

Portslade in Victorian times. 1837 -1901

Social reform, Empire building and dodgy pies – welcome to the Victorian era

When William IV died in 1837, the throne passed to the 18 year-old Princess Victoria. She was William's niece, and only living heir. Victoria was determined to improve on her two predecessors on the throne (William IV and George IV) who both had reputations for being lazy and wasteful. She had also taken over a country with many problems: dreadful living conditions for the poor, rising population and rural unemployment.

Despite these problems, her 64 years as Queen is seen as a golden age of Great Britain. It was a time of great inventions, development of industry, and saw Great Britain ruling over one quarter of the world. The top five facts about Queen Victoria:

1. She was only 4 foot 11 inches tall (150 cms)
2. In 1837 she became the richest woman in the world, when parliament granted her an annual allowance of £385,000 (£40 million in today's terms)
3. When her husband died in 1861, Victoria only wore black clothes in mourning, until her own death in 1901.
4. There were eight attempts to assassinate Victoria during her reign – even though she was a popular Queen.
5. She has more roads, buildings and towns named after her around the world than any other monarch (locally think Victoria Road and park in Portslade). In total, 30 countries commemorate her via buildings, roads and place names.



Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert. They had nine children over their 21 years of marriage.

Longest serving English monarch.

1. Queen Elizabeth II – 69 years
2. Queen Victoria – 63 years
3. George III – 59 years
4. Henry III – 56 years
5. Edward III – 50 years

Shortest reign

1. Lady Jane Grey – 9 days in 1553. Beheaded by Mary I
2. King Harold – 282 days. Killed at The Battle of Hastings.

The growth of business in Victorian Portslade

Portslade transforms from a village into a town

The population of Portslade grew rapidly in the 19th century. From just 358 residents in 1801, there was a population of 4100 by 1891.

To accommodate these extra people, more homes, shops and jobs were needed. The picture below shows Boundary Road in 1900 – a mix of shops and homes. It is still the same today.



Laundry is big business

As Brighton's popularity and wealth grew, so did opportunities for people in Portslade. The wealthy Victorians would change clothes several times a day. This was due to fashion, but also to get rid of the smell of gas lamps, smog and horse manure from the streets.

Portslade became home to many large laundry cleaning businesses. The valley, which catches the strong sea wind, was a perfect place to dry the clothes.

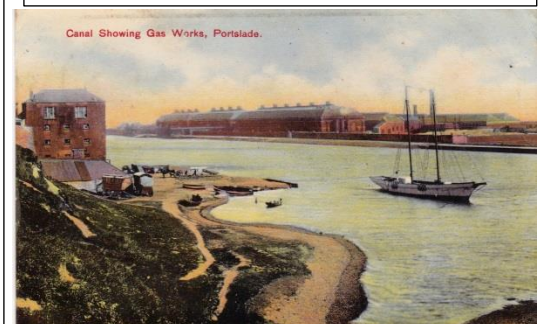
Petersfield Laundry & Cleaning Works



(A. W. GREEN, LTD.) ESTABLISHED 1879
ARE THE ONLY GOLD & SILVER MEDALISTS IN SUSSEX FOR
Shirts, Collars and High-Class Laundry Work.
Tennis and Cricket Flannels CAREFULLY CLEANED AND PRESSED.
4 Gold and 2 Silver Medals Awarded
at the Leading Exhibitions open to all England.
Receiving Offices—
Brighton—80 London Road & 1 Temple Street.
Worthing—2 Shelley Road & 5 South Farm Rd.
Shoreham—94 High Street.
— Works: UPPER SHOREHAM ROAD, PORTSLADE —

Portslade Gas Works

To keep up with the growing population, a large gas works was built in Portslade. At this time, gas was used to light the homes and heat water. The gas works also gave well-paid work to many local people.



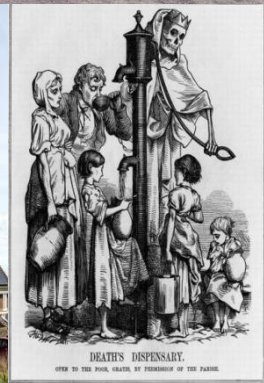
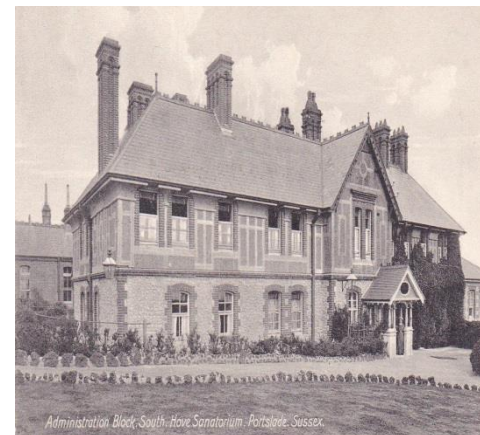
Medicine and health in Portslade.

As the population of Portslade grew, so did its health issues. The problem was that towns were growing fast, but there was little done to improve water supply and sewers. Brighton had particular problems, as its population increase from 7000 to 50,000 in the first 50 years of the 19th century.

Cholera – a potentially life-threatening disease caused by drinking unclean water – was widespread in Victorian times. In Brighton it killed one in every 250 people a year (Covid death rate was one in 805 in its first year across the city 2020/21)

Other deadly infectious disease – such as smallpox, measles and typhoid – were also big problems. Thus, a special isolation hospital was built in Portslade. Here patients would be treated but, more importantly, kept away from other people to stop the spread of disease.

The hospital was situated next to Foredown Road. The hospital was still in use until 1972. It was pulled down in the 1980s, and all that remains is its old water tower (Foredown Tower) and its surrounding flint wall.



Food in Victorian Portslade. The birth of the Sunday lunch and food tampering.

Portslade changed from a small rural village that grew its own food, into a large town dependent on outside supplies. The arrival of the railways (1840) made it possible to move the basic foodstuffs – flour, potatoes, root vegetables & beer – at speed, and over great distances.

Other innovations that made distributing food easier included long-life products such as condensed milk, dried eggs, soups, and bottled sauces. Britain's first large-scale meat-canning factory was set up in 1865, and by the 1870s almost every middle-class kitchen had a tin opener. In the 1880s the refrigerated transport of meat became possible. Meat became cheaper, and a regular part of the diet of the middle classes for the first time.

For many Victorian Portsladers, Sunday was their only day of rest (a 12-hour day, six days a week was common). It was also the only day when they would eat meat. So began the custom of buying a small joint of beef, pork or mutton to be shared with the family, accompanied by lots of vegetables, potatoes and gravy. If you couldn't afford a roast joint then there was always offal, such as liver, tongue or heart.

As food demands increased, so did unscrupulous ways of making money. Food adulteration – where cheaper ingredients are added to bulk-out food – became widespread. It is estimated that 20% of all food was contaminated in this way. Can you guess what these illegal non-food items were added to, just so they would make more money for the manufacturer? Answers below.



1. Mustard was made to look more appealing with yellow paint. 2 Tea was bulked out with much cheaper sawdust. 3 Chemical poisons were routinely added to sweets and other confectionery to make them more colourful and attractive. 4. Chalk was added to bread to give it a bright-white colour. 5. Horsemeat was used in pies and sausages, as a far cheaper alternative to beef. It was argued that thousands of horses went to waste every day, mainly elderly cart horses, which were worked to death and then slaughtered for glue & pet food.

The Lord of Portslade Manor in Victorian times

Portslade's original manor house, which was built in 1130, was now very small and dated for the Lord of the manor. The Borrer family built a grand new home in 1807, which had 12 bedrooms, several living rooms and staff quarters. It still stands in the grounds of Emmaus.

After the new manor house was built, the old manor building was used as an almshouse for the poor and destitute. During the Victorian era, it was brutally demolished, leaving just the ruins we can still see. Some of the old house flints were used to build a garden folly castle tower, a dovecote and a grotto – these can all be seen in the Emmaus grounds. No one knows why John Borrer destroyed the old manor house, though there is a theory that he didn't like the impoverished living immediately on his doorstep.

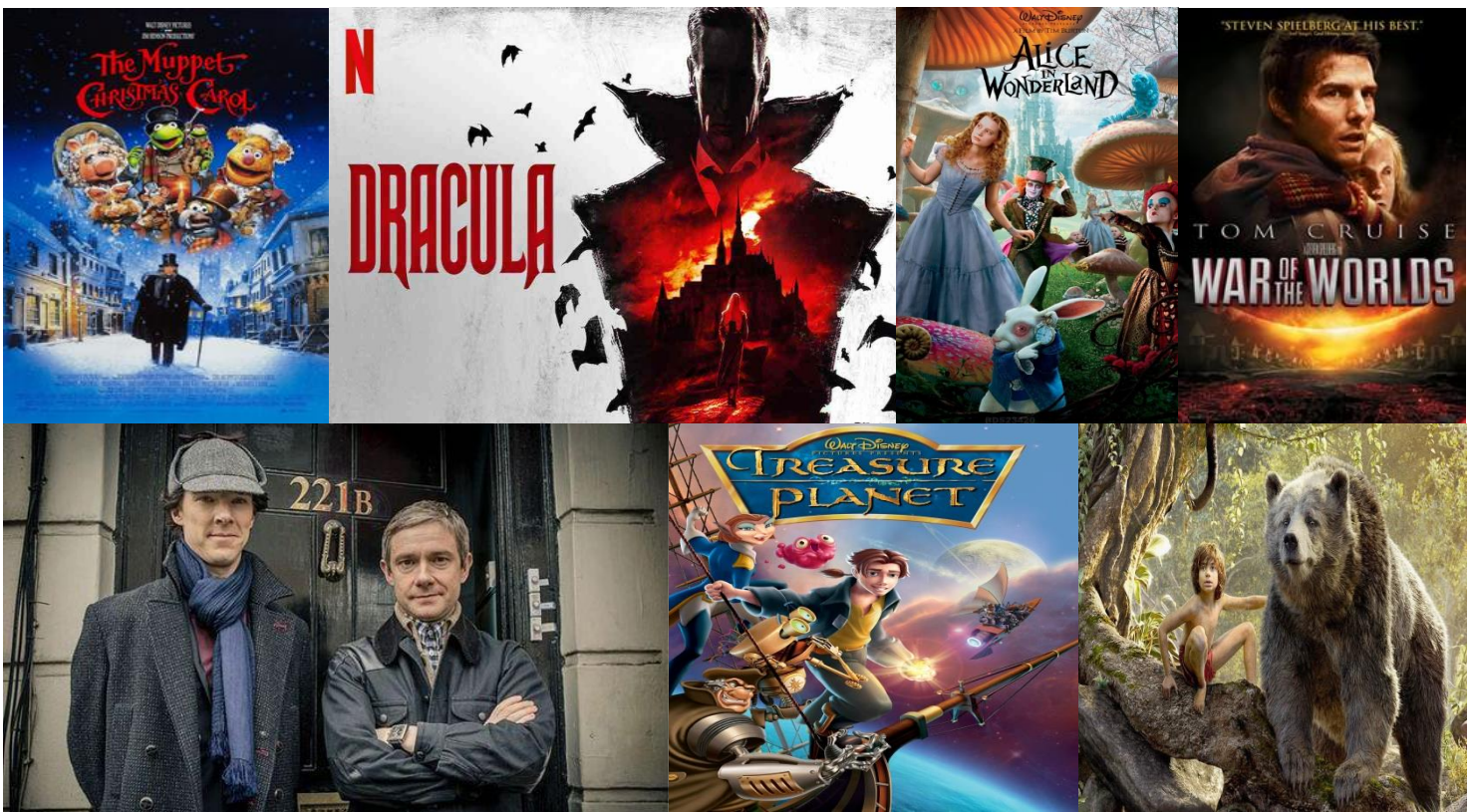
John Borrer died in 1866 and is buried in St Nicolas Church. His grave is next to the doorway he had built for his own privacy, leading to Portslade Manor from the church.

What were Portslade people reading in the Victorian times? (and still are!)

As education and self-taught literacy increased in the Victorian era, so did a love of reading. Cheaper printing methods and the opening of public libraries made reading accessible for all. Newspapers were also popular, with the Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph starting in the mid-19th century (The Times had been in circulation since 1785).

Charles Dickens was the most popular writer. His stories were serialised in monthly magazines, before being published in book form. He wrote 15 books in total, selling millions and making him very rich. To date, 'A Tale of Two Cities' has sold 200 million copies.

There are many famous Victorian writers, whose work is still read today; many have been turned into films. Look at the 21st century movie adverts below, and see if you know the book and author from 150 years ago.



From top left: 1. Charles Dickens – A Christmas Carol (with no muppets or singing!) 2. Bram Stoker – Dracula. 3. Lewis Carroll – Alice In Wonderland. 4. H G Wells – War of The Worlds. 5. Arthur Conan Doyle – Sherlock Holmes. 6. Treasure Island – Robert Louis Stevenson (Disney changed it to 'planet', and set it in outer space. 7. Rudyard Kipling – Jungle Book (did you know that Rudyard Kipling lived just along the coast at Rottingdean?)

Influential Portslade people in Victorian times.

Harry Blaker was the personal surgeon to Queen Victoria, and was the private doctor to the royal family when they were staying at the Royal Pavilion. He was paid £300 a year to look after the royal family for their short and infrequent visits – about £13,000 today.

In 1828 Dr Blaker became the first surgeon to be appointed at the Sussex County hospital (pictured), and was one of the founding members of the Royal College of Surgeons. He lived in Kemps – the large white house at the top of Portslade village. He died in 1846.



Hannah Brackenbury inherited a vast fortune from her family in the 1860s. As the only surviving member of the family line, plus unmarried with no children, she set about donating her money to good causes. It is estimated during her life she gave away in excess of £13 million pounds in today's terms. This included building a college at Oxford University (pictured), and paying student scholarships in medicine and law. She donated the land and building costs to build Portslade's first large school, now named Brackenbury School (pictured). She left a further £4 million pounds in her will of 1873.

She is buried in the Brackenbury Chapel at St Nicolas Church in Portslade, which she also built. We estimate her net worth today to be at least £20 million pounds.

The Mews Brothers purchased Portslade brewery and several pubs in Portslade in 1884 for £24,000 – that is just over three million pounds in today's value. Once established in their new booming brewery business, the brothers made 25 further property and land purchases across Portslade. They also owned two shops in Hove from where they sold their prize-winning beer, which was brewed from the heart of Portslade.

Any self-respecting rich Victorian would want their own splendid homes. The Mews brothers had two large homes built – both still in Portslade today. Whychcote, near the Old Village and Loxdale House, situated close to St Nicolas School are fine examples of Victorian sprawling mansions.



And finally, other events and inventions from the Victorian era



Portslade railway and station opens in 1840



In 1901, Portsladers got a new football team to support



In 1884, most men in Portslade were now allowed to vote. Rich Portsladers could vote from 1832. Women were not given the vote until 1918.



The **bike** was invented in 1885, taking over from the Penny Farthing model. The **phone** was invented in 1876. Used initially for business, it was not commonplace in homes until 1970s.

