

Nash, John 1752 - 1835



John Nash was born in September 1752 [1], probably in Lambeth, Surrey [now London], England and in c.1766 entered the office of the architect Sir Robert Taylor (1714-1788) as an indentured pupil. By 1775 he had left Taylor and within a couple of years had set up his own architectural and building practice in London. He also formed a partnership with Richard Heaviside, timber merchant and carpenter to the Board of Ordnance. His first completed projects as an architect date from this time: 66-71 Great Russell Street, London for Sir John Rushout, and 16-17 Bloomsbury Square, London (both 1777-78).

The next five years did not go well in his business and private life and in 1783 he was declared bankrupt. By about 1785 Nash had moved to Carmarthen in Wales where he formed a new partnership with Samuel Simon Saxon (1757-1831), who had previously been a pupil of Sir William Chambers (1722-1796), and over the next decade re-established his business. In 1788 he designed his first public building, the County Gaol in Carmarthen (1789-92). By 1793 he was employing two refugees from Revolutionary France - Augustus Charles Pugin (1769-1832) as a draughtsman, and Robert George, as his assistant.

After building several properties in Carmarthen, as well as rebuilding the west front of St David's Cathedral (1791-93), and designing a stone bridge over the River Rheidol at Aberystwyth (c.1797-1800), in 1797 he left Wales and returned to London.

He had already formed a partnership with Humphry Repton (1752-1818) in 1795. Repton was by then a well established and fashionable landscape gardener with connections among the aristocracy and landed gentry and provided Nash with

many opportunities to obtain architectural commissions. The partnership was dissolved in an atmosphere of acrimony in 1800 with Repton accusing Nash of not paying him a fair share of the business. By then, however, Nash was well on the way to being one of the most successful architects in England.

In 1806 Nash was appointed architect to the Office of Woods and Forests, A government department responsible for managing the crown estate. One of his first acts was to prepare a plan for the layout of Marylebone Park, north of London. This was to become Regent's Park. The scheme included a number of private villas designed by Nash. It also led to the creation of a major new thoroughfare, Regent Street which linked the park with the West End and Westminster, and Nash designed many of the buildings along its route.

Nash's work at Regent's Park drew the attention of the Prince Regent [later George IV], who commissioned him to design a series of royal residences. In 1815 Nash together with John Soane and Robert Smirke, was appointed an Attached Architect in the Office of Works, and that year was commissioned by the Prince Regent to remodel the Royal Pavilion in Brighton. In Nash's hands, the building, which had originally been designed by Henry Holland in a restrained manor, was transformed into "a riotous, Mughal-inspired extravaganza." [DNB]. The project took seven years to complete.

Following the prince's accession to the throne in 1820, he commissioned Nash to reconstruct the largely 18th-century Buckingham House into the principal royal residence in London. Work on what was to become Buckingham Palace began in 1825. It was to be Nash's last significant project, although it was not appreciated at the time. When George IV died in 1830 the building was subject to considerable criticism on architectural and financial grounds. Politics also played a part in its denigration. The completion of the building was taken out of Nash's hands and he was dismissed from the Office of Works. Thereafter, Nash's career as a public architect effectively came to an end. Nash died at his country house, East Cowes Castle, Isle of Wight, on 13 May 1835.

[1] Date of birth given in the Dictionary of National Biography Online

Worked in
UK
Works

For a detailed list of works by Nash see: Colvin pp. 731-737

Images of Works by Nash

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- British Listed Buildings - over 220 entries on John Nash <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/site-search/?q=%22John%20Nash%22>
- The Victorian Web <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/nash/index.html>
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