

Joseph Kay, born in 1775, became apprentice architect to William Porden, and married his daughter.

Porden was surveyor and architect to the Earl Grosvenor, in Mayfair in the 1780s and at Eaton Hall in Cheshire in the 1800s. Kay's assistance in this included designing new furniture.¹ Porden, with Kay, from 1804–08 was architect for the stables, riding house and tennis court at the Brighton Pavilion for the Prince of Wales.² Porden was also for much of the period architect for the Foundling Hospital by Bedford House; and it was here, creating Mecklenburgh Square and its long east terrace (completed 1815) that Kay first gained notice.



Kay & Porden, 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.³

¹ A Regency Ormolu-mounted Mahogany Side Chair.

² Geoffrey Tyack, 'A pantheon for horses: the Prince Regent's dome and stables at Brighton', *Architectural History* 2015;58:141-158.

³ 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).⁴ 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

⁴ <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)*

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



Belmont, Hastings. Author's photograph

Kay also made designs for Lord Chichester's house at Stanmer.⁵



⁵ Richard Morrice, 'Paestrina 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 1825.⁶

The mid eighteenth 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'.⁷



Richmond Avenue, N1 © Laura Porter

⁶ <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp49-57>

⁷ 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.'⁸

The later Trafalgar Tavern, with bays and porches recalling Pelham Crescent, overlooks the Thames.

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 II⁹



Trafalgar Tavern, Park Row, Greenwich, London ¹⁰

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.¹¹

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.

⁸ Historic England, Grade II listing

⁹ Historic England

¹⁰ RIBA image 47781

¹¹ Frank Salmon, 'British Architects, Italian Fine Arts Academies and the Foundation of the RIBA, 1816-43', *Architectural History* 1996;39:77-113

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.

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 them [the accounts]'.

Rentals. — A Statement of Money paid in to Miss Spelling was obtained from the application of Lord Camden to whom the results had been communicated, and in the absence of ^{the} Mr Kay's accounts it was impossible to ascertain how far this statement bore out Mr Kay's statement. — Most urgent applications were made for a statement to Mr Kay but — imbecility of mind and increasing infirmities rendered it impracticable to gain the required information. —

The following appears to be the result of the examination of the accounts received, and which have evidently been only recently made out — Mr Kay having lately neglected to prepare them —

due from the Legal Representative of the late } £ 2580 -
 Mr Kay

E. B.
 2 May 1848

As a general remark it may be observed that the rectitude of any Agent is the main point to be relied on — ^{which} ~~was~~ an Agent resolved to be dishonest there are so many ways of being so — namely by not accounting for monies received, — by putting forward Rents paid up, as arrears, — by fictitious Vouchers &c and which no accountant or Auditor however vigilant could possibly discover — in all events not till some long period has elapsed after the transactions; — also by withholding accounts altogether, under various excuses, as on the present instance — omitted. — It is suggested that good and valid Security should be taken;

Memo as to Mr Kay's accounts and the amount due from the legal representative of Mr Kay. It was estimated that Kay owed about £2580 – about half of the total capital balance of his financial estate. The accountant shook his head about the possibilities for negligence. Kay's final letters in 1847 are written in a hand not much changed with time or content. He would seem to have completed his role for the estate to his own satisfaction.

Town 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
to the general intermediate space between other
Public Lights under your direction, - I have
certainly considered it a burthensome expence
in addition to the other rates for which I am
chargeable - I have directed the lighting of it
to be discontinued therefore since Michaelmas last
hoping that you will be pleased to afford me some
relief, upon my removal of the Lamp & Standard
to

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 circumstances of the case, I consider to a great extent are well founded.

I should think it probable that he may object (as I believe some of the Clergy do) to the Ceremonial as of a "Masonic" & not of a religious character & sometimes attended with too much
of

As a postscript, the Royal Institute of British Architects library holds a folio of loose documents on Joseph Kay, but it is very thin. One item, of 5-Nov-1978 is a letter from the artist John Bratby¹², writing from Kay's former house, The Cupola, Belmont Road, Hastings E Sussex, and seeing information about Kay:

Requesting information from the library on John Kay, whose Hastings house 'based on the Tower of the Winds' I have just purchased. I know he built Pelham Crescent and the church of St Mary and the Belmont quartet in Hastings, Nelson Road in Greenwich, another street in London and that he was architect to the Post Office and surveyor to the Greenwich Foundling Hospital and that he was strong in the founding of an architects body but apart from that the libraries seem unable to supply any other information. One think 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.

The reply from Head of Library was to suggest the entry in Howard Colvin's Biographical Dictionary of British Architects (London, John Murray 1978)

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:¹³

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.

¹² Whose work featured in the film *The Horses Mouth* (UK 1958).

¹³ T Brittain-Catlin. *Bleak Houses: disappointment and failure in architecture*. MIT Press, London, 2014.