

Early Brighton

- 1000 AD Brighton is a small village
- 1185 St Bartholomews Church is first mentioned
- 1313 Brighton is given a charter (a document granting the people certain rights). Weekly markets are held and annual fairs.
- 1340 The sea 'swallows' 40 acres of farmland
- 1497 A bulwark is built to defend Brighton
- 1514 The French burn Brighton
- 1545 The French return but are driven off
- 1580 Brighton has a population of around 2,500. It has 80 fishing vessels.
- 1651 Charles II comes to Brighton while fleeing the Roundheads
- 1660 The modern name Brighton is first used
- 1665 A free school opens
- 1703 Brighton is severely damaged by a storm
- 1705 Another storm damages the town
- 1730 Encroachment by the sea causes great concern in Brighton
- 1739 Preston Manor is built

The Seaside Town

- 1750 Dr Richard Russell writes a book in which he claims bathing in seawater is good for your health. Afterwards Brighton develops as a seaside resort.
- 1774 The first theater in Brighton opens
- 1783 The Prince of Wales visits Brighton. The population of Brighton is about 4,000.
- 1789 A grammar school opens
- 1793 Two new batteries are built at Brighton
- 1815 Brighton Pavilion is built
- 1821 A local newspaper is founded in Brighton
- 1824 Steam ships begin operating between Brighton and France
- 1841 Brighton is connected to London by railway
- 1861 The population of Brighton is 65,000
- 1866 West Pier is built
- 1867 Brighton General Hospital is built
- 1872 An aquarium is built
- 1874 Preston Park opens. A museum and library opens.
- 1882 A telephone exchange opens in Brighton
- 1883 The electric railway begins
- 1888 The Clock Tower is built
- 1899 Palace Pier is built

- 1901 The first electric trams run
- 1909 The first cinema opens in Brighton
- 1925 A boating pool is built
- 1936 A Rock Garden is laid out in Preston Park
- 1939 The last electric trams run in Brighton
- 1962 Sussex University is founded
- mid-1960s Churchill Square is built
- 1975 West Pier closes
- 1977 The Brighton Centre is built
- 2000 Brighton and Hove is made a city
- 2005 The Jubilee Library opens

History of Brighton

Brighthelmston was a fishing village in the 16th century, with 400 fishermen and sixty boats. By the early 17th century Brighton was the largest town in Sussex with a population of nearly 4,000 people.

The decline in the fishing industry during the 18th century resulted in large numbers leaving the town in search of work. Those that remained found life very difficult and by 1740 over three quarters of Brighton's households were too poor to pay rates. [Daniel Defoe](#) pointed out in his book, *[A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain](#)* (1724): "Brighthelmston (Brighton) is a poor fishing town, old built, and on the edge of the sea."

In the middle of the 18th century some doctors began to claim that diseases could be cured by bathing in sea-water. [George III](#) was the first monarch to believe this advice and he regularly visited Weymouth for a swim. His son, the future [George IV](#), spent a great deal of time in Brighton and eventually built the [Royal Pavilion](#) in the town.

Rich people tended to imitate the behaviour of the royal family, and holidays by the sea became very fashionable. The number of people visiting these resorts increased further because of the claims made by some doctors, such as [Richard Russell](#), that drinking sea-water would cure asthma, cancer, consumption, deafness and rheumatism.

Brighton soon became the most popular seaside resort in Britain, with over 2,000 people a week visiting the town. The cost of transport meant that it was extremely rare for most people living in towns to visit the coast. For example, the cost of a coach ticket from [London](#) to Brighton was more than most people could earn for two weeks work. However, the large number of rich people in the town enabled the [Theatre Royal](#) to be built in 1807.

[Elizabeth Fry](#) visited Brighton in 1824: "During her stay at Brighton, Mrs. Fry was often distressed by the multitude of applicants for relief. This was not confined to beggars by profession, who infested the streets, following carriages and foot passengers with clamorous importunity, but extended to the resident poor, many of whom had obtained the habit of asking assistance to the houses, not only of the inhabitants, but the visitors to the place. It was difficult for the former, but almost impossible for the latter, to discover the true state of the case, whether their poverty was real or assumed."

This view was supported by Dr. G. S. Jenks: "Owing to the imperfect and insufficient drainage of the town, the inhabitants are compelled to have recourse to numerous cess-pools as receptacles for superabundant water, and refuse of all kinds; and to save the inconvenience of frequently emptying them, they dig below the hard coombe rock till they come to the shingles, where all the liquid filth drains away. Nottingham Street is the well-known haunt of tramps and beggars; Egremont Street of the lowest prostitutes and thieves. In Nottingham Street there are eight or nine lodging-houses. Lodging keepers have commonly three or four houses, for each of which they pay 2s. 6d. per week. The following is a description of one of them. One room, common to the whole of the inmates, who amounted to 30, including the children, served both as kitchen and sitting-room. The room was crowded when I visited it in company with the chief police-officer, Mr. Solomons, with not less than 17 people covered with filth and rags."

After the success of the [Liverpool & Manchester Railway](#), a group of businessmen decided to build a railway between [London](#) and Brighton. The first train entered [Brighton Railway Station](#) on 21st September 1841. At first, the railway company concentrated on bringing the rich to the coast. It was not long, however, before the company realised that by offering cheap third-class tickets, they could increase the numbers of people using their trains. In 1843 the [London to Brighton Railway](#) reduced the price of their third-class tickets to 3s. 6d. In the six months that followed this reduction in price, 360,000 people arrived in Brighton by train.

Large numbers of people now moved to the town to provide these visitors with food and entertainment. Between 1841 and 1871 the population of Brighton increased from 46,661 to 90,011, making it the fastest growing town in Britain.

In the 1870s the family of [Evelyn Sharp](#) would visit Brighton for a month every year. "Brighton in the seventies was not Hove. For us it was Kemp Town, with a background of bare Downs and a foreground of untidy shingle on which lay rowing boats and fishing smacks when they were not afloat-a beach strewn with bits of treasure cast up by the tide, and with fishing nets spread out to dry, and, when the tide was out, presenting a long stretch of rather black smooth sand on which to build castles. Over it all was that smell of the sea-or was it only of stale fish and decaying seaweed - which, with the smell of the magic-lantern and the circus, may be ranked among the subtle smells of Victorian childhood that never failed to thrill. And in this charming old Georgian seaside resort-resort is exactly the right word for it - we used to occupy rooms in a house with a shining black front of bow windows, in Lower Rock Gardens, looking sideways to the sea and frontwards to a wind-swept, sun-dried oval of enclosed garden that we thought as lovely as the rest of it."

As a young man, [Edward Carpenter 1844-1929, Utopian socialist poet and activist](#) lived in Brighton: "The scenery and surroundings of Brighton are also bare and chilly enough; and trees, whose friendly covert I have always loved, do not exist there; but the place has two nature-elements in it - and these two singularly wild and untampered - the Sea and the Downs. We lived within two hundred yards of the sea, and its voice was in our ears night and day. On terrific stormy nights it was a grisly joy to go down to the water's edge at 10 or 11 p.m. - pitch darkness - feeling one's way with feet or hands, over the stony beach, hardly able to stand for the wind - and to watch the white breakers suddenly leap out of the gulf close upon one, the booming of the wind, like distant guns, and the occasional light of some vessel labouring for its life in the surge."

By [John Simkin \(john@spartacus-educational.com\)](#) © September 1997 (updated January 2020).

ROYAL PAVILION

The prince had been advised by his physicians to benefit from Brighton's fortunate climate and to try out the sea water treatments, which included 'dipping' (total body immersion into the salt sea water).

Fun, fashionable and frivolous

Brighton suited George who was a vain and extravagant man with a passion for fashion, the arts, architecture and good living. He rebelled against his strict upbringing and threw himself into a life of drinking, womanising and gambling.

This decadent lifestyle combined with his love of architecture and the fine and decorative arts – his residences in London and Windsor were like immaculate sets to show off his superb collections – resulted in his incurring heavy personal debts.

In 1787, after much pleading and many promises by the Prince of Wales, the House of Commons agreed to clear his debts and increase his income.

George hired architect Henry Holland to transform his Brighton lodging house into a modest villa which became known as the Marine Pavilion. With his love of visual arts and fascination with the mythical orient, George set about lavishly furnishing and decorating his seaside home. He especially chose Chinese export furniture and objects, and hand-painted Chinese wallpapers.

In 1808 the new stable complex was completed with an impressive lead and glass-domed roof, providing stabling for 62 horses.

The Royal Pavilion grows

In 1811 George was sworn in as Prince Regent.

At that time the Marine Pavilion was a modest building in size, not suitable for the large social events and entertaining that George loved to host.

In 1815, George commissioned John Nash to begin the transformation from modest villa into the magnificent oriental palace that we see today.



This stage of the construction took a number of years. Nash superimposed a cast iron frame onto Holland's earlier construction to support a magnificent vista of minarets, domes and pinnacles on the exterior. And no expense was spared on the interior with many rooms, galleries and corridors being carefully decorated with opulent decoration and exquisite furnishings.

Comfort and convenience

George was determined that the palace should be the ultimate in comfort and convenience. Particular attention was paid by his architect and designers to lighting, heating and sanitation, as well as to the provision of the most modern equipment of the day for the Great Kitchen.

Prosperity for Brighton

George's presence had an enormous impact on the prosperity and social development of Brighton from the 1780s.

Brighton's population grew significantly, from around 3,620 inhabitants in 1786 to 40,634 in 1831. The rebuilding of the prince's home provided work for local tradesmen, labourers and craftsmen.

The presence in the town of the court, George's guests, members of society and the Royal Household provided invaluable business for local builders and the service industries.

An elegant era that remains today

Many of the handsome seafront squares and crescents that still stand today are attributable to the arrival of George IV and the fashionable Regency era.

Amon Wilds and Charles Busby, architects of the day, built impressive estates in Kemp Town to the east and Brunswick to the west in Hove. Both are now outstanding Grade I listed conservation areas and underpin the look and the feel of modern Brighton & Hove.

George became king in 1820. However, due to increased responsibilities and ill-health, once the interior of the Royal Pavilion was finally finished in 1823 he made only two further visits (in 1824 and 1827).

On his death in 1830, George was succeeded by his younger brother, William IV.

William IV and a more subdued palace

William IV was a popular and affable king and continued to visit Brighton and stay at the Royal Pavilion. As George IV had become reclusive towards the end of his life, the people of Brighton were reassured by William's visibility and openness.

However, the Royal Pavilion's accommodation was not suitable for a married sovereign and extra room had to be found for Queen Adelaide's extensive household. Further buildings were added to the Pavilion estate, virtually all of which have since been demolished.

Although William and Adelaide continued to entertain at the Royal Pavilion, it was in a much more informal style than the glamour and extravagance of former decades.

The young Queen Victoria

King William IV died in 1837 and was succeeded on the throne by his niece Victoria.

Queen Victoria made her first visit to the Royal Pavilion in 1837 and this gesture of royal approval thrilled the people of Brighton.

However the lack of space in the Royal Pavilion, and its association with her extravagant and indulgent elder uncle, made Queen Victoria feel uncomfortable. She adopted a policy of financial stringency during her residence in Brighton.

As her family grew and the Royal Pavilion failed to provide her with the space and privacy she needed, she finally sold her uncle's pleasure palace to the town of Brighton for over £50,000 in 1850. As it was thought the building would be demolished, she ordered the building to be stripped of all its interior decorations, fittings and furnishings, for use in other royal homes.

1850-1900 the town takes over

Brighton continued to prosper in the mid 19th century and the opening of the new London to Brighton railway in 1841 marked the beginning of mass tourism.

The people of Brighton were aware of the economic and symbolic importance of the former palace. Within a year of purchase the main ground floor rooms had been completely redecorated in a similar, but much less lavish, style to that of Crace and

Jones, and the Royal Pavilion was opened to the public. It was this Victorian civic pride that helped to maintain and secure the Royal Pavilion's future.

In 1864 Queen Victoria returned many items – chandeliers, wall paintings, fixtures – with further gifts being made in 1899.

From 1851 to the 1920s the admission fee to the Royal Pavilion was sixpence. At this time the Royal Pavilion was also used as a venue for many different events and functions from fetes, bazaars, and shows to balls, exhibitions and conferences. The Royal Pavilion Gardens were opened up and made accessible to both residents and visitors.

Into the 21st century and recreating George IV's vision

During World War I the Royal Pavilion was used as a hospital for Indian soldiers. As a result the interiors were altered, sometimes damaged, and inevitably neglected.

In 1920 a programme of restoration began (funded by a settlement made by the government for the damage done to the building during its use as a hospital). This was further boosted when Queen Mary returned original decorations, including furniture that had remained at Buckingham Palace.

After a break during World War II, restoration work began again in earnest with the revival of interest in the Regency era.

'Brighton – For Health and Pleasure' – The History of a Seaside Resort

July 29, 2019 In [Headlines from History](#)  by Rose Staveley-Wadham

'What Pompeii was to the Romans... Brighton is to Londoners,' comments an article on the famous British seaside town in the [Penny Illustrated Paper](#), 10 August 1889. This 'Queen of Watering-places,' developed from a health resort in the eighteenth century, via its growth as a fashionable destination thanks to the Prince Regent, through its railway heyday, and on to its infamous twentieth century seediness.

The same article in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* describes how 'As far back as 1736 we find [Brighton] described by an enthusiastic chronicler as 'one of the principle places in the kingdom.'" But why was this? The paper attributes the town's 'beautiful and healthy situation, and atmosphere of wonderful crispness and purity, which is nearly always saturated with sunshine' to its early popularity.

Eighteenth century physician Richard Russell came to recommend Brighton for a very specific reason – its health benefits. Russell 'sang the praises of sea-water very

loudly,' and published a work named *A Dissertation on the Use of Sea-Water in the Diseases of the Glands*. Thus, the town grew in popularity as it became a destination for those seeking a cure in its climate and its waters.

This draw continued well into the twentieth century. [A bulletin](#) in the [London Evening Standard](#) describes how the current monarch – King Edward VII – had seen a 'benefit' in his health from visiting Brighton in the winter of 1908. [An advertisement](#) in the [West Sussex Gazette](#) in 1923 lauds 'Brighton for Health and Pleasure all the Year Round' – and so now it was not just kings and princes that could reap the benefits from a Brighton cure – it was everybody.



[Illustrated London News | 8 January 1927](#)

And indeed, Brighton embodies this fascinating juxtaposition between health and pleasure. Visitors would flock to the town for a 'rest cure,' such as the one Edward VII took in 1908, but many flocked to its beaches for pleasure.

And with the opening of the railways, Brighton became a popular destination: 'The London, Brighton and South Coast Railway has done a hundred times more to develop Brighton than Dr Russell and George IV,' claimed the *Penny Illustrated Paper* in 1889.

With this influx of visitors, and its proximity to the capital, Brighton became known as 'London-by-the-Sea.' Illustrations from the 1870s show a beach crowded with visitors, and instead of appearing like a seaside idyll, the town seems like an extension of the urban sprawl.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in two fascinating illustrations published a month apart in the [The Sphere](#). The [earlier sketch](#), published in June, shows 'a typical scene on Brighton beach.' This is veritably London-by-the-Sea – bustling and filled with all types of humanity. But a month later, the same newspaper published

a [whimsical depiction](#) of 'sea bathing at an English watering-place,' this watering-place being Brighton.



[The Sphere | 1 June 1901](#)

Here, bathing huts touch the sea, and an old fisherman rows bathers out for a swim (although in 1929, [according to The Sphere](#), bathers and fishermen were up in arms, both claiming each other to be a nuisance). It is nothing short of paradise.



[The Sphere | 13 July 1901](#)

But with its popularity came pitfalls. Crime became more common – with the notorious Brighton trunk murders splashed across newspaper headlines in the 1930s. The [Yorkshire Evening Post](#), 16 July 1934, [reports that](#) 'another body was discovered in a trunk at Brighton yesterday.' This followed on from an earlier discovery of female's torso in a trunk at a Brighton railway station.

Graham Greene famously captured the seediness of the seaside resort in his novel *Brighton Rock*, which follows ruthless seventeen-year-old gangster Pinkie. [The Sketch](#), 21 January 1948, [describes](#) the 'sleazy mean lodging-houses and narrow streets behind the front in the holiday season' that make up the setting of both film and novel.

The 'visual savagery' of the work is at odds with the popular image of Brighton as a fun and family-friendly destination. However, the reputation of the town as a place for pleasure survived such connotations. Lord Kilbracken, in a 1962 article for

the [Tatler](#) entitled '[Return to Brighton](#)' writes how to him, as a child, 'Brighton offered all the delights in the world.'

Returning years later, he was 'delighted...to find it exactly as I recalled it:'

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