



James Burton
1761-1837



Decimus Burton
1800-1881

Newsletter
Summer 2021



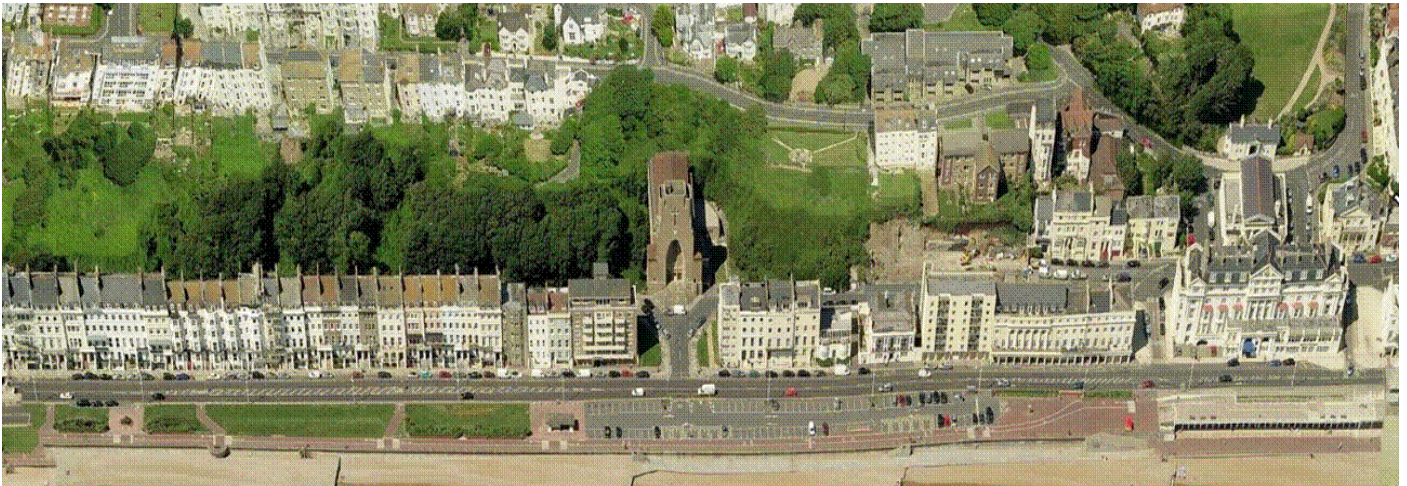
This delightful watercolour of the Assembly Rooms by an unknown artist has recently come into the possession of the Society's Chairman. It has been cleaned by an expert picture restorer and dated provisionally to c. 1830 but is undergoing further study. We see the entrance to the St Leonards [soon to be the Royal Victoria] Hotel, originally situated at the rear of the building, facing the Assembly Rooms, and street lighting on the two near corners. The picture also shows that the double villa on East Ascent is in place and what appear to be the beginnings of its mirror image on West Ascent (destroyed by bombing in the 2nd War). This confirms that Burton constructed much of his new town from east to west. The visual damage to the formerly purer Doric style of the Assembly Rooms, resulting from the much later addition of lobes to the wings, can be judged.

We may also detect clefts or gulls in the former coastal cliff which has given so much trouble over the past 50 years, in particular in James Burton's Undercliff—possible early signs of instability in the Wadhurst Clay uplift. See the article on the next page and the piece in the Spring 2019 Newsletter by Christopher Maxwell-Stewart on the geotechnical issues involved.

The Future for St Leonards Church

Readers of the Autumn issue for last year will have seen Chris Lewcock's proposals for the now disused Adrian Gilbert Scott church. Chris will regrettably be leaving us for colder pastures (Aberdeen) but has left his thoughts on how the project — "Science on Sea" — might fare forward. We summarise below.

Although the award of £24.3 million to Hastings under the Town Deal programme was announced on 8 June, the proposals were not included because the church is not in the town centre, which is the focus of The Town Investment Plan. Nevertheless, they received a great deal of support from many quarters including the Shipwreck Museum, the Burtons' St Leonards Society, the Hastings & St Leonards Society, several local Councillors, the Design Group, the Science Museum, and the 20th Century Society. The project has great potential for regeneration in the bough and may be appropriate in whole or part for applications to other funding agencies e.g. the Heritage Lottery and South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP).



The church is Grade II listed ("Group value" with the Burton tomb). It has strong maritime features and is a key townscape element in Burtons' St Leonards (it replaced the original Burton church destroyed by bombing in the last war). It has a large nave with good acoustics. It offers a dramatic plaza/exhibition space between church and sea, currently unsightly. The project would address the following issues:

- ⊙ An incomplete unsightly housing site in the Undercliff
- ⊙ The need for a community facility such as meeting rooms
- ⊙ Marine Conservation Area(s) lie immediately offshore with no current onshore facility.
- ⊙ There are well respected maritime themed museums and cultural events in Hastings with great expertise and limited space.

Chris's baton has been passed to Bryan Fisher of the West St Leonards Neighbourhood Forum. The Society will be discussing possible ways forward with him and other local interests.

Before the above proposals or any elements of them can be progressed, the unstable cliffs require urgent work behind the church. These also affect the areas above and below it including the Burton graveyard (currently closed off) and the steps linking West Hill Road and the seafront (see opposite page). Discussions are in train between the Burtons' Society and the local and diocesan authorities but the problems to be faced are considerable.

The foregoing issues have become a major concern for the Society. The photograph below is of the pyramid over the vault in the former churchyard of St Leonards Parish church where James and Elizabeth Burton were buried in 1837. Mounted on it are four Portland plaques (one shown here) commemorating James Burton, the founder of St Leonards, Elizabeth and three of their children - Jane, Decimus and Alfred. The tomb belongs to the heirs to the Burton Estate. It was restored in 1973 by the Burtons' St Leonards Society with funds provided by the late John Fearon and listed by Historic England Grade II in September 1976. The care of the churchyard was transferred to Hastings Borough Council which has since maintained it as the Burton Memorial Garden - sole publicly accessible part of the former coastal cliffs of St Leonards.



The photograph below records a January 2021 slip of the cliff below the former churchyard which self evidently threatens the Burton Tomb and the Memorial Garden above.





25 West Hill Road as recently renovated by two Society members, who commissioned this painting by local artist Stewart Walton. It captures the attractive character and proportions of the house. By chance but happy coincidence he bears its Victorian name (see below).

Recent research has disclosed that two parcels of James Burton's estate which remained undeveloped on his death in 1837 were assigned to Decimus Burton in 1838. The first was the land on which Nos 72 to 82 Marina were constructed between 1850 and 1859.

The second was the parcel on the cliff above these, corresponding to what are now Nos 19 to 35 West Hill Road. The development here began in 1862 with the construction of 1 to 3 West Hill Villas later renumbered 23, 25 and 27 West Hill Road. Nos 23 and 27 were designed as a matched pair abutting the wider and deeper No 25. In the late Victorian years No 25 was better known as Walton House. Its neighbour, No 23 (happily also owned by two Society members), has retained its Victorian designation as Burlington House. Their elevations have remained very close to how they were constructed between 1862 and 1866.

The set of three were built on leases granted by Decimus Burton to the builder William Rodda (who concurrently constructed Nos 1-6 of The Mount) under the supervision of the architect Henry Marley Burton, Decimus' nephew, who succeeded to his practice in 1867.

GLOUCESTER LODGE



This lovely drawing was done by Prue Theobalds in the early 1970s. It shows the fountain built in the garden by the present owner's father. The Society has now restored the James Burton monument in the garden near to its boundary with St Leonards Gardens with a bronze replica of the plaque (previously vandalised) fixed to the granite obelisk (see Newsletter Spring 2019). It is hoped to be able in due course to restore the fountain tap to the monument.

Events on hold

Held over from the pre-lockdown period are a number of talks and visits which we plan to reinstate as soon as circumstances allow. These include

- a talk on the Crake family and their association especially with Highlands Gardens (see last year's Autumn Newsletter); and a possible further Rider Haggard event at the Kino;
- a visit to London's Regent's Park area, where James Burton worked extensively with John Nash, often to Decimus's designs; and to the Old Royal Naval College at Greenwich (below, showing Inigo Jones' Queen's House, recessed centre). Both of these visits will depend on the full lifting of Covid-related restrictions and our putting suitable arrangements in place.



The Holme (1818), the Burton family home in Regent's Park, designed by Decimus at the age of 17



The ceiling by Sir James Thornhill in the Painted Hall of the Old Royal Naval College

- talks on the life of William Ford Burton (1784-1856) the first of the 12 children of James and Elizabeth Burton, who became a gunpowder manufacturer and resided in his later years at South Lodge; and on his extraordinary younger brother, James (see the opposite page).



The Remarkable Burton Family

The Society is assembling and cataloguing information about all 12 children of James and Elizabeth Burton. Two daughters sadly died of small pox a few months old. The other 10 had varied and interesting lives.

One such is their fourth child and second son, James junior (1786-1862), who has hitherto been considered to be the 'black sheep' of the family partly on account of what appears to have been (without much evidence) an undistinguished period as a mathematics student at Trinity College, Cambridge. The present Librarian at Trinity writes:

"We don't seem to have any letters of James Burton or other members of his family – quite often there are occasional letters if a student remained in contact with his tutor later in life, or letters from his father enquiring about admission, but nothing has turned up. He was admitted to Trinity as a pensioner* on 22 October 1805, matriculated in the University at Michaelmas 1805; BA, 1810; MA, 1815, admitted at the Middle Temple, January 17, 1807, as '2nd son of James, of Quarry Hill, Tonbridge, Kent'; also admitted at Lincoln's Inn, November 19, 1814, age 25. The ODNB** records that 'According to Tavel [George Tavel, his tutor and Senior Tutor at Trinity at the time] he was not a good pupil, having a dilatory nature', but I haven't been able to find out where this statement originates. The College examinations book does not show his name in the lists for the period when he was in residence. This isn't itself a surprise, as not everyone took College exams, but it would have proved useful if it had shown he was at the bottom of the list."

Certainly James's behaviour was unconventional – even licentious – but no more so than other characters of the Romantic era. His achievements as an Egyptologist are noteworthy, particularly his work in the Valley of the Kings. He reverted to the original family surname, Haliburton, around 1838 and died in Edinburgh in 1862. (See the next page.)

His brother Henry also went up to Cambridge, to Gonville & Caius ['Keys'] College. The details in Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses* are as follows:

Burton, Henry. Admitted pensioner (age 22) at CAIUS, May 4, 1821. Son of John (sic), architect [doubtless James Burton, of London, the well-known builder]. Born. in London, 1799. School, Tonbridge. Matriculated Michaelmas 1821; Scholar, 1821-6; M.B. 1826; M.L. 1828; M.D. 1831. F.R.C.P., 1832; Censor***, 1838; Consiliarius****, 1843. Practised in London. Physician to St Thomas's Hospital. Contributed many articles to the *Medical Gazette*, etc. Died August 10, 1849, at his house in Jermyn Street, London. Brother of Decimus Burton, architect.

The ODNB records that of the twelve children, ten survived infancy; in order of birth: William Ford, Eliza, James, Jane, Septimus, Octavia, Henry, Decimus, Alfred, Jessy (Jessica).

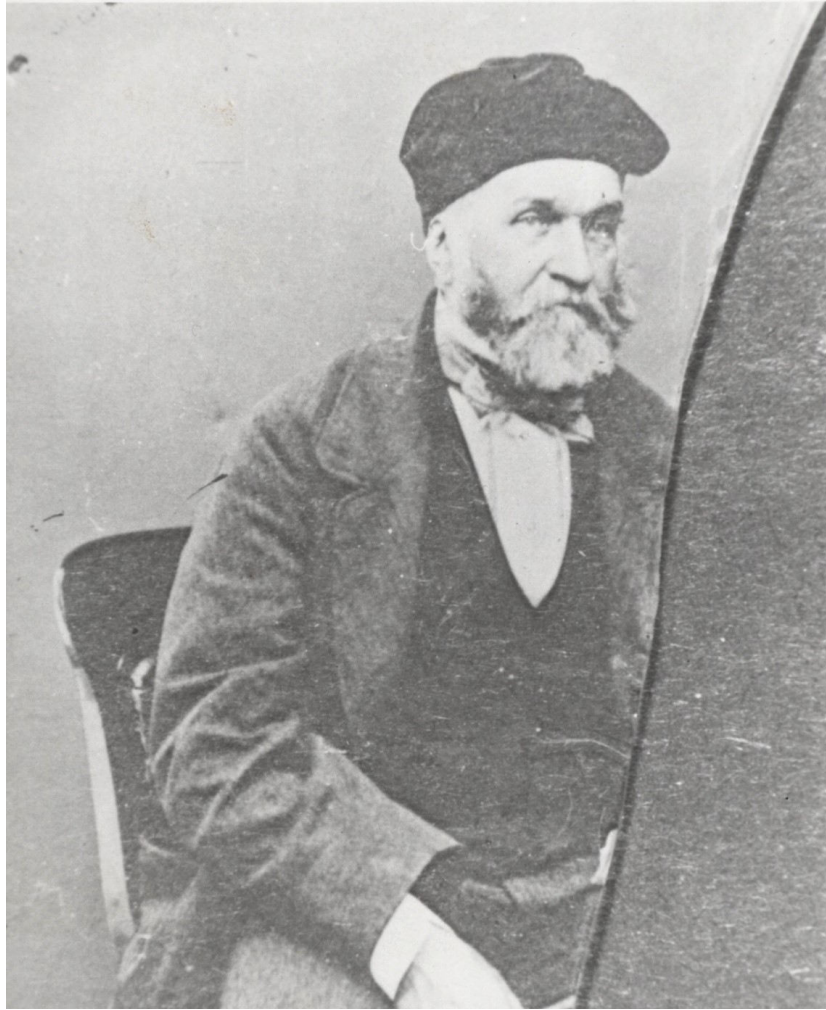
* A student at Cambridge who met his own expenses [a term no longer in use]

** Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

*** An examiner of physicians

**** An arbitrator of contractual arrangements between physicians and patients

If readers with properties in the Burton area have any appropriate historical wills, plans, leases or other legal documents relating to them, we would very much appreciate the opportunity to study them. They would of course be treated with the utmost care while in our possession.



James Burton junior (1786-1862), the Egyptologist, in later life [1850s]

from a glass negative in the Hastings Museum and Art Gallery. He does not appear to be quite the dissolute figure that some have painted him to be. He is said (though without reliable evidence) to have been fond of drink and women and as having bought a Greek slave girl (but see below). Described at one point as being skeletal through poor health and opium addiction, it seems he recovered after his return to England in 1834. Certainly he appears robust in the photograph. He lived until his mid-seventies. More probable is that he was in a loyal relationship with Charles Humphreys, his secretary, who died shortly after they returned to England. This may explain why they stayed so long in Egypt despite the high risks of death from endemic infections.

The domestic 'slave girls' were supplied to him (and other British explorers) by the British Consulate's dragoman, a Scotsman named William Taylor or Thomson, known as Osman Effendi. (Osman, being Islamic, could purchase them; Christians could not.) The Cretan Greek girl, Andriana Garolafalakii, whom he eventually married, may well have been a translator of Greek (the *lingua franca* of Alexandria and the Delta) and Turkish (the language of the Ottoman administrators of Crete and Egypt). It does appear to be the case that he brought home with him an extraordinary menagerie, which included a giraffe, the poor animal surviving as far as Calais, where it is said to have slipped on an icy surface and died. Much information about him has been gathered by Neil Cooke, who contributed the ODNB entry on him. Less reliable is that contained in a biography of his Canadian cousin Thomas Chandler Haliburton by Richard Davies (such as the more scurrilous suggestions in the first paragraph above).

IN MEMORY OF TWO DEPARTED FRIENDS

With very great sadness we report the deaths earlier this year of two people closely involved in the Society: John Francis, husband of our redoubtable Secretary, Christine, and Christine's close friend and member of our Council of Management, Sherry Codd. Long-standing members of the Society will remember them both well and will find it hard to think that they are no longer with us.

John Francis (1942-2021)

John and Christine moved to St Leonards in the 1980's, originally to a flat in Decimus Burton's 76 Marina where they brought up their two sons. In 1995 they relocated to 1 West Ascent.

Before his retirement John worked in project management for Philips, based in the Netherlands and travelling worldwide. He joined the Society in 2002 and was for some years a member of the Council of Management and editor for a while of our Newsletter.

John's special sense of humour will be well remembered by all those who knew him. It is well illustrated by his quip that their house at 1 West Ascent, where the double villa had stood, was originally designed by James Burton but redesigned by the Luftwaffe!

John would have been 79 this month.

Sherry Codd (1951-2021)

Sherry was the only daughter in a family with three sons. After boarding school in Haslemere, she went to secretarial college and later worked for a finance company in Kensington for many years.

She moved to St Leonards in 1990, becoming a resident in St Leonards Lodge and Secretary of the management company of this important Burton property, including its extensive grounds. Sherry occupied a large part of 'The Cottage', designed by Decimus and later modified and extended to become St Leonards Lodge by Alfred Henry Burton to designs by Edward John May.

Sherry was an ever dependable and much liked help at the Lodge and at our public meetings, where she happily greeted those attending and happily looked after the entrance fees.



John and Sherry will be sorely missed. Our thoughts are with their families and close friends.



James Burton
1761-1837



Decimus Burton
1800-1881

Membership of the Society

Application details can be found on the Society's website:

www.burtonsstleonardsociety.co.uk

Membership subscriptions

The Covid 19 situation has changed everyone's routines but the Society still needs to cover its running costs – at present with no income from events; and (as this newsletter illustrates) to be able to take forward a number of important initiatives. Please therefore renew your subscription if you have not done so already. These remain the same as in previous years:

Single membership £15.00 – Joint (2 people living at the same address) £25.00.

How to pay:

Bank Transfer:

HSBC

Sort Code: 40-40-09

Acc No: 01215248

Please identify the payment with your name.

By Cheque:

To Burtons' St Leonards Society

South Lodge

St Leonards on Sea

TN38 0BA

Note for members

If you are paying your membership subscription through your bank at an old subscription rate, we shall be very grateful if you would amend this to the current rate(s) shown above.

Readers may like to know that the **Decimus Burton Society**, based in Tunbridge Wells, is now well established. We maintain very close links with them. Their activities and resources available can be found on their website at: <https://www.thedecimusburtonsociety.org/>

They also have a Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/DecimusBurtonSociety/>

Both are excellently illustrated and highly informative.



The Burtons' St Leonards Society

The Society was registered in 1970 but conservation efforts leading to its foundation began in the 1950s. Our campaign, backed by various organisations such as the Civic Trust and the Georgian Group, resulted in the designation of Burtons' St Leonards as a Conservation Area by the local authority in 1969. Our aims are to:

- encourage high standards of architecture and town planning in St Leonards-on-Sea and prevent unsympathetic development
- stimulate interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of St Leonards-on-Sea and its surroundings
- encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general interest, in particular the contribution made by James and Decimus Burton to the architecture and town planning of St Leonards-on-Sea.

The Society keeps a vigilant eye on local planning applications, especially those affecting listed buildings, and on alterations to such buildings made without planning consent.

For more information, please visit our website at:

www.burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk

For further information, eg on specific events or for advice on architectural or planning matters, please email:

info@burtonsstleonardssociety.co.uk

Please note however that because of the large numbers of requests for technical or historical advice, we can only provide this free of charge to members. In other cases we request a donation of £25 except where the query is simply and readily answerable.

Email

If you have an email address which you think we may not hold, we shall be glad to have it. It will not be communicated to others except with your express consent. Use of email saves us a very considerable amount of time and money in printing and postage, and means that we can ensure that members receive communications much more rapidly than is otherwise possible.



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