

Joseph Kay

Joseph Kay, born in 1775, became apprentice architect to William Porden, Porden was surveyor and architect to the Earl Grosvenor, in Mayfair in the 1780s and at Eaton Hall in Cheshire in the 1800s, where Kay assisted in designing new furniture, and from 1804–08 was architect for the stables, riding house and tennis court at the Brighton Pavilion for the Prince of Wales.¹ After studying in Italy (1802-1805) Kay married Porden's daughter in 1807.

Kay was assistant to SP Cockerill and became architect to the Foundling Hospital where he created the long east terrace of Mecklenburg Square and the gardens.



Kay & Cockerill, plan of gardens at the Foundling Hospital, London

Kay had taken over as architect for the Clifton Hotel and Assembly rooms houses at The Mall, Bristol, completed 1811. The first architect, Francis Greenway, had been found guilty of fraud and sentenced to death, which was transmuted to transportation to Australia. There, Greenway became the architect for several stage buildings – the Australian 10 dollars may be the only world banknote showing a convicted forger. His painting of a mock trial at Newgate Prison, Bristol, is in the State Library of New South Wales.²

¹ Geoffrey Tyack, 'A pantheon for horses: the Prince Regent's dome and stables at Brighton', *Architectural History* 2015;58:141-158.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Greenway Francis Howard Greenway b. 1777



In 1814 Kay was selected with Archibald Eliot as architect for the Post Office in Edinburgh (alas now demolished).³ The joint Post-Masters General were Lord Chichester and Lord Salisbury. He also won the selection in 1819 for the new Post Office in Newgate, but the award went to Robert Smirke. Lord Chichester, however, remained his patron. He commissioned Pelham Crescent and the church of St Mary in the Castle at Hastings, 1824-28. A large section of the castle cliff was excavated and an Arcade with cellars beneath was created, 'for many years a fashionable destination for visitors to Hastings, providing music, refreshments and a bazaar'. Much of the original East side of Pelham Place however was demolished in 1898/9 for the Marine Palace of Varieties.



Pelham Crescent, author's photograph

³ <http://britishpostofficearchitects.weebly.com/>

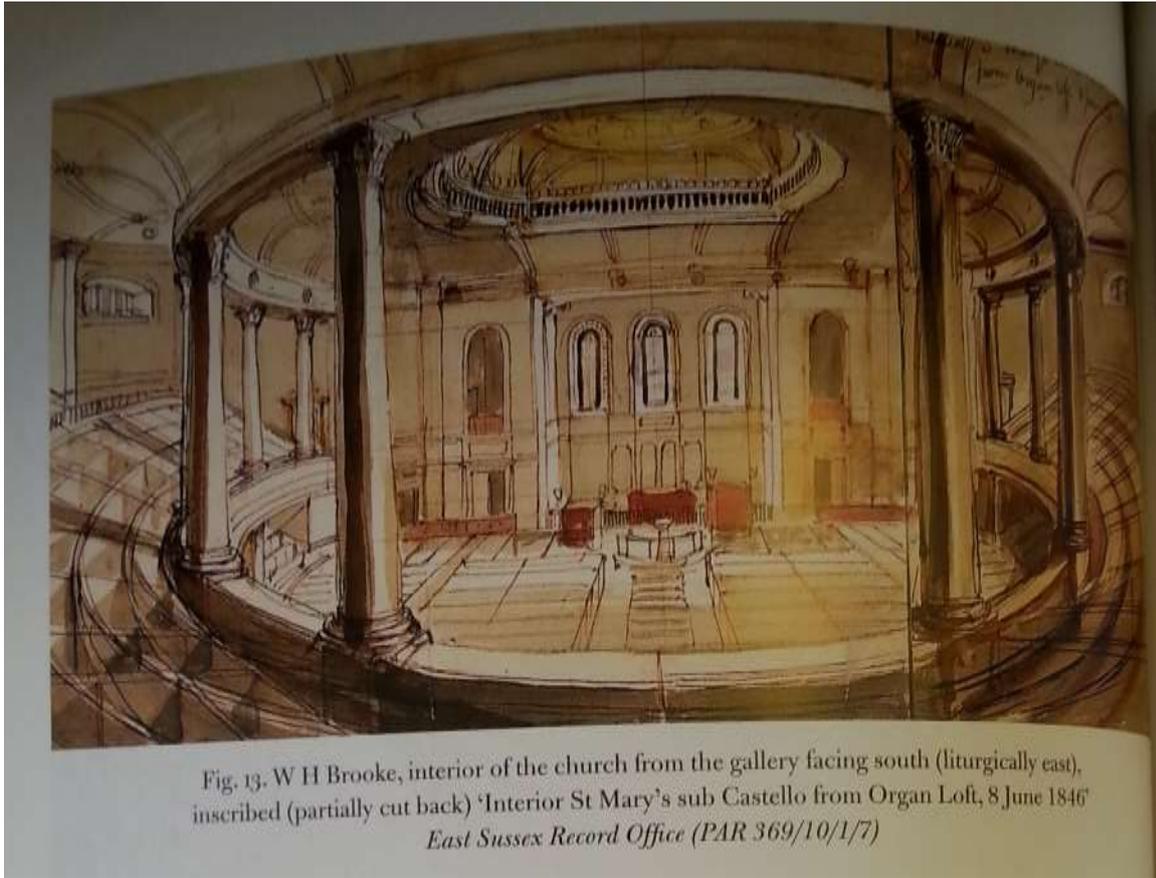


Fig. 13. W H Brooke, interior of the church from the gallery facing south (liturgically east), inscribed (partially cut back) 'Interior St Mary's sub Castello from Organ Loft, 8 June 1846' *East Sussex Record Office (PAR 369/10/1/7)*

Kay owned one of the Pelham terrace houses built and his own house at Belmont nearby.



Belmont, Hastings. Author's photograph

Kay also made designs for Lord Chichester's house at Stanmer.⁴



⁴ Richard Morrice, 'Paestina in Hastings', *Georgian Group Journal* 2001;9:93-113.

Minutes of the Kensington Turnpike Trust for 1826 indicate that Joseph Kay was surveyor for William Pitt the Younger, making an agreement with Samuel Bickford for building along part of the Kensington Church Street frontage. No houses were built however, perhaps because of difficulties in the building industry after 1825.⁵

The mid eighteen twenties was the start of Kay's work for Lord Camden as estate architect, managing the planning and design with speculative builders rather than directly working for a commission. Kay had also had a short period with Lord Thornhill in 1810-1812 – the Thornhill estates were in Islington. But Thornhill became pre-occupied with the Regent's Canal (in which he held shares) and died in 1820. From 1824-1842, however, in small bursts, there were developments across the Thornhill lands. Kay was responsible for nos 1-10 Malvern Terrace (Grade II) listed double-fronted terraced villas (1839-1841). Later, 'William Dennis built the southern terrace in Richmond Avenue with sphinxes, as fierce as any hunting dog, guarding the steps'.⁶



Richmond Avenue, N1 © Laura Porter

⁵ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp49-57>

⁶ Cosh *The squares of Islington*. Part I (self-published), 1990, Part II 1993

As Surveyor for Greenwich Hospital, in 1827, Kay prepared a plan for the east end of the Greenwich Royal Naval Hospital chapel. [SA52/4] From 1829 he planned development of Nelson Road, enclosing the market and building on four sides. 'Its design compares favourably with contemporary schemes such as the West Strand Improvements in London.'⁷

His son William worked with his father at Greenwich and was also a skilled draughtsman:



In 1842 William was invited to Australia, and with the support of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, became the Director of Public Works. He returned to England in 1860 and died 1897 in Tunbridge Wells. [Eardley-Wilmot himself suffered from false accusations and died 'of no known disease' in 1847. The Wilmot Place in Camden Town may be named after him.]

The Trafalgar Tavern by Kay, with bays and porches recalling Pelham Crescent, overlooks the Thames at Greenwich.



⁷ Historic England, Grade II listing

“This riverside inn of 1837 was designed by Kay in an elegant Regency style. The stuccoed building has charming cast-iron balconies, canopied bow windows and a recessed loggia to its riverside elevation. Listing: Grade II” (Historic England)⁸

On a different front, Kay developed an influential position among London architects. Although not an early supporter, he converted to the movement of architects that became the (later Royal) Institute of British Architecture, and was Chairman of the provisional committee in the crucial later stages of its creation.⁹

Kay’s work for Lord Camden was broad. He negotiated with builders for leases, encouraging those he felt most reliable. He collected rents from them. And he made up the accounts, sending balances to the two landlords, Lord Camden and Thomas Randolph in the proportion 2:1.

His accounts, for example, in Michaelmas 1824-25 were:

Rents received £2597, tax paid £110.

Minus £930 to Randolph – and 3/6 Quit Rent to Lord of Manor of Cantlowes

And subscription 5 gns to National School

Mr Dent’s account for forming improved line of road to Kentish Town: £16

Mr Collard’s account for altering footpath in Jeffries (sic) Street

Mr Ward’s [solicitor] expenses £97

Mssrs Tims and Scadding account for preparing a bond for the church £6;

Improvements to the Back Road £15;

Sim New Parliamentary Road £31;

One year’s salary £150;

Misc £40 (not clear what part of this charged to prebend).

Cash to balance £1412 – includes £850 paid for sewers.

In 1827-28, the accounts include £100 to George Lever for making up Camden Gardens and £50 for Mr Wood for fences on his ground on ‘Camden New Road’. The balance of account to Lord Camden was £1395.

⁸ Historic England

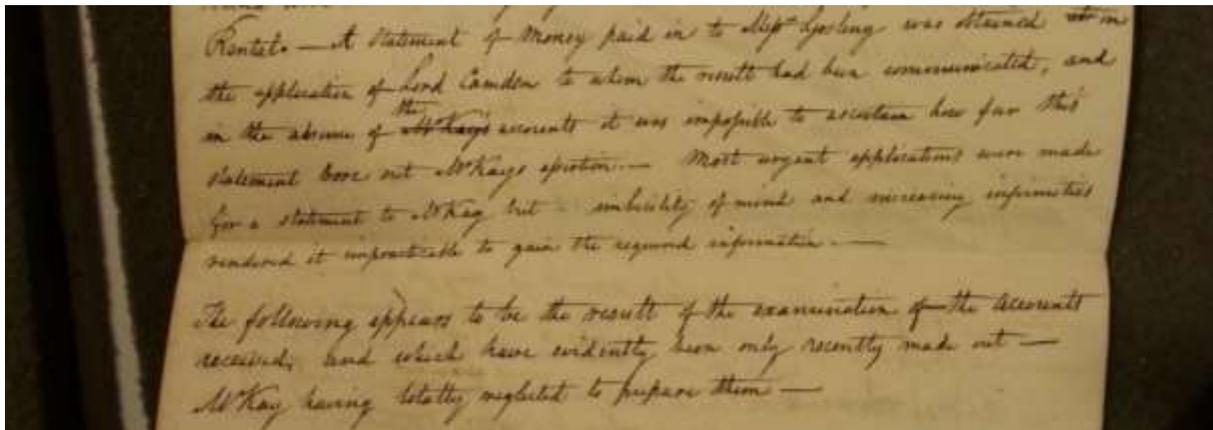
⁹ Frank Salmon, ‘British Architects, Italian Fine Arts Academies and the Foundation of the RIBA, 1816-43’, *Architectural History* 1996;39:77-113

In correspondence on his remuneration, Kay wrote to Lord Camden – ‘the amount of the salary is certainly only adequate for the collection of rents & general direction of the management of the property. I have found by experience that the business occupies a very considerable portion of a clerk’s time in addition to a great deal of my own personal attention’. He considers his professional assistance ‘on an improved distribution of the property, ... may deserve a distinct consideration’.

Over twenty years Kay wrote regularly to the second, and then the third Lord Camden, sometime several times in a month. It is evident that he met with Lord Camden, and that sometimes Lord Camden came both to Kay’s house at 6 Gower Street and also ‘on site’ in Camden Town (although there is no direct account of such meetings).

Randolph was tetchy about Kay’s slowness in making up accounts and sending balances, but this passed. However, in the 1840s, the third Lord Camden also showed concern over the accuracy of some accounts. This also passed, and it was only Kay’s sudden death in late 1847 that led to a review of the position.

The report from the accountant was not promising – Mr Kay having been ‘totally neglectful in preparing [the accounts]’.



A Memo suggested that he owed about £2580 – half of the total capital balance of his financial estate, and indicated ways that there might have been mismanagement.

Kay kept correspondence on several directions late in his life. Here are letters respectively seeking attention to lighting at Belmont in Hastings and discussion of a Foundation Stone ceremony for the new church at Camden Square.

Gower Street
Bedford Square
October 31st 1846

Gentlemen

The whole charge by the Hastings
Gas & Coke Company, for lighting the Gas Lamp
near the entrance of my Property at Belmont
having hitherto been paid by me, although it has
been the only Light provided in the adjoining
Public Roadway for a distance very disproportionate

Gower Street
September 6. 1847

My Lord

I am not aware of the
nature of Mr. Thomas's objections
to the Ceremonial of laying the first
Stone of the new Church at Camden
Town, - except so far as they are
explained by his Letter to your
Lordship, & which, under the

The Royal Institute of British Architects library holds a thin folio of loose documents on Joseph Kay. On 5 Nov 1978, the artist John Bratby¹⁰ wrote requesting information from the library about Joseph Kay, 'whose Hastings house based on the Tower of the Winds I have just purchased ... I am eager to know is if he is responsible for a number of white stucco buildings on the Castle Ridge called West Hill that look very much like his work to me. Perhaps Castledown house is his work.'

Kay had an obituary of 6 lines in the *Builder* 11 Dec 1847.

From a contrarian perspective, Timothy Brittain-Catlin includes Kay in his architects of 'disappointment and failure', with a side-kick at John Shaw for good measure:¹¹

p31. 'I came across Kay when I found his unremarkable, and nastily drawn, design for a parsonage house in Boxworth in Cambridgeshire (1840). So poor Kay's place in history is as the untalented pupil of a second-rate father [SP Cockerill – 'destined to be known almost only as the architect of a house that was a one-liner – the exotic Indianesque Sezincote in Gloucestershire'] of a great one [Charles Cockerill, of the University Library of Cambridge].'

p62. The works of John Shaw at Pugin's own school, Christ's Hospital, in the City of London were 'sad failures'.



The Cupola, Belmont Road, Hastings. The window pane design is the same as houses of Rochester Road in the Camden Town estate.

¹⁰ Bratby's work featured in the film *The Horses Mouth* (UK 1958).

¹¹ T Brittain-Catlin, *Bleak Houses: disappointment and failure in architecture*. London, MIT Press, 2014.