

HPHE7010 – WRITING FOR HERITAGE

PORTFOLIO

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THEIR ONLY CRIME WAS POVERTY

I have encountered the field many times, walking my dogs, taking my children for a runaround when they were small, or simply as a cut-through to get to the shops. I never stopped to think about what the field used to be, why it still exists as it does, immune to the pressures of developers who are ever on the lookout for prime housing sites. As I stand in the field now, there is a peaceful feeling to the place, but it is tinged with a still sadness. I take in the ominous-looking six-foot stone wall surrounding the field, the mysterious bumps in the ground, the daisies emerging through the grass in unexplainable straight lines. There is a steady drone of traffic passing on the other side of the imposing walls, the chatter and shouts of children in the playground of the nearby primary school, birds singing, pigeons startled by my presence and rising to the sky with the sound of their wings echoing in the still air, trees rustling gently in the breeze. None of this gives any clue as to what happened here and what is buried beneath my feet.

As I stand there, I am suddenly jolted from my musings by a mysterious, rhythmic sound. I can't quite place what it is. I turn to see a small group of people approaching the centre of the field. There are about ten of them, mostly middle-aged, wearing coats and hats against the morning chill. One of the group strikes a large, heavy-looking brass bell every twenty seconds or so. The group walk very slowly, and appear to be reciting names from a list. A group of musicians follow behind, playing folk music on recorders, a violin and an accordion. I watch the curious spectacle for a few minutes but I am not quite brave enough to move any closer.

I wander across the field and approach the present-day St Martin's Hospital. The first building I encounter is an imposing, even overbearing, three-storey structure, grey and gloomy looking as if it has secrets to hide. Behind the entrance block, there is an intriguing hexagon-shaped layout to the buildings, still a domineering three-storeys high, but with open spaces in-between them. I wonder what they were used for. A short distance away I encounter four ornate pinnacles rising up before me, reaching to the heavens above what proves to be a fully-fledged Victorian gothic church, complete with tall, stained-glass lancet windows. As I draw nearer, the sheer size of the building becomes apparent, as does its foreboding nature, built in the same limestone ashlar as the other buildings on the site.

I decide that some research is needed. What happened at the eerily quiet field with its strange feeling of sadness, and what ceremony were the group of people performing there? What were the imposing, grey hospital buildings originally built for? And why is there such a towering, gothic masterpiece of a church in the hospital grounds?

Back at home, armed with a hot, steaming cup of tea and with my dog Bella snuggled next to me, I switch my laptop on and start the search for answers. After much typing, scrolling and many dead-ends, I discover that the answer to the mystery lies in the imposing building's original use, which was as the Bath Union Workhouse. I learn that this was opened in 1838 to house the increasing numbers of destitute people needing support following the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The Act proposed the setting up of large, rate-funded, centralised workhouses to replace the smaller, ad-hoc provision previously supplied by local parishes and wealthy individuals. The workhouse was to accommodate 600 people, with separate wings for men, women and children. I am shocked to discover that by 1845, it contained 758 adults and 374 children, and by 1857 additional wards for invalids and 'lunatics' had been built to satisfy the increasing demand.

I find out that one of the inmates, a stonemason named John Plass, was largely responsible for building the chapel, between 1843 and 1846. To call it a mere chapel is misleading. Its size reflects the importance placed on church-going – a full-time Church of England chaplain was employed by the workhouse, and inmates were expected to attend services every Sunday. A simple stone-carved plaque inside the chapel states that it was "built by inmates of the Union Workhouse, for whose spiritual benefit it was designed". I further discover that burials of workhouse inmates were initially carried out in unmarked graves in consecrated land adjacent to the chapel, with 1,107 people being buried there. This was done as a matter of convenience more than anything else, as reported matter-of-factly by the Bath Evening Chronicle in 1847 that "the inconvenience of removing the bodies to different parishes will in future be obviated."

So how does this relate to the eerie, mysterious field, I wonder? Through my research, I come across Richard White, a writer who specialises in walking and exploring forgotten and obscure heritage. I arrange to meet him at a local café, where over a hot chocolate and a slice of cake, he fills in some of the details for me. Taking off his hat to

reveal long, curly hair, Richard sits down opposite me and explains that by 1855 the burial area next to the church had become full, so a parcel of land was purchased half a mile away to be used as the new burial ground. This was cleared of stone and rubble by inmates of the workhouse and the stones used to build the boundary walls which still stand today. A tunnel was built underneath the main Frome Road through which the bodies were carried to the burial site, out of sight of 'respectable' local citizens. He tells me that, shockingly, 3,182 people were buried at the site between 1858 and 1899 in unmarked graves, the only dignity afforded them being that the site was consecrated ground and remains so to this day. He movingly sums up the disgrace by saying "Here in this field, a rich city in a rich country at the centre of the richest Empire, dumped the bodies of its poor". He also reveals that neither of the workhouse's burial sites appear on any modern maps, further testament to the perceived insignificance of the workhouse residents.

I arrange with Richard to re-visit the site a month later when the mysterious ceremony next takes place. I meet him there on a chilly Spring morning, the sun breaking through the clouds and a soft breeze rustling the leaves on the trees. Returning to the site with knowledge of its history brings a whole new perspective. The high stone walls now make sense. Knowing that they were built by the very inmates that were likely to find their final resting place below the ground that they enclosed is a sobering thought. The lumps and bumps in the grass also become clearer, being the remnants of the burial sites below. The daisies flower in straight lines following the boundaries of the final resting places of the silent witnesses beneath. All of these things were offering clues about the secrets hidden beneath the soil, if only I had taken the time to notice them. A makeshift memorial in the centre of the field has been built, sometimes added to with flowers laid by local people, other times embellished with a few homemade flags proclaiming the names of people buried there, an attempt to carry on their memory in even a small way. Standing here, I feel very strongly the disrespect shown to these people whose only crime was being poor. The site is a 'traumascape', a place that has been transformed by suffering, and I feel this emotionally as a visitor.

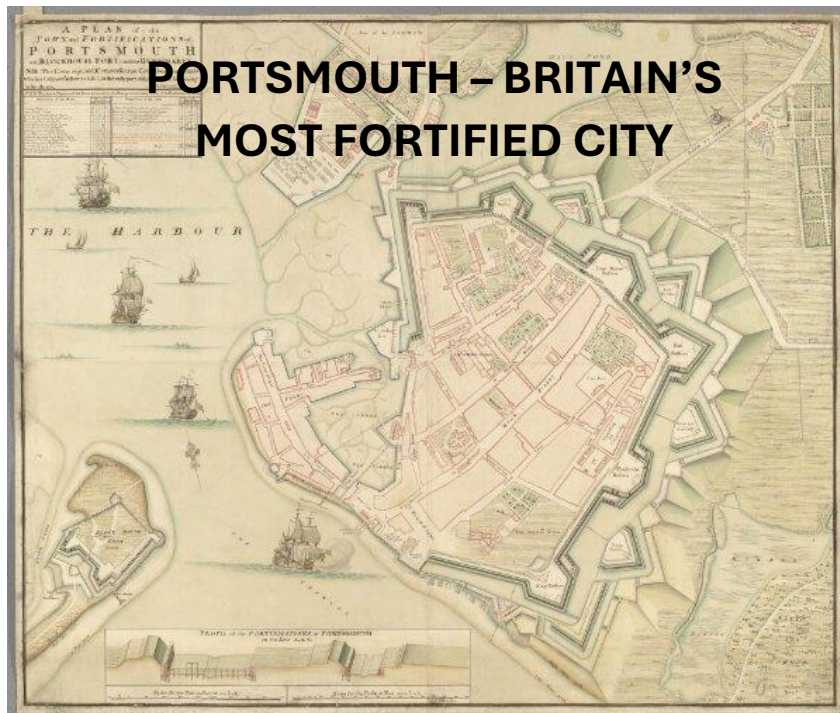
Richard leads me over to the group of people in the centre of the field. We stand respectfully and listen to the music, poetry, names being recited, and the relentless

tolling of the bell. It is very poignant and emotional. Once the ceremony is over, Richard introduces me to the group. I discover that these passionate locals have come together to bring the story to people's attention and show some respect to the field's silent inhabitants. The group comprises local residents, artists and descendants of people buried there. I am told that what I have just witnessed is a 'walking of the names'. This is where participants read aloud the names of inmates from the burial register whilst walking to the accompaniment of a steady tolling of the original workhouse bell, which once regulated every aspect of their lives, from morning until nighttime. Richard calls this a 'poor requiem', an attempt to give the unfortunate souls the funeral service they never had. This moving experience brings the group members closer to those who have passed away by acknowledging each individual person's life.

I speak to another group member, a tall middle-aged man with a neat grey beard, who I discover to be the founder, John Payne. He tells me that the realisation that his own great-grandparents were buried here after spending their later years in the workhouse is what sparked his interest in the site. He explains that through the group's hard work, a plaque and interpretation board have been installed and several trees planted around the impromptu memorial, with the aim of growing into something more permanent and visible. As he says, they were "not just dead paupers, but human beings just like you and me". I wander over to the newly-installed bench with its poignantly-worded plaque "Their Only Crime was Poverty", and sit for a while, thinking about what I have learned. I suddenly feel very emotional as I pause there, contemplating the enormous sadness of the place but also feeling a sense of hope as I hear the voices in the background still reading the names, accompanied by the ever tolling bell.

The Workhouse burial ground is finally getting some long overdue life back due to the dedication and persistence of the small group of local people who have made it their mission. Wandering across the site, you can almost hear the voices of the people whose last resting place it is, imploring us to remember them after all this time. I am glad that their stories are finally beginning to be told and hope that the maturing trees and flowers planted by the volunteers will create a permanent living memorial to the unfortunate inhabitants. I feel that this is the least that could be expected to finally acknowledge the

lost souls underneath the undulating grass who in their lifetimes suffered the stigma of being poor and whose punishment carried on even after their deaths.



VISIT

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Did you know that Portsmouth is Britain's most fortified city? Why is this? And how much of its defences remain?

Located on England's south coast, Portsmouth's strategic position made it a key frontier against sea attacks. As the U.K.'s only island city, it was vulnerable from all sides, necessitating fortifications since its founding in 1180.

You can still explore many of these fortifications today. Some are more complete than others, but there are interesting things to see at each one.

Round Tower

Built in 1418, this is one of the oldest surviving defensive towers in Portsmouth. Its purpose was to defend the entrance to the harbour from raids by French ships.

Climb the steps to the top and you have a magnificent view of the Solent and across to the Isle of Wight. If you time your visit well, you can wave to one of the giant naval ships or submarines sailing past from or on the way back to Portsmouth Naval Base.



Square Tower

Henry VII was on the throne when this tower was built in 1494. Since then it has been used as a residence for the Governor of Portsmouth, a gunpowder store and a meat store for the Royal Navy. Nowadays it is mostly used for weddings and other celebrations but you can still wander around the outside of the building and imagine how it would have looked as the busy residence of the Governor back in the 15th century.



Southsea Castle

Henry VIII built this castle in 1544 to defend the coast from invaders. You can stand in the very spot where he watched his beloved ship The Mary Rose sink during the Battle of the Solent against the French in 1545. You can also imagine what it was like when Parliamentary soldiers climbed the castle walls and seized it during the English Civil War in 1642. Highlights include walking the ramparts (see if you can spot the buoy marking the site of the wreck of the Mary Rose), marvelling at the enormous cannons, and exploring the 19th century tunnel built to defend the castle moat.



Fort Cumberland

Two hundred years after the building of Southsea Castle, Portsmouth was under threat once again from the French following the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. Fort Cumberland was built to protect Langstone Harbour and defend access from the East to Portsmouth Dockyard. The Dockyard was at the time the most important Royal Dockyard in the country, and was instrumental in the development of the Royal Navy.



Fort Cumberland was built in a star shape, so that defensive fire could be used in all directions. Today it is an archaeological research centre, but you can visit on Heritage Open Days. You can also wander around the outside of the building and imagine what it would have been like with its 34 gun emplacements, and over 700 men stationed there.

Hilsea Lines

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Hilsea Lines were used as a defence against possible attack from the north of Portsea Island, on which Portsmouth is located. The fortifications were a defensive line of forts, magazines, storehouses, and barracks. The Lines were also used in the first and second world wars.



You can visit the Lines today and explore the abandoned defences, imagining what they would have been like in their heyday, full of the hustle and bustle of two battalions of soldiers. They are now part of a wildlife haven where you can escape the busy city and immerse yourself in nature – there's even a cosy café located in one of the disused vaults!

Fort Nelson

This magnificent fort towers over Portsmouth high up on the cliffs at Portsdown. Built in the 1860s by the prime minister Lord Palmerston, it was part of a ring of defences protecting Portsmouth Royal Naval Dockyard. It was designed to repel attack both from sea and



from land forces to the north. It was never actually used in action, but was used as barracks and an ammunition store. It is still a magnificent example of Victorian architecture and is now home to the Royal Armouries and open to visitors. Highlights include weapons from the 15th century, French guns captured at the Battle of Waterloo, live firing demonstrations, costumed guides and many tunnels to explore.

Solent Sea Forts

For something completely different, how about forts built in the sea? The four Solent Sea Forts were constructed between the 1860s and 1880s, again by Lord Palmerston as a result of the threat of attack from the French. By 1909 further defences were provided by two lines of concrete blocks running from two of the forts to



Southsea in one direction and the Isle of Wight in the other. This forced all ships to go through a narrow channel between these two forts, making it easier to defend the Solent. Recent uses of the forts are more entertaining, they have been a hotel, a museum, and a party venue. In 2024, two of the forts sold at auction for over £1million each, but if this is out of your price range, you can take a boat trip to see around the outside of them for much less!

Five Lesser-Known Museums in Bath

Publication: History Today Magazine

Editorial department: 'History Matters' section of the magazine and website – “thoughts, opinions and commentary on all things historical”. Up to 1,000 words. “Submissions should be original, exclusive to *History Today* and offer an engaging and authoritative take on a historical subject”. My article is based on articles focussing on museums from previous editions of the magazine

What springs to mind when you think about the historic city of Bath? The Roman Baths, the Pump Rooms, or the Royal Crescent? But that's not all there is to the city of Bath. Here we take a look at five lesser-known museums that show a different side to Bath.

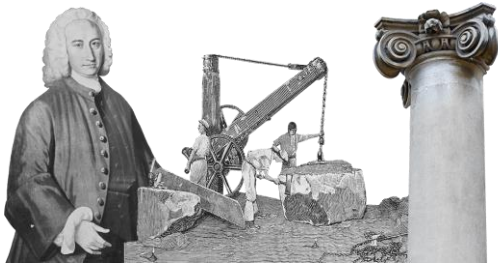


Bath Medical Museum. Bath's connection to medical matters may not be immediately obvious, although perhaps it should be considering that the city's growth was largely built on the supposed health-enhancing properties of the hot spa waters. This small but perfectly formed museum, appropriately tucked away next to the modern Thermae Bath Spa, tells the story of Bath's historical connections to health and wellbeing.

The museum charts the city's role at the forefront of modern medicine. This starts with the founding of Bath by the leprosy sufferer Prince Bladud in 863BC after he discovered the healing properties of the hot spring waters. It continues through the Roman development of Aquae Sulis as a baths and temple complex, to the re-emergence of Bath as a great spa town in the 18th century. Highlights include a 19th century surgeon's instrument set and post-mortem dissection kit, an 18th century amputation chair, an early electrotherapy machine, and even a wig scratcher (used to relieve itching caused by lice living in wigs!) You can explore the Royal Mineral Water Hospital as it was in 1740 by following a virtual tour, exploring each room and peeking into drawers and cabinets to see the doctors' and surgeons' tools and apparatus. You can also follow walking tours that explore the important sites in the medical history of Bath.

To find out more, visit <https://bathmedicalmuseum.org/>





Museum of Bath Stone. Bath is well known for its magnificent Georgian architecture and distinctive honey-coloured stone, but where does this come from and what was it like to work in the stone mines? This tiny museum in the suburb of Combe Down tells the story of the mines that provided the stone used to create

modern Bath. Bath's 'oolitic' limestone formed in the Middle Jurassic period (168-166 million years ago), from calcium carbonate mixed with the remains of marine animals. These properties make it a 'freestone', which can be cut freely in any direction without shattering or splitting, ideally suited to building the classically-inspired buildings of the 18th century.

The Museum tells the story of the wealthy philanthropist Ralph Allen who, together with architect John Wood, rebuilt the entire centre of Bath in the Palladian and neo-classical styles. The Museum traces the development of well-known Georgian buildings such as Pulteney Bridge, the Royal Crescent and Circus, and the many grand terraces of residential buildings. It also gives an insight into how the stone was excavated from the ground and has mining artefacts and stories from the miners themselves to discover.

To find out more, visit <https://www.museumofbathstone.org/>



3 Herschel Museum of Astronomy. What is Bath's connection to astronomy, you may ask? The answer lies in William and Caroline Herschel, who lived in Bath during the late 18th century. William originally came to Bath in 1766 to further his career as a musician and his sister Caroline joined him six years later. William became interested in astronomy and taught himself to

make telescopes, which he proved to be very talented at – Sir Patrick Moore has described him as “the greatest telescope maker of his day”.

In March 1781, using his seven-foot reflecting telescope, he discovered a new planet from his back garden at 19 New King Street, now the location of the Museum. This planet was Uranus, the first new planet to be discovered since the 2nd century B.C., and its discovery doubled the size of the known universe. Herschel went on to make many more astronomical discoveries, was appointed King's Astronomer, and built ever larger and more elaborate telescopes. An astronomer in her own right, Caroline discovered eight comets and received numerous awards for her work. The Museum displays many telescopes, globes and models of the solar system. It also has a music room and the workshop in which William made his telescopes. You can even take part in a stargazing event in the very garden where the planet Uranus was discovered!

To find out more, visit <https://herschelmuseum.org.uk/>.



4 Mary Shelley's House of Frankenstein. Think of Frankenstein and you probably picture Boris Karloff in the Hollywood films of the 1930s or the Hammer horror series a few decades later. This museum celebrates the writing of the novel that started it all, 'Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus', the world's first science fiction

novel. The author was Mary Shelley, who had been inspired to write the chilling story during a writing competition with Percy Shelley and Lord Byron whilst staying near Lake Geneva in May 1816. Later that year she moved to Bath and wrote much of the story whilst living in the city.

The museum is housed across all four floors of a Grade 1 listed Georgian townhouse and tells the story of Mary's unconventional and often tragic life and what led to her writing the book. Packed full of unusual and often macabre artefacts, including an eight foot tall animatronic Frankenstein monster, eerie soundtrack and evocative smells, it is a truly multisensory experience. It also explores the legacy of the Frankenstein phenomenon and how it has been portrayed through popular culture, with a gallery of related memorabilia, a cinema room and two escape rooms.

To find out more, visit <https://houseoffrankenstein.co.uk/>



5 Sally Lunn's Historic Eating House. Our final museum is perhaps the most unusual. Sally Lunn's tea house is located in one of the oldest buildings in Bath. The site has been used for hospitality for over 1,800 years, starting with Roman times, perhaps as an inn for travellers visiting the nearby Roman Baths. In the 12th century, it was part of the Abbey complex, probably used as the kitchen and refectory of the Benedictine monastery.

The current house is believed to date from 1482, with substantial rebuilding in 1622. The building survives as one of only a few from the medieval walled city, and the bread ovens in the basement date to that time.

The eating house is named after a young Huguenot refugee named Solange Luyon who arrived in Bath in 1680 to escape persecution in France. Her name being too hard for locals to pronounce, she changed it to the more English-sounding Sally Lunn. Her unique version of the brioche bun became so popular that the baker's shop where she was employed changed its name and concentrated on selling her 'Sally Lunn's', buns that could be eaten with sweet or savoury toppings. The buns are still baked to her secret recipe and are famous across the world. The modern building combines the 'eating house' and a museum telling the story of Sally Lunn and the enduring appeal of her unique buns.

To find out more, visit: <https://www.sallylunns.co.uk/>