

## **Heritage Statement for the Royal Norfolk Hotel, Esplanade, Bognor Regis. PO21 2LH**

Bognor Regis's original hotel and assembly rooms were situated in this vicinity but were burnt down in 1826 and the remains subsequently succumbed to the encroaching seas. The adjacent land in this area was known as Barn Field when in 1830 Andrew L Sarel decided to build another hotel. To avoid the problems of the encroaching seas, he bought Barn Field and decided to locate the hotel further inland to ensure it did not fall to the same fate as the first hotel. This was at a time when the town's population was about 2,000. By 1837, the hotel was being managed by William Lock, who advertised it in the Brighton Herald, as "a family hotel" and invited visitors to "enjoy the splendid views of the sea". Dally's Bognor Guide also extolled the virtues of this impressive establishment. In 1857, the Naldrett family took over and John Naldrett became the new manager of this hotel that was described in many guidebooks as "resembling a gentleman's mansion". Early photographs of the hotel clearly show how the lawns went down to the beach. The early building was, in fact, only the central section of today's hotel and was also without its impressive balcony, which was not added until the 1880s. During 1872, Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte III stayed at the Norfolk Hotel for just a week and is reported as saying that he was 'happy with Naldrett as proprietor'. Another famous guest in the 1960's was the comedian Tony Hancock, and a room called the Hancock Suite in the hotel is named after him.

Charles Barker took over the hotel in 1886 and renamed it the Royal Norfolk. Within two years, he had added the large balcony on the front and installed a reproduction royal coat of arms on the coping of the hotel. Over the years, many people have mentioned or asked why the hotel has a royal crest coupled with the name 'Royal Hotel'. After which royal visit did this occur? The answer is no royal visit was commemorated. In fact, the Royal Warrant Holders Association queried this fact with the Home Office in 1917. It was discovered that no royal warrant had ever been given. But it was agreed it could remain because of the duration of its existence. However it was mentioned that the crest could not be used on stationery, china or gifts, and it is assumed that this still remains in force today.

In 1910 the hotel was extended in a westerly direction increasing the number of window fenestrations on the front elevation from 7 to 9. In 1920 Frederick Sadler, a Chichester corn merchant and miller, achieved a secret takeover by buying all the shares in the Bognor Hotel Company. This company owned not only the hotel, but also a triangular site across the road, where the Esplanade Theatre once stood. It would appear this purchase was only a speculation as he sold it again three years later to a Mr. James from Winchester.

The hotel was sold in 1944 to Bognor Town Council, but shortly afterwards in 1946 was sold again to private owners who resumed to operate as a hotel. At one time, up until the late 1970's, the hotel operated two outdoor swimming pools and tennis courts. It was in 1971 that the hotel had major extensions in both easterly and westerly directions, almost doubling the hotel in size. Shortly after the extensions were completed the hotel was listed on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1975 as Grade 2. In 1973 a book was written by J Wentworth Day entitled "Salute To The Royal Norfolk Hotel".

Leisureplex Hotels Ltd, an employee owned company, currently operate the hotel along with 20 other seaside hotels located throughout the UK. They acquired the hotel in 2010 when the previous operators, Christ for the Nations UK, a charitable trust, went into administration. The hotel is a very popular destination for the customers of Leisureplex and there is a desire to increase the bedroom provision which currently stands at 68 bedrooms following a similar conversion project in 2017 / 18.