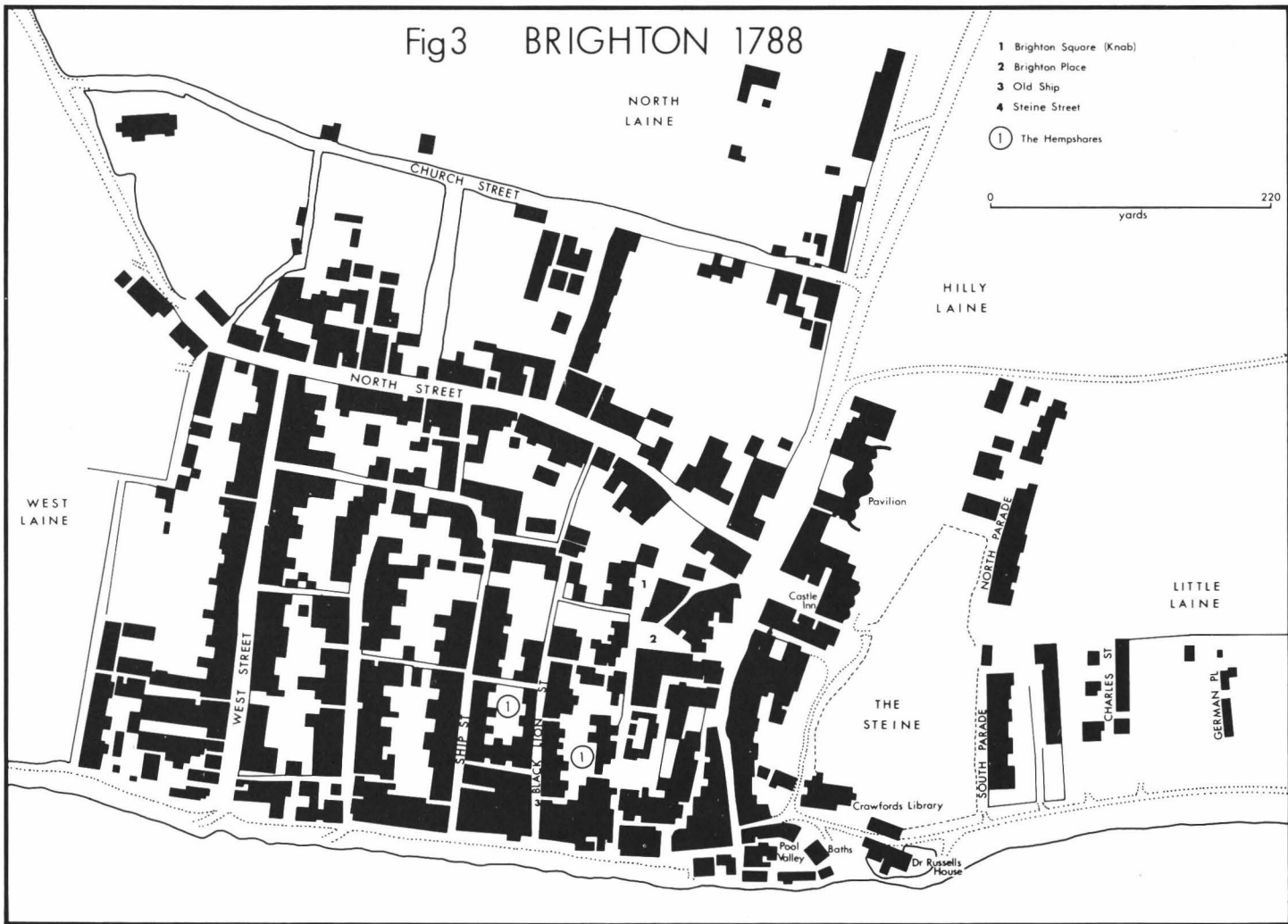
Why Brighton should have become a fishing settlement is readily explained by its site which is at the junction of three physical regions, the foreshore, the Downs and the Sussex coastal plain. The chalk cliffs made access to the foreshore further east difficult, but Brighton had easy access up onto the Downs for long distance travel to east and west, and through them to the north. To the west the coastal plain, at least in earlier times, had been ill-drained, so impeding movement between the shore and the Downs. The foreshore at Brighton provided adequate berthing for the boats, for it seems to have been protected from the main force of the waves by a shingle bar extending from the west side of the river Adur's mouth to east of Brighton.¹⁹ The bar was probably submerged but a boat which could pass over it came into calm waters and could beach on a shore which had a gentle gradient and was not buried in steeply-shelving shingle. On the shore beneath the cliff, which was only some 25 feet high, there were in 1576 some 90 'shops' which served as the fishermen's stores for tackle and workplaces for repairs and processing locally caught fish, and nearly 50 'capstanplaces' which probably embraced the ground for both the capstans and the beached boats. Certainly in the 1660s, and no doubt earlier, there were also over 20 inhabited cottages on the shore.²⁰

Why Brighton should have prospered as a fishing settlement around 1600 is less clear. The mid-sixteenth century may have been a lean time generally for fishermen, but a more rigorous enforcement of Lent combined with a rising population may have increased demand for fish later in the century.²¹ Locally the silting of Rye's harbour and the decline in its fishing fleet from about 1565 may have given scope for expansion elsewhere. Though there is no evidence of emigration to Brighton, Brighton was particularly open to newcomers because manorial control was weak.²² Most land within the limits of the town was copyhold, but with the largest manor in joint ownership, lordship was fragmented amongst up to ten families, of which only one, the Shirleys, lived locally.²³

Indeed the fisheries' expansion cannot be traced accurately as to either date or scale. According to the Customs of 1580, Brighton had four score fishing boats, and the Privy Council's survey of two years later listed 36 vessels of ten tons or more, so roughly 40 may have been smaller. These are the only statements on the size of Brighton's fleet. How many went to Yarmouth fare is indicated by the number entered, with the names of their Yarmouth hosts, in the borough's records in the few years for which they survive; these numbers are minima because of possible evasion, but generally concur with other evidence.²⁴ In 1581, 44 were entered, and in 1593, 50, figures similar to the estimate of at least 40 going to Yarmouth made by the stewards of Brighton-Lewes manor in 1576. In both 1601 and 1623, as many as 66 were recorded, the largest Brighton fleet reported in any one fishery. A petition of 1626 gave the lower number of 28 to 30 barks in the Yarmouth fare in better times (compared with a mere eight that year); but the Yarmouth records give 31 for 1634, 27 for 1645, and 45 for 1650, the last being close to the 50 boats preparing to sail reported in a petition of 1653.²⁵ The apparent fall from a peak early in the century is reflected in fluctuations in the estimated total number of boats at Yarmouth: in all the years cited Brighton's fleet comprised between 10 and 15 per cent. of the total, except in 1623 when it reached 18.7 per cent. In the mackerel fishery, 35 barks with 400 men were ready to sail in one year in the early 1620s, while 30 boats in 1657 and 50 with more to come in 1659 were convoyed to the fishing grounds.²⁶

Though the scale and chronology of the expanding population and fisheries cannot be precisely determined, their impact on the town can be indicated in three respects: the wealth of

Fig3 BRIGHTON 1788



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inhabitants at death, the physical growth of the town, and its government. Wealth is indicated by the valuations of chattels for probate. As the inventories on which they were based have not survived, their composition is not known, and interpretation of the valuations is also beset by problems of coverage. Nevertheless, if the valuations are inflated to 1631-40 prices and, for each decade, are ranked, the lower quartile, median and upper quartile values may be compared over time. In 1551-60, they were (to the nearest pound) £17, £32 and £78. In the next two decades they were lower, at £11, £15 and £37 in the 1570s, but were back to the earlier levels in the 1580s and 1590s, and over the next 40 years roughly doubled, standing at £31, £88 and £145 in 1630s.²⁷

If the population grew three fold in a century, it is to be expected that the number of buildings increased also. But enough land within the earlier limits of the town was apparently available for building as to avoid the need for outward expansion. A comparison, unavoidably crude, of two rentals, from 1576 and 1665, for the copyhold tenements of the Manor of Brighton-Lewes within the town shows that the total rent charge went up by about 20 per cent., presumably by virtue of grants by the lords out of the manor's wasteland.²⁸ The increase was very unevenly distributed between different parts of the town (Fig. 3). In East Street, and the Knabb and Bartholomews on its west, there was none, unsurprisingly because East Street ran between the access to the foreshore at the Pool and the road northwards to Lewes, and because expansion in the immediate vicinity was restricted by the damp ground of the Steine on the east and the precincts of the former monastic cell on the west which (in part at least) the town bought in 1584 and was using as pasture in 1665.²⁹ Rents in West Street were up by 20 per cent., but in North Street and in the area of Middle Street by as much as 72 and 66 per cent. Certainly in the mid-seventeenth century on the north side of North Street were concentrated the malshouses and the crofts belonging to the yardlands, for it was the part of the town with readiest access to the fields. Maybe the cottage properties on the south side dated from the previous century. Counted with Middle Street in 1665 are tenements in the Hemphshares which was 'a field in the middle of the town' in the early sixteenth century, and which a hundred years later was being built on with the beginnings of Black Lion and Ship Streets.³⁰

Around 1580 the area bounded by Middle, North and East Streets must have been markedly bare of buildings when viewed from the cliff. On the cliff, though, were a few structures, principal among them the blockhouse, a circular building about 50 feet in diameter and 18 feet in height, built of flint in about 1560 to store powder and shot for the cannon in the gun garden on the seaward side. East of the blockhouse was the market, or town, house which presumably had the market place to its north. Many writers have alleged that a defensive wall stood on the cliff top, but there is no sound evidence other than for an arched gate across the slope up from the Pool to East Street, perhaps with retaining walls on each flank, such as may have also been built at the foot of the cliff facing the sea.³¹

The third indication of the impact of the town's growth is that a codification and, to an extent unclear, a restructuring of its administration were deemed necessary in 1580. Five years earlier, the fishermen had complained to the Privy Council that they alone bore the expense of maintaining the town's defences and its church. The commission to whom this petition was referred is not recorded as acting, and in 1580, probably after a second petition, the Council appointed another commission who caused the 'Ancient Customs' to be set down.³² These Customs describe the organisation of the fisheries so as to state the basis for computing the quarter share in the profits paid to the churchwardens for the church's maintenance and other public charges. The commissioners ordered that 'the husbandmen and artificers' should be rated to raise half the amount raised from the fisheries; and they specified how the income was to be administered. Furthermore they appointed

twelve inhabitants as assistants to the constable in all matters but each was also charged with keeping good order in a part of the town. Vacancies were to be filled, as the constable was already appointed, by nominations to the steward at the view of frankpledge which belonged to the Barony of Lewes. The Earl of Arundel and Lord Buckhurst each held a quarter of the barony, were jointly the lords of the principal Brighton manor (Brighton-Lewes), and were two of the four commissioners, so the arrangements were presumably intended to confirm their authority over the town as exercised through the view. Nevertheless by 1613 it was customary for the constable to be appointed from among 'the Twelve' to whose ranks he returned at the end of his year of office. Furthermore, in the years 1613-21 the jury at the view averaged 21 members, eight of whom were of the Twelve most of whom were far more frequent in their attendance than other jurors.³³ We can infer that, within a generation of 1580 and despite a nominal subordination to the lords of the barony, the Twelve were in practice a 'civic oligarchy', also discharging with the vicar and (if they were not of the Twelve) the churchwardens and overseers of the poor the duties placed on the parish by parliamentary statute. Hence a characteristically urban form of internal government evolved to meet the changing condition of the town.

2. *A depressed coastal town*

It is from the 1650s that comes evidence of both the largest fishing fleet and, before the later eighteenth century, the greatest population, but the dearth of information may conceal a peak which had been passed earlier. What is clear is that within a generation of 1660 the town was in severe difficulties. The connection between cause and effect is inferred rather than proven, but just as expanding fisheries seem to have been the basis of Brighton's growth in the previous 100 years, so contraction in the fisheries is reflected by the town's depression.

Even in the 20 years from 1661 the occupations given by testators yield a significantly different pattern compared with the 20 years to 1640. The proportion of fishermen fell from 55 per cent. to 29; 20 per cent. called themselves 'mariners', a description rarely used before then; and the proportion in crafts and other services rose from 29 to 38 per cent. The title 'mariner' was no mere alternative for 'fisherman', to describe the same employment, for the proportion of wills mentioning nets dropped from 45 to 25 per cent. These trends continued to the extent that only two fishermen are to be found among the testators of 1701-50, half the male testators stating their occupations were mariners, only 6 per cent. of the wills proved in the 1690s specified nets as legacies and almost none after 1710. Nineteen per cent. of the surviving inventories from the following 30 years include nets but nearly always they were described as old or were found in garrets and backrooms with other lumber.³⁴

Fishing as an employment for the town contracted by withdrawal from the more distant fares. Brighton ceased to send a fleet to the North Sea between 1680 and 1697: in the former year, 29 boats (11.8 per cent. of the total) appear in Great Yarmouth's records, and in the latter only three, or 2.5 per cent. (later records do not allow any Brighton boats to be identified). Fishing came to be confined to inshore with limited excursions up and down the Channel to meet the herring and mackerel shoals.³⁵ It ceased to be an enterprise which provided the livelihood of the town's men of substance who were the willmakers. To visitors in the first half of the eighteenth century it may have seemed the town's mainstay because of the activity it generated along the seafront, but we may guess that it was the poor man's employment.

Why fishing declined can be seen no more clearly than why it had expanded. A major recession in the European fisheries at the end of the seventeenth century has been detected by

historians, possibly associated with traditional fishing grounds becoming less productive.³⁶ More apparent to the Brighton fishermen were the reasons given by a writer in the 1720s, that the town's fishing had decayed since the beginning of the Civil War 'for want of a Free Fishery, and by very great Losses by Sea, their Shipping being often taken from them by the Enemy'. Yet other Sussex fishermen did not abandon the North Sea, for a fleet was still going to Yarmouth from Hastings in the 1740s.³⁷ At Brighton there was a localised reason, which was the erosion of the foreshore by the sea. The shingle bar was being driven landwards and the sea may have been encroaching on the fishermen's workspace by the 1640s and causing them to concentrate their activity immediately under the cliff. By 1700 ships could probably no longer be beached unless they came in on one tide and left on the next or unless they were small enough to be hauled onto the Steine. In the first half of the new century the cliff was being undermined at the rate of perhaps one foot a year, though thereafter the groynes first erected in 1723 succeeded in stabilising the beach.³⁸

The diminished scale of fishing based at Brighton brought the other aspect of seafaring, cargo carrying, into greater prominence, as a primary rather than secondary employment. This was signified by 'mariners' supplanting 'fishermen'. John Warburton in the 1720s rightly noted that Brighton was mostly inhabited by men who found it convenient 'for their going on shore in their passing and repairing in the Coasting trade.' Even so, it was probably in the mouth of the river Adur, opposite Southwick and Kingston, some five miles to the west, that the larger Brighton boats were laid up, for they no longer needed to be near a netshop, and relatively few cargoes were destined for or originated at Brighton.³⁹ Indeed the town seems to have lost its resident Customs officer around 1690.⁴⁰ 'Bark' had been the usual description of the boats which went fishing in the North Sea, but from the 1670s 'ketch' was more common and from the 1710s 'pink'—these terms denote cargo vessels. As time passed the most frequently recorded size of shares owned in the vessels shrank. Before 1640, shares smaller than a quarter were rare; in the 1670s and '80s, eighths and sixteenths were normal, and in 1710-32 thirty-seconds. Owning shares in more than one vessel was more frequent and the dispersion of ownership may have been intended solely to spread the risk, but it may also represent the transfer of investment from fishing nets to boats and the need to draw on a larger proportion of the town to finance them.⁴¹

In the 1680s Brighton boats had a firmer hold on the local carrying trade than they had had a century before: in 1683, 87 per cent. of the cargoes through the Port of Shoreham were in Brighton boats, 37 per cent. through the Port of Newhaven. In 1700-1 the percentages were 43 and 29, but as many as 35 different boats were entered in Sussex's Port Books and, on the evidence of the cargoes carried, their average burden was 36 tons.⁴² So the fleet of cargo carriers was as large as it had been in the 1580s, though the crews would have been smaller, perhaps only three or four, than for fishing voyages.⁴³ Hence a similar number of vessels provided less employment—and as the century progressed the number declined. In 1761 the town had only 11, and although 28 Brighton boats entered Littlehampton harbour between 1735 and 1744 their average tonnage was only 19.⁴⁴ It is scarcely surprising that a town without harbourage should not in the long term retain a freight trade.

Decline of fishing followed by decline of freight carrying removed the economic mainstays of the town and were not replaced until its rise as a watering place. From around 3,500 inhabitants in 1660, the population fell to perhaps 2,400 in 1724 and as low as 2,000 in about 1750.⁴⁵ Baptisms and births recorded in the Anglican register fell from 82 a year in the 1680s to 55 in the 1690s. The very sharp initial drop in 1690-94 may have been accentuated by rising adherence to the Presbyterian chapel, but even including baptisms entered only in its register, the annual averages in the first three decades of the next century were only 60, 59, and 53.⁴⁶

The valuations in probate inventories also show a downward trend with the low point reached around 1700. As price levels were fairly steady throughout this period and were comparable to those immediately before the Civil War, the valuations need not be indexed. In general the quartile values of the 1670s (£20, £39, £106) were a third below those of the 1630s and fell by a quarter over the next 20 years, to £15, £28 and £78 in the 1690s. A recovery from the 1710s may be more apparent than real because of the diminishing proportion of the decedents for whom there were inventories.⁴⁷

Greater hardship at the other end of the social scale is indicated by the town's difficulty in supporting its own poor. In 1690, the Justices in Quarter Sessions rated five neighbouring parishes at 6d. in the pound for the relief of Brighton, apparently to raise about £39 a year on a continuing basis. By 1703 the money was not being paid and the order was repeated for four of the parishes plus a fifth, but three were able to convince the Justices that they had sufficient poor of their own to support. Another eight parishes further away were therefore rated from 1704-5, and five more were brought within the net in 1706, but again several succeeded in pleading their own poverty. Newtimber parish failed in an application to Queen's Bench for the Justices' order to be quashed, and the Justices seemed to have taken this as a signal to abandon the attempt to rate neighbouring parishes regularly, and instead, in 1708, to levy a single 1½d. rate throughout the eastern rapes of Sussex. As much as £800 may have been raised and, instead of going directly to Brighton's parish officers, was paid to a Justice as 'Receiver and Treasurer of the said charity' who presumably administered it as an endowment fund. Though this measure removed the subject from the Justices' immediate attention, the poor did not go away, for in 1744 as many as three quarters of householders were exempted from paying rates.⁴⁸

One source of income to the town which was declining was the quarter share in the profits of the fisheries. As late as 1756 the vicar was still collecting his half share as tithe, to the total of £14; the town's share would have been £7 and was no longer collected, for it compared with over £250 levied as poor rates on lands and houses. The change may have come in 1699 when, reversing the roles of 1579, the farmers and land occupiers complained to Quarter Sessions that they bore almost the whole charge of the poor and that the seamen and trading men paid very little; a new rate book, assessing both land and stocks, was ordered. The form of government instituted in 1580 fell into disuse: no reference to 'the Society of Twelve' later than 1641 has been found, and in 1744 the town's affairs were in the hands of a vestry comprising the constable, four headboroughs, four overseers of the poor and perhaps some other parish officers.⁴⁹

Although manor court books survive for most of the town from the later seventeenth century, they do not offer much indication of how economic decline affected landholding and topography, because comparison with the earlier era of prosperity is precluded. The erosion of the foreshore and cliff must account for the grants of waste for cottages on the south and west edge of the Steine around 1660 and for the Bartholomews property providing, from 1727, the sites of the poorhouse and probably also the market place.⁵⁰ The impressions of visitors to the town suggested that otherwise there was little new building: the Rev. John Burton in about 1730 saw 'here and there houses left desolate, and walls tumbling down', while John Whaley in 1735 succinctly described Brighton as 'the Ruins of a large Fishing Town' and John Warburton in the 1720s claimed that whole streets were deserted.⁵¹

3. *A pioneer seaside resort*

From this slough of despond Brighton was rescued by the adoption of the sea for a new purpose. Its development as a seaside resort has traditionally been associated with Dr. Richard

Russell of Lewes who, in 1750, published the results of his use of seawater to treat a wide range of ailments. But the earliest known reference to seabathing (and also sunbathing) at Brighton is from 1736, for pleasure rather than as a cure, and Russell, whose interest in seawater treatment dated from before 1730, was sending patients to Brighton before 1750.⁵² Hence the origins of the town's development as a resort are close in time to those of Scarborough and Margate.⁵³ Russell's contribution to Brighton's development and to the success of seaside resorts in general was to establish firmly the use of seawater for medical purposes, securing the dual function which spas already had.

By 1750, Worthing, Hastings and Eastbourne on the Sussex coast were probably being visited for recreational seabathing; certainly, along with Seaford, they were by the mid 1750s.⁵⁴ Why then did Brighton become the foremost south coast resort? First, Brighton was the most accessible south coast town for Londoners, being within a day's travel in the 1750s. It was only eight miles from Lewes, the social centre for the gentry of eastern Sussex, and was quite close to the fashionable spa of Tunbridge Wells. Secondly, it was a sizeable settlement with established, if rudimentary, services, but the decline of fishing and later of cargo carrying must have left the reduced population under-employed and the housing stock under-utilised (and consequently cheap to purchase or to rent). No other new employment was competing for labour, space or capital. Thirdly, because Dr. Russell was a Lewes resident and due to long established links between the two towns, prosperous Lewes townfolk were aware, and took advantage, of Brighton's new function. The people from Lewes and neighbourhood, who set up business in Brighton or, more commonly, lent money on mortgage to Brighton residents, played an important role in ensuring the early success of the resort.⁵⁵

Brighton's site and existing land use determined the location of the early resort's facilities and strongly influenced the direction of the first suburban development. East Street had long been the most densely built part of the town, as it linked the easiest access to the fore-shore, to the junction of the main road from Lewes (and London) with the east-west routeway which passed along North Street (Fig. 3). The resort facilities also needed access to the sea and to the main routeways; the land at the rear of East Street's east side faced both the sea and the open ground of the Steine; and it was owned in small blocks because much of it had been granted out of the waste. Other parts of the town with sea views lacked such advantages. Russell's house for his patients and Samuel Shergold's new Castle Inn were developed simultaneously in 1752-53 on the east side of East Street (Fig. 3), and both men purchased several copyhold tenements for their respective enterprises. The Castle was ideally sited for a coaching inn because it was easily visible as the coaches arrived from Lewes and along the coastal route. Russell's house was visible down the Steine and East Street but also had the advantage of some shelter by the town from the prevailing south westerly winds.⁵⁶ The Steine itself provided a level, sheltered promenade and served in place of a safe cliff top promenade.

Between 1750 and 1770 the town acquired the main requisites of a seaside resort and most of them were established in East Street or along the west side of the Steine. By 1754 there were bathing machines on the beach below Russell's house and an assembly room at the Castle Inn. In the late 1750s a bookseller opened a shop in East Street, and there was a library by 1760. In 1769 Awsiter's Baths were built at the bottom of East Street, attracted to the site by the proximity of the Steine and the gentle slope up which pipes were laid from the sea.⁵⁷ By 1770 several town houses had been erected on the east side of East Street, some of which certainly faced the Steine and one of which was built for a doctor. Other significant indications of the town's commitment to development as a resort between 1750 and 1770 include the establishment of regular coaches to London in 1756, assembly rooms at the Old Ship in 1761, the arrival of a Master of Ceremonies by 1767, and the

opening of private boarding schools which claimed the advantage of being by the sea. Visits by royalty and the compilation of visitor's lists between 1765 and 1770 suggest that the town was attracting a regular clientele and had become securely established as a resort.⁵⁸

Although the first resort facilities were created by incomers such as Shergold and Russell, the town had to be refurbished and its services improved, in order to retain the visitor's interest. The wills and manorial records suggest that investment in development was first by craftsmen and professional people, from the late 1740s, and then by retailers, from the 1760s.⁵⁹ *Bailey's British directory* of 1784 listed the most prosperous townfolk including an attorney, a fashionable cabinet maker, a ladies perfumier, a printer and bookseller, but there were many tradesmen who were omitted, both basic such as butchers and bakers, and specialist such as coalmerchants and a perukemaker, as well as representatives of all aspects of the building trade.⁶⁰ In the same decade the Land Tax suggests that a substantial group of townfolk were proprietors of lodgings and lodging houses, and some probably derived all of their income from this source.⁶¹

Fishing and cargo carrying, the previous mainstays of the economy and of employment, rapidly declined in their relative significance for the town. No more men were employed in fishing in 1805 than 1761, namely around 300, and fewer in 1818, though they benefited from the improvement in the 1770s of road communications which widened the market for fish landed at Brighton. The trade was conducted by middlemen and not by the fishermen; fish was carried in special waggons as far as London, often using draught animals provided by local farmers.⁶² As resort development gathered pace so the volume of coastal imports rose but ownership and management of the vessels by the townfolk seem not to have revived. Most of the coal and tradesmen's orders were landed on the beach although, from the 1760s, attempts were made to improve Shoreham harbour.⁶³ Soon after 1800 building materials were certainly being landed and stored at Shoreham.⁶⁴

The earliest general indicator of the dominance of the resort function within the town's economy and its influence is in Cobby's *Directory* of 1800. Over 770 individuals are listed and may represent over half of the 1,300 families resident in the town.⁶⁵ Forty per cent. of the people who were entered in the directory apparently derived their income entirely from letting lodgings or running lodging houses, boarding houses or inns. Twenty per cent. were craftsmen, another fifth were retailers and nine per cent. were in the professions which included music teaching and the law. A very high proportion of the town's inhabitants are listed in the directory but two large and important occupational groups are excluded, domestic servants and semi- or unskilled labourers both of whom were vitally important to the resort. The number and proportion of residents on private incomes cannot be assessed, but they must not be disregarded because of their role as generators of employment. Certainly by 1822 they were a large group, as shown by Baxter's directory.⁶⁶ This directory excluded nearly all accommodation except inns but comparison with 1800 which allows for these differences shows that the distribution between the major employment sectors (service, manufacturing, professions, transport, agriculture) was almost the same in 1822. As yet there is little evidence about the relative importance of letting accommodation in c.1820 or whether there had been changes in the type which was provided. Compared with Cobby's *Directory*, entries in Baxter's are more widely distributed through the town which indicates that by 1820 new shopping centres and manufacturing areas had been established in the suburbs, the St. James's Street-Edward Street area being especially important. Conversely some streets in the old town had declined in importance for commerce, but North Street remained the core of the business centre.

Between *c.*1750 and 1780 the town's population grew from about 2000 to some 3400, close to the previous peak which had been achieved in the 1640s. The demand for additional space for all forms of urban land use, including seasonal accommodation, shops, workshops, mews and larger town houses, was mainly met within the old town where the predominance of copyhold tenure did not inhibit development. Indeed the court books record a great increase in the number of changes in ownership, beginning in the 1750s.⁶⁷

Most of the development was apparently by Brighton residents who invested their profits from the town's burgeoning resort function and borrowed from the prosperous sheep/corn farmers in the downland region as well as from Lewes. The character of the old town changed between 1750 and 1780 as it became densely built up and as the proportion of recent building and refacings rose. By 1780 a distinct pattern of social areas was emerging, influenced by the resort role. The east side of East Street facing the Steine was lined with large town houses (which maintained their high value until 1820). East Street, Castle Square, the eastern end of North Street and the west side of the Steine comprised the fashionable lodging and shopping area. Slums were developing on the Knabb between East, North and Black Lion Streets, and on other large plots behind buildings on the main streets, such as the north west corner of North Street and the west side of West Street.

In the 1770s there was pressure to expand outwards and there were three responses, two of which were building developments. The earliest development on the fields, North Buildings, was started in North Laine in 1772 north of the town and facing the Steine, but it was premature and progress was slow. The row consisted mainly of service buildings and an inn, the King and Queen, which became a centre for agricultural business. Late in the decade building on the large crofts to the north of North Street (Fig. 4) began and Bond and King Streets were laid along their length connecting with Church Street. The type of houses, workshops and mews built in both streets suggests that the development of lodging houses and more exclusive shops on the main streets and the cliff top was pushing services and lower cost housing northwards. From the 1790s these crofts clearly evolved as a service area.⁶⁸

The third response to the pressure of urban development was administrative. By 1770 the increasing density of urban development and the expectations of visitors, who would regard the cleaning and paving of main streets and an adequate market as the normal accoutrements of a resort town, placed demands on the vestry for which it appears to have been inadequate. In 1773 and, perhaps by coincidence, soon after the first building on the open fields, town commissioners were appointed by an act of Parliament with the usual responsibilities of such bodies (paving, lighting, cleansing and the removal of nuisances and obstructions from the streets, and the administration of the town market) along with power to levy a town rate and market tolls.⁶⁹ Brighton's commissioners also maintained the groynes which secured the beach for vessels unloading coal and other cargoes. A duty levied on all coal which entered the parish had to be spent on the sea defences. This aspect of the commissioners' work was important for both the protection of buildings in the old town and, from the 1780s, for the new suburbs on the cliff.

The 1773 act gave the town commissioners very limited powers and in such a rapidly growing town regulation of the construction of buildings and control of the width of roads, including the alignments of buildings along them, was necessary, partly in order that the commissioners could carry out their sanitary and paving responsibilities reasonably effectively and cheaply. In 1810 a new act granted wider powers to a larger, reformulated body of commissioners.⁷⁰ Some clauses of the act had a direct influence on urban development and were at least partially implemented, including building regulations, power to purchase property in order to widen roads, and greater

penalties for failing to comply with regulations, for example by building excessively protuberant bow fronted houses.

The commissioners attempted to improve the town's sanitary state from 1773 but their efforts were especially concerned with the resort areas as shown by the expenditure on lighting, paving, and complaints against miscreants. They also provided drains for street runoff. Brighton's commissioners were unexceptional in their failure to devise an adequate system of cleansing and drainage for a rapidly growing town, but they did influence street facades and widths and controlled obstructions of the thoroughfares.

4. *Building on the farmland 1780-1820*

From the 1780s the old town's role changed as it became the centre of a series of suburbs which spread out at different speeds over the surrounding arable land. By 1800 the suburbs housed a substantial proportion of the town's 7,300 inhabitants and most of the resort accommodation, and the old town was becoming a business centre; solicitors were congregating in Ship Street, coach offices in Castle Square, repositories and similar upper class shops in North Street.⁷¹ The old town's compact, irregular and densely built-up area contrasted with the linear and more planned appearances of the new suburbs (Fig. 4). A similar contrast between the old core and the new terraces on the outskirts is still discernible in spa towns such as Bath and seaside resorts such as Hastings in Sussex and Weymouth in Dorset.

By 1780 almost all of the land which was suitable for resort development in the old town was built on and the price of land was rising sharply.⁷² The continuing popularity and prosperity of the town resulted in sustained building on the farmland from 1782. At that date virtually all of the land within the parish, but outside the town, was farmland. Five open fields called Laines surrounded the town on its landward sides, four of which, Little, Hilly, North and West had boundaries impinging on the Steine or the old town. Only in West Laine did some enclosure precede building (Fig. 1). In the other laines all of the land was still owned as strips when it was built on and they left their imprint on the process of development and on the street pattern (Fig. 4).

Only a few English towns, such as Portsmouth in Hampshire, had a similar extent of fossilised open fields surrounding them when they expanded.⁷³ Brighton's growth is of particular interest because of the way in which the demand for resort housing beside the sea or the resort facilities on the Steine influenced the growth of the suburbs. Land with the advantages of both attractions on the eastern side of the town was built on first and attracted the more expensive housing. The system of landholding dictated the actual layout of the streets.

The five laines were sub-divided into furlongs which were separated from one another by access paths called leakways, which usually became important east-west roads such as St. James's Street or Western Road (Fig. 4). Each furlong was divided into strips locally called paulpieces which were owned in units called yardlands, each of which in 1780 consisted of about 10 acres held as specific paulpieces and a stint for livestock on the pasture. The 84 yardlands were held by only 11 people, as a result of a process of consolidation extending over at least a century.⁷⁴ Although enclosure of all the laines was considered during the 1770s, it did not take place and land was sold or let for building on long lease in strips which were often long but too narrow to build on. For instance, an auction in 1798 included a plot in Little Laine, Upper Furlong, 25 feet wide and 600 feet long, and another in North Laine, Second Furlong, the same width and 459 feet long.⁷⁵ A developer normally purchased several adjacent strips from their owners.

The first laine to be developed was Little Laine whose western boundary was close to the core of the resort (Fig. 1). The laine was divided into two furlongs, Cliff and Upper, and terraces of houses were being built on their western fringes overlooking the Old Steine and the eventual site of the Royal Pavilion when the Prince of Wales made his first visit in 1783. In the mid-1780s German House and Place (now Madeira Place), Steine Street, Charles Street and Broad Street were being built in Cliff Furlong along the cliff top between the Old Steine and what became Rock Gardens on the south side of St. James's Street which was previously the leakway separating Cliff from Upper Furlong. All of the streets were built at right angles to the cliff top, following the orientation of the paulpieces (and extended the full width of the furlong). A developer could buy several paulpieces, lay out a road between the cliff top and St. James's Street, divide the land along one or both sides of it into building plots, build one or two houses and sell the rest of the plot to builders or townfolk who would then build the rest of the row, sometimes taking many years to do so. Houses were let to visitors, to residents, or used for private occupation.⁷⁶

The interest in sea air and the social activities on the Steine area was reflected in the value of the property which surrounded it especially on Little Laine. The most exclusive lodging houses were in Marine Parade along the cliff top and along the eastern side of the Old Steine (Fig. 4). The second most expensive lodging houses were in the most spacious streets in Cliff Furlong: New Steine, German Place and Broad Street. By contrast with the rapid development of upper class lodging houses on Cliff Furlong in Little Laine, Upper Furlong in the same laine but between St. James's Street and Edward Street was developed more slowly. So important was a location by the sea or the Steine that most of the streets in Upper Furlong which lacked these advantages failed as resort development and were developed as artisan housing and workshops by 1800. The Health Reports of the 1840s described several of them as most unsalubrious.⁷⁷

The importance of a location beside the sea or the Old Steine, and the orientation of the paulpieces is also illustrated by development on the other laines. Both North and Hilly Laines had the Old Steine as a boundary but neither was by the sea. (Fig. 1). Their paulpieces were orientated north-south and consequently building houses which faced the sea was not easily achieved. Upper class housing spread along the Old Steine to the north of the junction of the Lewes and London roads (Fig. 4), but was not established on the remainder of these laines. Land close to the town in both laines was used for market gardening and for paddocks for horses and dairy cattle until displaced by predominantly artisan housing and service buildings.⁷⁸

The pattern of development in West Laine was different because over most of it ownership was much less fragmented than in the other laines. The reason for progress being slow as compared with Little Laine was probably that, despite its coastal location, West Laine was distant from the resort facilities. In the 1780s and 90s, the three furlongs which were close to the town and which were also those in fragmented ownership, were built on. Due to its shallow depth back from the cliff, one of these, Cliff Butts, was used for short terraces and detached villas facing the sea which produced a layout contrasting with the development on the cliff east of the town (Fig. 4). In the early 1790s one of the three owners of the remaining furlongs made purchases from, or exchanges with, the other two, to give him sole ownership of them. He was then able to lease or sell blocks of land which offered greater flexibility of layout for development than did strips. Large scale building on West Laine began after 1800 when most of Cliff Furlong in Little Laine had been developed and the accelerating growth of the town stimulated interest in the previously epicentral western side as an alternative to extending the town further east into East Laine. Hence most of the rows of villas and terraces along the cliff top were soon displaced by squares such as Regency and Bedford Squares

and by access roads between the sea and inland developments such as Cannon Place and Russell Square. Compared with East Laine, on which there was little activity until after 1820, West Laine had the advantage of access to the old town where most of the services were located.⁷⁹

By 1801 at least a third of Brighton's houses stood in the suburbs on the open fields, but two thirds of them were either let as lodging houses or used as lodgings and most of the town's 7,339 inhabitants lived within the old town. Between 1801 and 1811, the town's population increased to 12,000, an increase of 63 per cent. and the number of houses rose from 1,420 to 2,380, or by 61 per cent., and as 80 houses were also being built in 1811, the rate of building was about commensurate with the increase in population. By 1811 the suburbs contained over half the town's housing. Between 1811 and 1821 Brighton's population increased by 67 per cent., which was the highest growth rate of any English town in the decade, and reached 24,400. The rate of building also dramatically accelerated, many streets which had been started before 1800 were completed, and when the census was conducted 360 houses were being built.⁸⁰

By 1811 the town was roughly triangular in outline with its base along the coast and its apex at North Steine and, by 1820 building on West Laine had accentuated the shape.⁸¹ In 1820 most of Brighton's buildings were under 30 years old. East Street and the south-western side of the Old Steine were rapidly losing their importance within the resort and facilities such as baths and libraries were available within the suburbs.⁸² By 1820 the size of the clientele of large seaside resorts was too unwieldy for the old spa routine centred on one area and the visitors were no longer interested in it. From about 1820 the development of estates of villas and large terraced houses, such as Kemp Town to the east of Brighton, Brunswick Town (Hove), and St. Leonards (Hastings) which were intended to provide space for entertaining in the home, signalled the start of developments which recognised the changing attitudes of the wealthy towards seaside resorts and a new stage in Brighton's development.⁸³

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⁵⁷ J. J. Cartwright (ed.), *The travels through England of Dr. Richard Pocock*, 2 (1889), 104. J. G. Bishop, *A peep into the past: Brighton in the olden time*, People's (i.e., 2nd) ed. (Brighton, 1892), 16, 113. *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* (abbreviated hereafter to *S.W.A.*), 10 Oct. 1769.

⁵⁸ Bishop (1892), 243, 29, 31. B.A.L., SB9 B76 (acc. no. 34693), for newspaper cutting on a school, dated to 1753; *S.W.A.*, 30 Jan. 1769. Bishop (1892), 113-14. Brighton Museum & Art Gallery has a 1769 visitors' list in MS.

⁵⁹ Farrant (1978), 20-23, 49, 59.

⁶⁰ *Bailey's British directory*, 4, *Eastern division* (1784), 788-9.

⁶¹ E.S.R.O., QDE/2/1/21.

⁶² Relhan, 17. J. V. Button, *The Brighton and Lewes guide* (1805), 21. C. Wright, *The Brighton ambulator* (1818), 95. *S.W.A.*, 15 June 1772. T. Pennant, *A journey from London to the Isle of Wight* (in 1793), 2 (1801), 69-71. E.S.R.O., AMS 5575/27/5, Ph. Mighell's day book, 1776-8.

⁶³ J. H. Farrant, *The harbours of Sussex 1700-1914* (Brighton, 1976), 10-11.

⁶⁴ P.R.O., C 217/69/2, Th. Budgen's carriage ledger, 1808.

⁶⁵ E. Cobby, *Brighthelmstone directory for 1800* (Brighton, 1800).

⁶⁶ *The stranger in Brighton and Baxter's new Brighton directory* (Brighton, 1822).

⁶⁷ Population estimated from W. A. Barron, 'Brighton and the smallpox', *Sussex County Mag.*, 26 (1952), 605-6. Farrant (1978), 47, 58.

⁶⁸ Farrant (1978), 9, 37-38, 51-55, 57-61, 64-67, and further research on the court books listed on pp. 84-85.

⁶⁹ 13 Geo. III c. 34.

⁷⁰ 50 Geo. III c. xxxviii. Dale (1976), 107-12.

⁷¹ Cobby.

⁷² Farrant, 44-61, *passim*.

⁷³ C. Chalklin, *The provincial towns of Georgian England, a study of the building process 1740-1820* (1974), 113-39, 245-6.

⁷⁴ Farrant (1978), 74-79.

⁷⁵ *S.W.A.*, April 1798 issues.

⁷⁶ Court books listed in Farrant (1978), 84-85. *S.W.A.*, Oct. 1789 issues.

⁷⁷ e.g., G. S. Jenks, 'On the sanitary state of the town of Brighton . . .' (1840), in *British Parliamentary Papers (Lords)*, 1842, XXVI.

⁷⁸ B.A.L., SB352.1 B76 (acc. no. R 65919), re-rating survey, 1814.

⁷⁹ Farrant (1978), 73-78. E.S.R.O., deeds transferred from Hove Area Lib. *Attree's topography of Brighton* (1809).

⁸⁰ Cobby. Decennial censuses, 1801, 1811, 1821.

⁸¹ S. P. Farrant, 'Building on Brighton's West Laine c. 1779-c. 1830', *Brighton Polytechnic Review* (Summer 1979), 8-11.

⁸² Gilbert, 67-71.

⁸³ A. Dale, *Fashionable Brighton*, 2nd ed. (Newcastle, 1967), 70-148.

Sources for the figures:

Fig. 1 E.S.R.O., AMS 4106, and B.A.L., SB9 B76 (acc. no. 74318), map and book of reference giving the ownership of the laines in 1792 and, in the book, in 1738/9. The sheepdown ploughed up between the two dates is shown as down. The groynes in front of the town are from C. Lemprière, 'South view of Brighton in the year 1743' (sketch in Brighton Museum & Art Gallery).

Fig. 2 Webb and Wilson

Fig. 3 T. Budgen, *A new and correct plan of Brighthelmstone* (Brighton, Sept. 1788). The only known original copy is B.L., K.42.16.

Fig. 4 'Brighthelmston, 1822', map in *The stranger in Brighton & Baxter's new Brighton directory* (Brighton, 1822).