

# BOGNOR REGIS HERITAGE TRAILS



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A GUIDE TO

## Novels Set in Bognor Regis



BOGNOR REGIS  
TOWN COUNCIL

[bognorregistrails.co.uk](http://bognorregistrails.co.uk)



## THE AUTHORS & NOVELS OF Bognor Regis

Why are so many novels set in Bognor Regis and its surrounding villages?

Why do so many authors choose this warm and sunny south coast town in which to set their stories?

Could it be that the sparkling sea inspires them? Or is it the South Downs that focuses creativity and inspiration onto its writers by the sea?

The town and its villages have provided a backdrop, which has released the talents of so many writers over the years, enabling them to create stimulating novels that reflect the changing tides and times of society.

The following examples, out of many, go to show just how much Bognor Regis has been able to inspire authors to set their stories across the ages. The settings range from Philippa Gregory's novel *Tidelands* that is set in the civil war, right through to the present day with June Vernau's *Flight Fantastic*, which is based on the town's famous "Birdman" competition.

The town is also blessed with having within its environs the cottage in which one of Britain's most creative artists and writers lived, William Blake. The members of the internationally respected Blake Society make frequent visits to the cottage whilst researching the work of this great man.

Does Blake's spirit still illuminate and energise Bognor Regis' writers?

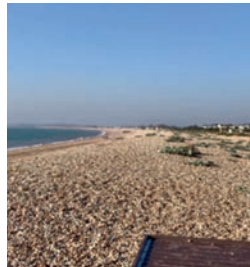
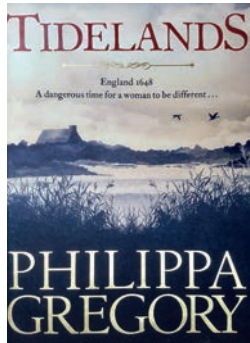
This review of novels set in the town and its environs expands the Bognor Regis Heritage and Blue Plaque Trails, produced by the Bognor Regis Heritage Partnership, to the literary heritage of the town.

We hope it will inspire you to seek out these novels and read them.

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## AND ALSO...



Distant view of Selsey from Pagham Harbour

# Tidelands

PHILLIPA GREGORY

It is 1648 and the sea between the Selsey Peninsula and Pagham is mudland, where abandoned midwife and herbalist, Alinor, lives hand to mouth, with her son and daughter, whilst her brother runs the family ferry. England is in the middle of the Civil War. Her life is set to change when she happens upon James, a Cavalier sent to help Charles I escape from his prison in Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. But will it change for better or for worse?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Philippa Gregory is an authority on women's history, Philippa has written over 300 books including many best selling historical novels. She has a degree in History from Sussex University and a PhD in 18th century literature from Edinburgh University. Born in Kenya, she lived in West Sussex before settling on a farm in North Yorkshire.**

**"What a different world it was hundreds of years ago, where an ever changing topography has influenced and controlled our lives".**



# Sovereign's Key

ROSALIND LAKER

Set in Bognor and London in the late 18th century, as we follow the rise of Theresa, from fostered child to aristocracy at a time when Sir Richard Hotham was building a seaside resort fit for a King. We see her life through her relationship with 3 men – Andrew, a tavern boy; David an excise officer and Jonathan a Sussex Lord, at a time when men decided women's fate against a background of dissolution and cruelty

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Rosalind Laker - real name Barbara Ovstedal was a very popular novelist, known for her romantic historical novels, which have been translated into over 20 languages. Her first novel was inspired by the threat of demolition of Sir Richard Hotham's 18th century house in Bognor Regis, her birthplace.**

**"Rosalind was a true Bognorian whose writing and support inspired others." Sylvia Endacott**



# Gates of Paradise

BERYL KINGSTON

Set in 1800-03, the years that William Blake lived in a cottage in Felpham with his wife. A lovely feel of village life, characters and morality and a look at Blake's relationship with the writer, William Hayley, until his court case in Chichester – charged with sedition by a vengeful drunken soldier.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Beryl Kingston was evacuated to Felpham during the Second World War and now lives in Aldwick after a hugely successful career firstly as a teacher and then an author.**

**The two Bognor based novels featured in this booklet are completely different and show her range of imagination and empathy.**

**"Away to sweet Felpham, for heaven is there" - William Blake**



Shripney Manor

# The Shripney Lady

ROSALIND LAKER

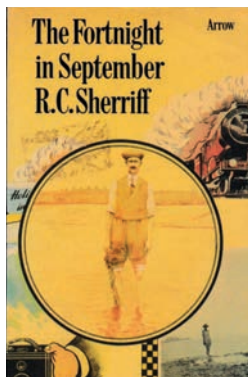
Set in 1808-09 during Princess Charlotte's visits to Bognor, this tells the story of Caroline, who comes to the Manor to catalogue the Library and falls in love with William Bott, the Lord of the Manor, despite his difficult invalid wife and the supposed actions of the ghost, Katherine Knight, a former inhabitant. William's cousin John, as well as his daughter Isabella, complicate matters and make this definitely 'a Haunting Romance'. Lovely view of Bognor at the time of the Royal visit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Rosalind Laker's talent was first spotted by her English teacher. It was only when she was bringing up her son and daughter that she acquired an old typewriter and began to write. Her first attempt at a romantic novel was immediately snapped up by a publisher and set her off on her illustrious and successful literary career.**

**"With her local knowledge, Rosalind Laker was able to create a sense of place which she included in numerous publications"**





R C Sherriff's home near Marine Park Gardens

# The Fortnight in September

**R C SHERIFF**

It's time again for the annual family trip to Bognor Regis for the Stevens' family of Dulwich. These normal, delightful, caring people use this holiday to address their issues, fears and concerns with dignified consideration and not a little fear: Mr Stevens' role as family head, his silently unhappy wife, his blossoming daughter Mary, son Dick, who needs to decide on his work future and young Ernie. The novel provides a lovely sense of place and a lesson in human goodness.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**(1896 – 1975) Best known for the play Journey's End (1929) and his script writing in Hollywood (The Invisible Man, Goodbye Mr Chips, Mrs Miniver, The Dam Busters). A Surrey man, who never married, he lived with his mother in Esher until her death, but spent time in Bognor Regis near the sea in Marine Gardens.**

**"When asked to name a novel set in Bognor Regis, this is the title most local residents know about"**

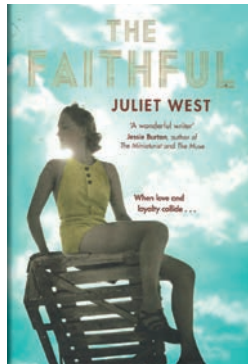


Photo © Kelly Hill

# The Faithful

**JULIET WEST**

Hazel lives in Aldwick with her flighty mother. In the Summer of 1935, she falls in love with Tom, a young working-class man, one of the thousands of Oswald Moseley's Blackshirts who visited the Summer camp in the fields behind Aldwick Bay. In 1936, after things go badly wrong for her, Hazel finds herself in London sucked into the Fascist world living with upper-class Lucia, affected by the Spanish Civil War and the Outbreak of the Second World War. Can she find a solution to her difficult life? This page turner describes a sinister slice of Sussex history.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Juliet West, a former journalist, grew up in Worthing. Her first degree was in History at Cambridge University, followed by an MA in Creative writing at Chichester University. She writes novels, poems and short stories, has been shortlisted in competitions and has won prizes for her work. She researched this story in local newspapers in Bognor Regis Library and by retracing the Blackshirts steps around Aldwick.**

**"It's hard to imagine how such a tranquil setting could have been hijacked by the hate-filled politics of the BUF, (British Union of Fascists) but The Faithful offers some insight into life in Bognor Regis during this turbulent period of the twentieth century."**



Aldwick Bay Estate: Barrack Lane

# After the Party

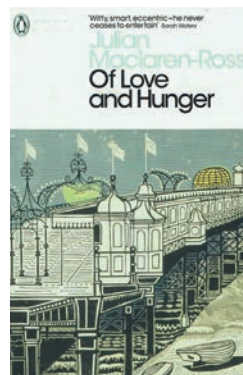
**CRESSIDA CONNOLLY**

Set in the Aldwick/Rose Green area in 1938 when a Fascist Summer camp was active nearby, the story follows the return of Phyllis and her family to England to visit her sisters Patricia and Nina, both of whom have strong views on Fascism. Phyllis is swept along with the mood of the day and we are given a vivid account of what it was like for the followers of Mosley at that time and for those who were imprisoned when war broke out.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cressida Connolly was born in 1960, is married with 3 children and lives in Worcestershire. As well as a writing well received novels, she is a reviewer and journalist, who has written for many newspapers and numerous publications. Her focus is often on the life of women and how they handle the society and events that they are caught up with.**

**"Deeply impressive.... quietly devastating tale of world affairs played out on an intimate scale" - Metro**



High Street East

# Of Love and Hunger

**JULIAN MACLAREN-ROSS**

The downside of Bognor Regis in the depression just before the Second World War, sees Richard Fanshawe living hand-to-mouth as an unsuccessful vacuum cleaner salesman in a dingy boarding house. But then he falls in love – with the wife of his work colleague. The story provides a good sense of place and period, full of humour, wit and the reality of life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**(1912-64) He was born in South Norwood London, the son of a ship merchant and the youngest of three boys. Educated in France, he served in the army during the war, until discharged in 1943. He found himself in Bohemian London post war, with debt, alcoholism and a love of debauched living, all featuring heavily in his life, and which he dipped into to enrich this novel.**

**"(he) was a dedicated and highly professional writer who never quite found the right vein for his talents." The Times**



Bognor Pier 1940s. Image: Sylvia Endacott



Bersted Lodge Sir Richard  
Hotham's first House 1790s



A vintage 1960s postcard of  
Bognor Regis Esplanade Gardens  
and Illuminated Pier



Cars outside the Arcade in the 1910s.  
Image A Picture of Bognor Regis, West Sussex  
County Council Library and Archive Service

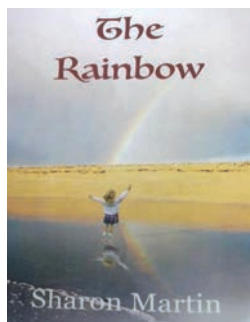




# The Other Half of Me

SHARON MARTIN

1958 and teenagers Ed, Tilly and Ken, who live in North Bersted, are trying to grow up as best they can. But life isn't easy. Ed loses his twin brother in an accident on the Bognor Rocks, whilst Ken has to deal with a toxic environment at home. Ed turns to brandy, but finds solace in gardening, to begin with on an allotment and then in the garden of Tilly's home. It turns into a thriving business and he and Tilly are attracted to each other as the years pass. Tilly then has her own demons to work through. As the 50s turn into the 60s, we follow the trio through their harrowing traumas as they try to work towards a better and happier future.



# The Rainbow

SHARON MARTIN

It's 1966 and we live through a year in the lives of our main characters from The other Half of me and their relationships with their parents, friends and issues in their marriages. And children arrive, some adopted. This novel highlights one of these, Rosie, taken on by Ed and Tilly from a traveller. Central though is Cathleen, whose more minor part in Volume One, now becomes the catalyst for change. Her actions have major impacts on the relationships between the four families.future.



# Glass Houses

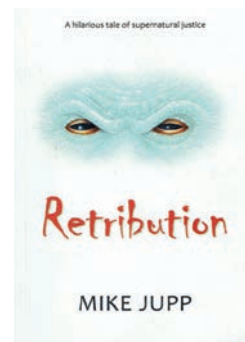
SHARON MARTIN

It's 1967 and the four families have grown and matured. But old betrayals still hurt and secrets, when revealed, have a huge impact on everyone. The spotlight also falls on the two families, who own the local stables, where a murder visits the main characters, who can only move forward if they can unravel their pain and perceptions and find a way of forgiving and loving unconditionally. future.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sharon Martin** was born in Runcton and has lived in West Sussex all her life. She has always enjoyed writing and throughout her life, has written poems and short stories, full of humour and scenes from everyday life. Her novel trilogy was inspired by people in her own life and as she began to understand what had caused their problems, the storylines just fell into place.

"Some people might look better than others, but they are just blessed. Things can change overnight and we are all vulnerable to being hurt"



# Retribution

MIKE JUPP

A hilarious quirky slapstick story about elderly Miss Forgetmenot, whose cottage is badly damaged by the Great Storm and is then ripped off by builder, Charlie Wollock and estate agent, Enoch Filch. She loses her house, which is bought by lottery winners, the dreadful Hobbs family. Can the resident gnomes, fairies, goblins and other garden folk, find a solution to the new regime with the help of Snaps, the resident cat?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mike Jupp** is probably best known for his artistic talent creating the "I Love " series of jigsaws. Mike Jupp says, this is a novel of 'Supernatural Justice' based on actual events that happened in West Chiltington in 1970 . Those very strange incidents were eventually bought to the attention of Dom. Robert Petit-Pierre, the priest on whom William Peter Blatty based his famous story The Exorcist.

"I changed it to a comedy based on a fictional seaside town called, 'Bogham'. Strangely, my story contains characters that bore a striking resemblance to some of the natives in my home town of Bognor Regis! Coincidence is a strange thing!"

"It's the Hobbit meets Arthur Daley"  
Mike Read – DJ and broadcaster



# Maggie's Boy

BERYL KINGSTON

When Alison married Rigby, life seemed to be perfect, as they settled down in Bognor Regis. But recession hit and the debts began to mount up, though both were in denial. Slowly life became worse and Alison learnt a lot about trust, love, pain, honesty, as we see her taken very knowledgably by the author through the various stages of the path to poverty, benefits and despair before she can find her true grit and begin to rebuild her life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Beryl Kingston** is leading a very interesting and varied life. She survived a bomb two doors away in London in the Blitz. She was a Beauty Queen at 17. She has always been a political animal. And has worked every day since she was 9.

And still does today.





## AND ALSO...



Hotham Park House  
built 1792

# Lie in Wait

**GRAHAM J MINETT**

Owen Hall finds life hard, but he is doing fine until he gets inadvertently mixed up with Abi and Callum, whom he has known since school days. And then a passenger in his car asks to use the facilities in a petrol station and then disappears. And then he finds himself prime suspect in a murder in South Mundham.

This is a gripping page turner, where nothing is what it seems and there are twists at every turn. Over 4 months we see the net slowly closing and everyone is trying to outthink everyone else. The area around Chichester, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton and the areas in between, can be seen as they are today. future.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Graham Minnett studied Languages at Churchill College, Cambridge before teaching for several years in Gloucestershire and West Sussex. In 2008 he completed a part-time MA in Creative Writing at the University of Chichester and subsequently won both the inaugural Segora short story competition in 2008 and the Chapter One competition in 2010. He is now writing full-time, and lives in West Sussex with his wife and children.**

# Sanditon

**JANE AUSTEN**

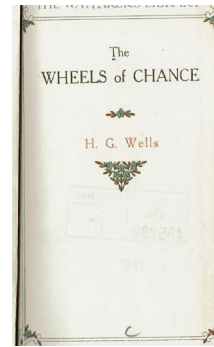
Possibly set in Bognor, though this is disputed.

It is a snippet of a story, about the Parker family, with their hypochondria and vision for an enlarged Sanditon town and the family of Lady Denham and their sense of entitlement, as seen through the eyes of a new family friend, the young, intelligent and observant Charlotte Heywood.

**OBSERVATIONS** *No one knows for certain where this newly growing seaside resort on the South coast is. But there are clues in the book, which literary experts have used to support their view that it is either Worthing or Bognor Regis. And was Mr Parker in fact Sir Richard Hotham of Bognor (who prompted the development of Bognor into a seaside health resort in the late 18th century) or Edward Ogle of Worthing? Austen experts say it is set West of Eastbourne. Local historian, Gerard Young, in his book about Bognor writes that Austen's description of Mr Parker "might have been describing Hotham himself". And when introducing Sanditon she refers to "the milliner's shop and the library; a little detached from it, the hotel and billiard room", a good description of Bognor at the time. Why not read the 11 chapters of this unfinished novel and decide for yourselves?*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**(1775 – 1817). Jane Austen is one of our most famous authors, but only wrote 6 completed novels, 4 of which were published in her lifetime. Born and died in Hampshire, she is known to have visited Worthing in 1805 and loved visiting seaside resorts all her life.**



Cycling in Bognor Regis  
today

# Wheels of Chance

**H.G. WELLS**

The Wheels of Chance is an early comic novel by H. G. Wells about a cycling holiday set in 1895, somewhat in the style of Three Men in a Boat. In 1922 it was adapted into a silent film The Wheels of Chance directed by Harold M. Shaw.

Draper's assistant, Mr Hoopdriver begins his 2 weeks annual holiday on his bicycle, a very popular mode of transport at that time. He falls in love with fellow cyclist, the Young Lady in Grey and spends much of the journey trying to get her out of the clutches of predatory Bechamel. One such rescue is set in Bognor, and consists of a brief 3 chapters.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**H. G. Wells (1866 – 1946) H.G. Wells was a major writer in his day and is best known for his Science Fiction works . He knew West Sussex well as his mother was housekeeper at Uppark House and he was a teacher at Midhurst Grammar School and this novel is typical of his novels of character and humour, such as The History of Mr Polly.**



The promenade today

# A Walk by the Seaside

**SALLY HEWITT (WORDS)  
CHRIS FAIRCLOUGH (PHOTOS)**

A Children's picture book

A children's Picture Book describing what you can find at the seaside: the sea and the promenade - and how young children can enjoy it. The photos used to illustrate the book are clearly of Bognor Regis Promenade.



## FLIGHT FANTASTIC



# Flight Fantastic

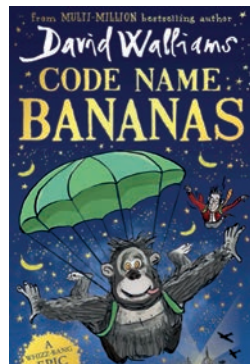
JUNE VERNAU

Written for young teenagers. Daniel's father has got a place in the International Bognor Birdman Competition and so teenage Daniel and his grandfather go along as supporters. But when a battle between two contestants on a fantasy website, Legendworld, spills over into real life at the competition, Daniel has to try and find a way of stopping them ruining the annual competition.

The novel provides an insight into the Bognor Regis seafront and good explanations on how the Birdman competition works.



The Bognor Birdman Competition.  
Birdman Images, Paul Wells



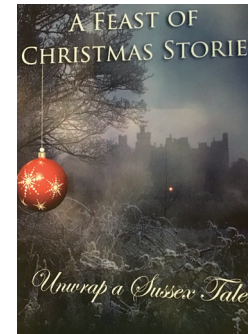
# Code Name Bananas

DAVID WALLIAMS

Just released in November 2020. This children's adventure story, set in 1940 follows the friendship of an orphan boy Eric and a gorilla named Gertrude in London zoo. Eric looks to escape wartime London and take Gertrude with him to Bognor Regis.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Walliams is a well known actor, comedian, television personality and writer of children's stories with multi million sales of his books.



# A Feast of Christmas Stories

A BOOK OF SHORT STORIES BY  
16 SUSSEX AUTHORS

16 Sussex based authors offer a short story about Christmas. Set in Sussex villages, the Downs, Lyminster, Iping, Selsey, Chichester, West Dean, Horsham Woods, Brighton and as far as Hastings and World War 1 battlefields. There are 3 where Bognor Regis can be clearly identified. Read them all and find the local ones. Each story is different and offers a range of emotions, humour and circumstances

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**CHINDI (Chichester Independent Authors):**  
Beryl Kingston. Christopher Joyce. Alan Readman. Maralyn Green. Bruce Macfarlane. Carol Thomas. Patricia Feinberg Stoner. Lexi Rees. Phil Clinker. Angela Petch. Julia Macfarlane. Patricia M Osborne. Isabella Muir. Susanne Haywood. Rosemary Noble. Peter Bartram



Bognor Regis Arcade  
at Christmas - 1900s



# **BOGNOR REGIS**

## **HERITAGE TRAILS**

This review of novels based in Bognor Regis has been prepared by Irene Campbell, a member of the Bognor Regis Heritage Partnership.

The Bognor Regis Heritage Partnership consists of members of a number of heritage organisations in the town and has developed the website [www.bognorregistrails.co.uk](http://www.bognorregistrails.co.uk).

The website covers people, buildings and places of importance in Bognor Regis. The Bognor Regis Heritage Partnership has also unveiled a number of blue plaques in the town during 2019 and 2020 and organises heritage events in the town.

## **WHERE YOU CAN OBTAIN THE BOOKS FROM:**

### **In Print**

Waterstones; [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk) (inc. ebooks)

### **Out of Print**

Heygates Bookshop, 67 Little High Street, PO21 1RY

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**TOWN COUNCIL**

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