Portslade in the Georgian era 1714-1837

Oh, we do like to be beside the seaside

People in Portslade saw many changes during the Georgian era, particularly when the Prince Regent, the future King George IV (pictured), took a liking to Brighton. He came to drink seawater (we don't recommend this!) and bathe in the sea to improve his health.

The health benefits of Brighton's seawater had been researched and recommended by local doctor, Richard Russell. He said that certain diseases and ailments could be cured by Brighton's seawater, which he said was superior to the water found at inland spa towns.

From a small fishing village, Brighton quickly transformed into a modern seaside town, thanks to the Prince's patronage. In 1787, work began building the Brighton Pavilion. Many of the splendid buildings in Brighton date from this period. Suddenly, Portslade – a quiet farming village - had a fashionable seaside and health resort on its doorstep.

Portslade continues to grow……

Portslade saw a much development during the 18th century. Robins Row cottages (pic), built c1740, still survive and provide a good example of typical dwellings from that time. These cottages would have been home to labourers and servants, with several generations or families sharing each cottage. This meant very cramped and unhygienic living conditions.

There were also much grander houses built in Portslade during the Georgian period. This indicates that some of the village inhabitants were very wealthy. These included Portslade Lodge (1785) in Locks Hill, which still survives today and is now called Manor Lodge. Portslade House (built 1790) was an impressive mansion with 20 acres and views to the sea. The remains of the house now lie underneath the former school at the top of Applesham Way. The grounds of the house were situated both sides of the high street and there used to be a small bridge going over the road connecting the two sides.

The George Inn pub dates from the late 18th century. There was already a brewery in the village at that time, which could explain why a small village had two large pubs.

Who were the Georgians?

When Queen Anne died in 1714 with no surviving children, the crown passed to Anne's closest living Protestant relative. Therefore, despite many Catholic relatives with stronger claims, George of Hanover in Germany, who didn't speak English but was a great-grandson of King James I, was crowned King George I of Great Britain and Ireland.

For the next half century, the deposed James II and his descendants claimed that they were the true line of British kings. Their final attempt to take the crown led to the last battle to be fought on British soil in 1746. Bonnie Prince Charlie led a Jacobite army into the Battle of Culloden in Scotland. Heavily defeated by the King's army, he managed to escape disguised as a woman and fled to France, never set foot in England or Scotland again.

George I was followed by George II, George III and George IV (who was Prince Regent for 9 years during his father's mental illness). George IV's only legitimate child, Princess Charlotte, died in 1817. So when George died in 1830, the crown went to his brother, William IV.

Top ten facts about King George III 1738 - 1820

1. George III was the first Hanoverian king who was fluent in English. King George I and II spoke mainly German. George III became King in 1760.

2. George's wife, Queen Charlotte, had African ancestry and may have therefore been the first black British royal. Queen Charlotte lived from 1744 to 1818.

3. In 1760 George III commissioned the Gold State Coach, an enclosed eight horse-drawn carriage. It is still used by the Queen and the Royal family today.

4. King George III and Queen Charlotte, had 15 children – 13 survived into adulthood.

5. George III became the last king to lose a war and a country. The American War of Independence ran from 1775 to 1783. It resulted in Britain's loss of many of its colonies in North America and with the formation of the USA in 1776.

6. George III started a new royal collection of books (65,000 of his books were later given to the British Museum, as the nucleus of a national library) and opened his library to scholars.

7. During his reign, George III acquired the nickname 'Farmer George', in part due to his agricultural interests and in part as a playful pun.

8. George III was the first British monarch to live in Buckingham Palace. He bought it for his wife, to use as a family home in 1761. Previously, they had lived at St. James Palace.

9. George III was the first king to study science as part of his education. His collection of scientific instruments can be seen in the Science Museum

10. After serious bouts of illness in 1788-89 and 1801, George became mentally unfit to rule in the last ten years of his reign. His eldest son, the later George IV, acted as Prince Regent until George III died in 1820.

Rule Britannia!

Britain rose to be the world's dominant colonial power during the 18th century. London was at the centre of global trade with goods and people arriving from all over the world.

The 18th century saw Britain fighting a number of wars against France. This included the Seven Years War (1756-1763) during which Britain took over colonies established by the French in India and Canada. Britain's empire also included colonies in North America, Australia and New Zealand. But they were to lose control of the North American colonies following defeat in the American War of independence (1775–83). Britain had to relinquish its authority and the United States of America came into being.

During the 18th Century, the British were heavily involved in the transatlantic slave trade. They were responsible for the enslavement of millions of West Africans, sent to work on Caribbean farms and sugar plantations. The slave trade made many people rich, but the suffering it caused to the millions of people who were enslaved is incalculable.

By the end of the 17th century, religious and humanitarian leaders had brought the issue to the forefront of British politics. Slavery was finally abolished in the British Empire by the Slavery Abolition Act1833 during the reign of King William IV

..Fake news about slavery.. Fake news about slavery.. Fake news about slavery....

Slaves were only owned by the very rich? **WRONG!** On the day slavery was abolished in 1833, 44,000 Britons owned slaves. These included vicars, farmers and shop owners. A further 900,000 benefitted financially from the slave trade. When the slave trade was abolished, 800,000 African slaves were freed. However, the government compensated the owners for 'their financial loss' – the total paid out was £17 billion pounds in today's terms.

Portslade in fear of invasion

From the late 1700s, Portslade lived in fear of invasion from Napoleon Bonaparte (pic). The Frenchman was one of the World's greatest ever military leaders. Napoleon had made no secret of his intentions of invading England. Fire beacons were set up along the Sussex coast to give warning of any imminent French attack, including one at Portslade on the cliffs at Copperas Gap (now the south end of Boundary Road).

One of the most famous sea battles took place off the south-west coast of Spain in 1805. The Battle of Trafalgar established Britain's naval supremacy for over a 100 years, but at a cost. Admiral Horatio Nelson, who led the battle for the British, was mortally wounded on his ship, the HMS Victory, by a French sniper. Trafalgar Road and the Battle of Trafalgar pub in Portslade are both named after the battle.
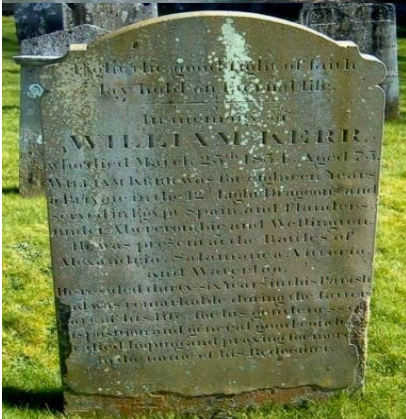
Napoleon never invaded Britain. He was finally defeated once and for all at the Battle of Waterloo (Belgium) in 1815 by an army led by the Duke of Wellington. This was the end of Napoleon's famous military career and it is said that he rode away from the battle in tears. There is a Wellington Road in Portslade in commemoration.

You can find the grave of a Waterloo veteran in St Nicolas churchyard. William Kerr's (1779-1854) tombstone can be found on the east side, facing the path. He lived in Portslade for 36 years. A Private in the 12th Light Dragoons British Army for 18 years, he saw action and battles across the world.

Going to school (or not) in 18th Century Portslade

Children living in Portslade in the 18th century were unlikely to have gone to school, unless they were from wealthy families who could pay for private schools. From a young age, poor children in Portslade would have been helping their families with farm work or chores at home. Free primary education for children aged 6-11 was not introduced in England until 1870. School became compulsory in 1880.

Before 1870, some children attended charity schools, which were scattered around the country. 'Dame schools', where a local woman provided some basic education to young children for a small fee, became popular. Elizabeth Godley started a dame school in Portslade in 1796, and is Portslade's first known teacher. She taught the children in her home, as there was no school building.

Elizabeth's daughter, Sarah Patching, became the first mistress of Portslade's first 'National School' in 1841. The school was supported by the Church of England. Portslade Farmhouse (pic) – still in Portslade Old Village - was used as the first schoolhouse before a new one was built close-by on land donated by the wealthy George Hall of Portslade House.

The school moved to a new building (pic) in Locks Hill in 1872 – this time thanks to the generosity of Hannah Brackenbury. This later became St Nicolas School, but more recently, has been renamed Brackenbury School. Portslade's pioneers in education - Elizabeth Godley and Sarah Patching - are buried in St Nicolas churchyard.

The Golden Age of Smuggling

The 18th century is known as the golden age of smuggling. This means the illegal trade in goods to avoid paying taxes. There were smugglers aplenty landing their boats on Sussex beaches. Portslade became one of their favourite places to land their contraband.

Some Portslade people would have taken the risk to earn money by helping the smugglers land their goods, which included spirits, tobacco and tea. The Crown Inn, which nestled in the Copperas Gap cliffs alongside some cottages, had deep cellars and was used by gangs to hide their goods before taking them inland to be sold on.

Most smuggling ended in the mid-19th century after the Government reduced customs and excise taxes, which meant smuggling was no longer so profitable.

FAKE NEWS ALERT!!!
Smugglers have often been romanticised in stories and films. In reality, the majority of smugglers were rough and violent criminals, and the local people would have feared them.

Stand and Deliver!

Anyone travelling by coaches and horses in the 18th century was in danger of being robbed. Highway robbery was a common crime and stagecoaches, mail coaches and farmers returning from market were all targets. Highwaymen were usually armed with pistols and wore masks.

The old Roman road in Portslade, (now Drove Road) may have been on a coaching route. Kemps House is said to have been a posting station (stopping point) on a coaching route. The nearby coach house (now Coach House Mews), stables (which are still there - picture below), a forge and two inns for the passengers, all support this belief. The coach would have been sheltered in the coach house, whilst the hard-working horses were refreshed in the stables.

The quality of roads up to the late 18th century was poor. They improved considerably following the establishment of turnpike roads, whereby tolls (charges) were made to use the roads. This money was used to maintain these roads and build new ones.

Famous events from Georgian times. Can your name them and the year?
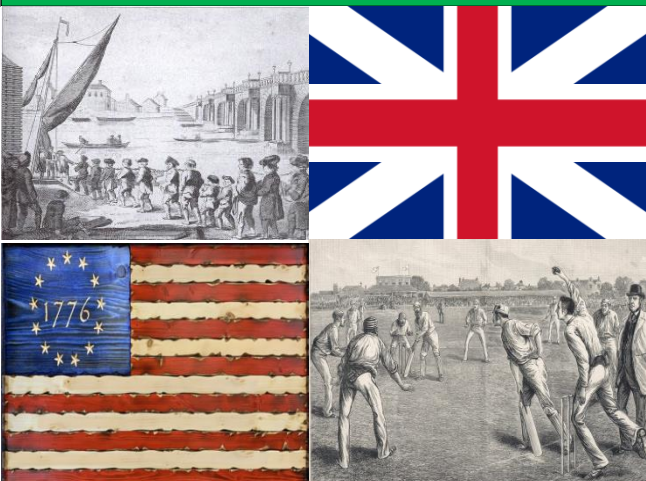
You may have heard of the highwayman, Dick Turpin, who has been described as 'heroic' in stories and films. **FAKE NEWS!!** Dick Turpin was a vicious villain who was feared and hated. Neither did he have a horse called 'Black Bess'. Turpin was eventually hanged for stealing a horse, though had committed far greater crimes, including murder.

Famous events
1. 1718 – convicts sent to the American colonies for the first time.
2. 1794 – England, Wales and Scotland join together to form Great Britain.
3. 1776 – USA is created as a nation
4. 1750 – the rules of cricket are established.
5. 1814 – The first steam engine is invented by George Stephenson, and his son, Robert. It had a top speed of 29mph. The technology applied to the design of 'The Rocket' was soon extended across the entire railway network, paving the way for the modern rail network and shaping the course of the history. It had a great influence on the Victorians, as you will see next.