

# Darned Memory

a walk exploring Millbank in relation to making and mending, collecting narratives and telling stories

The old Millbank prison dominated this area for most of the 19th Century (before which time marshy fields were the key feature) and thus dominates this walk and its stories. Jeremy Bentham acquired the land in 1792 to build his Panopticon, but the design was never realised. Work on the eventual six-pointed star fort began in 1812 to a design by William Williams. Demolished in 1892, some sources say that the 10 million reclaimed bricks were used to build the Millbank Estate.

Points of interest are marked on the map below, with some suggestions of things to do along the way. Feel free to visit as many or as few as you like, in whatever order you choose. If you would like to share your discoveries email images/information/anecdotes to: [studio@amesroom.com](mailto:studio@amesroom.com) for inclusion on the walk webpage.



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● = Things to do    ● = Points of interest

●●●●● = Suggested routes

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## Things to see and do on the walk:

- 1** The laundry ditch runs along the edge of the Arts and Crafts Millbank Estate, built 1897 - 1902 by the LCC as a 'sister' to The Boundary Estate in Shoreditch. The ditch and is said to be all that remains of the moat that surrounded Millbank Prison (demolished in 1892). Go down into the ditch and hang something on the line, tell a story about it.
- 2** The textile and shoe recycling bin. Take a bad clothing memory and consign it to the bin, tell the story and write it down, then put it inside.
- 3** This pathway traces the edge of the prison boundary, on which the graveyard was located. Early experimental gas holders also stood here, making a smell which was complained of in parliament. Follow the path through the gates - it looks like it only leads to a courtyard but you can get through to Vincent Street on the other side.
- 4** On the night of the 7th January 1928 the Thames broke its banks, instantly flooding the neighbourhood with the loss of 10 lives in local basement dwellings. The 'chequerboard' estate, designed by Lutyens and known as the 'Grosvenor Housing Scheme' was built in response, by the crown estate, clearing the slums between Vincent Street and Marsham Street.
- 5** This corner of Millbank gardens is close to the location of the prison laundry. Although water was likely drawn from the river, it may have come from a well. Holy wells, known for their healing powers, attract a custom of tying a piece of cloth, or a rag (known as a cloutie) to a nearby tree. The cloth should be taken from clothing worn near to an injury or ailment, the idea being that as it rots away the person would heal. The bedecked trees look very similar to those covered by prayer flags or ribbons. Tie something to the tree, for an ailment or a wish or a prayer.
- 6** This is the only point on this stretch of the Thames where you can get down to the river beach. If the tide is high go down to the water's edge and dip something in, if it's low collect something from the beach to bring back with you.
- 7** When Millbank tower was built in 1961 it was the tallest building in London at 34 stories. The secret garden behind the tower is bordered by the wall of the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital (1905 - 1977) which is now used by Tate as offices.
- 8** The millenium pier offers an almost to the water experience - though you can't get quite close enough to dip a hand in. The embankment wall was last replaced in 1963, when the road was widened, taking with it the last remains of the penitentiary steps leading down to the river from where convicts were transported to Australia. If you look back towards the Tate the steps were directly in front of the gallery's main entrance. Tie something to a piece of string and dip it in the water.
- 9** During the building of the Clore Galleries (opened in 1987) remains of underground cells, known as 'the darkness' were discovered. Arthur Griffiths, deputy governor of the prison, writing in 1884, tells the story of an intrigue that was uncovered between women prisoners working in the laundry, and certain male detainees. One morning when bundles of laundry were searched several letters were discovered written mostly on torn pages from prayer books using laundry blue as ink, along with love-tokens such as a heart embroidered in grey worsted on a flannel bandage.
- 10** One of the last remnants of the prison to be found in this area is this buttress, which stood at the head of the river steps from which prisoners were transported. The gate piers and a partner bollard now form the entrance to Purbeck House, in Swanage, Dorset.