



ENGLISH HERITAGE  
EDUCATION

KS2

KS3

KS4

## LEARNING PACK

### Performance at Portchester Castle

This pack helps teachers and students explore the unique role theatre has played at Portchester Castle, past and present. It focuses on the French prisoners of war who, in the early 1800s, formed a theatrical troupe and staged plays for fellow prisoners and the local community. Use these resources to uncover their story and to inspire your own creative projects.



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# Step into England's story

# WELCOME

This Learning Pack has been designed for teachers and educators exploring the story of the prisoners' theatre at Portchester Castle, whether in the classroom or at the castle. It includes a variety of materials suited to teaching a wide range of subjects and key stages, with historical information, suggested activities and ideas to support follow-up learning.

We know that each class and study group is different, so we have collated our resources into one pack allowing you to decide which materials are best suited to your needs. Please use the contents page, which has been colour-coded to help you easily locate what you need, and view individual sections. All of our activities have clear guidance on the intended use for study so you can adapt them for your desired learning outcomes.

To further aid your planning, we have created a Teachers' Kit, which explores the wider history of the site, and contains practical information about your trip. You can download this, plus useful Hazard Information sheets, from the Portchester Castle **Schools page**. Here you can also download information on our expert-led Discovery Visits and an overview of what your class can experience.

We hope you enjoy your visit and find this Learning Pack useful. If you have any queries please don't hesitate to get in touch with a member of our team either via [bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk) or on 0370 333 0606.

English Heritage Learning Team

## ICON KEY

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# INTRODUCTION

An overview of the creative collaborations that have informed this resource.



## INTRODUCTION

CREATIVE  
COLLABORATIONS AT  
PORTCHESTER CASTLE

Below is an overview of the collaborations that have informed this resource. Through these valuable partnerships, we have been able to explore the story of Portchester Castle in interesting new ways, broadening our understanding of this important place.

### ENGLISH HERITAGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

English Heritage and Professor Katherine Astbury, of the University of Warwick, have been collaborating since 2013 to retell the history of the French prisoners of war kept at Portchester Castle between 1810 and 1814. A focus of this collaboration has been on sharing the unique story of a group of Napoleonic prisoners of war who formed a theatrical troupe, built a fully-working theatre in the castle's keep and successfully produced high-level theatrical performances.

In 2017, a reconstructed stage was built in Portchester Castle's keep and a major new exhibition was opened. The launch was marked by the performance of *Roséliska*, a play first written by the castle's theatrical troupe in 1810. The performance took place on the stage in the castle's keep and was produced by Professor Astbury and Past Pleasures Ltd. The research done by Astbury and her team also fed into the updated site guidebook, the website and the designs for the costumes in the castle's new dressing-up box.

To find out more, watch our YouTube video about the project (4 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2uL-h4svVg>

This Learning Pack is a legacy to this collaboration and its findings. It will enable young people to access and explore this fascinating part of Portchester Castle's history. It draws heavily on the research produced by Professor Katherine Astbury and Dr Devon Cox, whose PhD research focused on French prisoner-of-war theatre at Portchester Castle.



The reconstructed theatre, built on the ground floor of the keep at Portchester Castle in 2017, helps tell the story of the French prisoners of war kept here in 1810–14.

## WORKING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS

Since the launch of the new exhibition in 2017, members of the education team at English Heritage, alongside Professor Katherine Astbury, have worked together with local secondary teachers and their students on piloting workshops and materials that have brought to life the story of the theatre and the prisoners' plays. This included theatre workshops with sixth-form students from Bay House School in 2017 and 2019, plus activities at the castle for Key Stage 3 and 4 students, inspired by the temporary sound installation by the artist, Elaine Mitchener.



Secondary school students visiting Portchester Castle.

In 2019, we partnered with various groups from schools in the Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust (GFMAT), to develop our on-site learning sessions and online materials. Together, we co-planned a range of activities focusing on the theatre. This cross-curricular work is ongoing and has already involved drama, literacy and history. Working with local schools has enabled us to gain useful feedback that helps us develop and improve our education resources.

## NATIONAL YOUTH THEATRE COLLABORATION

Together with the National Youth Theatre (NYT) and the University of Warwick, as part of the 'Freedom and Revolution' project for the Shout Out Loud youth engagement programme, a new play called *The Ancestors* was created and performed at Portchester Castle in 2021. It shines a light on the lives of the black and mixed-race prisoners brought to Portchester from the Caribbean.

A historical drama entitled 'The Revolutionary Philanthropist' was first staged by prisoners of war on one of the prison ships out in the bay beneath the castle in 1807. Written by a member of the naval expedition sent by Napoleon to reclaim the former colony of Haiti, the play explored how enslaved people of African descent had fought for their freedom in Haiti in 1791.

With performers from the NYT and local youth groups, and using new research from historian Abigail Coppins, we reimagined this play, switching the focus away from the original colonial male perspective, and retelling it from a black female point of view. The new play was written by Lakesha Arie-Angelo and directed by Jade Lewis. To find out more, visit: [www.nyt.org.uk/theancestors](http://www.nyt.org.uk/theancestors)



Performers from the NYT working on location at Portchester Castle.



# HISTORY

Information and sources to support learning and research,  
before or after your visit.

# HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## PRISONERS AND PERFORMERS AT PORTCHESTER CASTLE

Below is a short history of Portchester Castle's use as a prison and a theatre. Use this information to learn about the lives of the prisoners of war held at the castle. You'll find the definitions of the key words in the Glossary.

### FROM ROMAN FORT TO PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMP

Portchester Castle stands in a defensive position at the north end of Portsmouth Harbour. The Romans built a huge fort here in AD 285–290, to help defend the south coast of England. Some time after the Romans left Britain in AD 410, the site may have remained in use and eventually became a Saxon burh in the early 11th century – one of a series of forts that protected the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms from Viking attack.

After the Norman Conquest of 1066, a castle was built in one corner of the fort. It grew into an impressive royal residence, which was used by a long line of medieval kings until Charles I (r.1625–49) sold it in 1632.

Portchester Castle was used to hold **prisoners of war** as early as 1306, making it the oldest regular war prison in Britain. It was a prison during all the major wars of the 18th century.

The most notable period in Portchester Castle's history as a prison was during the **French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802)** and the **Napoleonic Wars (1803–15)**. Portchester Castle was one of 12 prisoner-of-war depots in Britain at the time and could hold up to 8,000 prisoners. Prisoners came to Portchester from across the globe.

Prisoners were held in the castle **keep** and the buildings around it. To increase capacity, in 1794, 11 new wooden houses were built inside the walls at Portchester, with room for around 400–500 prisoners in each.



A reconstruction of the Roman fort at Portchester being built between AD 285 and 290.



## LIFE FOR PRISONERS OF WAR AT PORTCHESTER CASTLE

Prison conditions at Portchester Castle could be harsh, particularly for prisoners who gambled away their clothing and food **rations**.

Prisoners slept in large dormitories, with each being given a hammock, a mattress and a blanket. Prison uniforms were dyed yellow to prevent them being sold, and to identify prisoners who tried to escape.

The prisoners' daily food ration in 1801 was one and a half pounds of rye bread and half a pound of beef and vegetables, replaced twice a week by fish and potatoes. These rations, while not generous, were more than the labouring poor of Britain could often hope to get in this period.

The prisoners of war were not completely cut off from the outside world and many used their skills to pass the time productively. Some found work in the prison kitchen and laundry, while others helped in the hospital.



A cutaway drawing of the keep at Portchester Castle showing how it may have looked when occupied by the prisoners of war. Many of the beams in the keep still have large numbers of nails driven into them, which were probably for the prisoners' hammocks.



A watercolour, painted by Captain Durrant in about 1810, showing the prisoners' market at Portchester, where they were allowed to sell craft objects to the public.  
© Hampshire Cultural Trust

Portchester Castle also had an **airing ground** and a daily market where prisoners were able to sell handmade items to locals, such as gaming pieces and playing cards skilfully carved from animal bones.

Prisoners also engaged in drawing, fencing and theatrical entertainment, as well as offering lessons in languages and maths. The wide range of activities shows that the prisoners came from all walks of life, and many were highly skilled.

## THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS (1792–1802)

The **French Revolution** began in 1789. After decades of population growth, high rates of unemployment, and increasing food prices caused by bad harvests, the French people were angry and became disillusioned with the **monarchy**.

King Louis XVI was the last king of France before the monarchy fell. He was removed from the throne in 1792 and executed by **guillotine** months later. After the monarchy was **abolished**, the first **French Republic** was established, to uphold values of freedom, equality and fraternity (or ‘brotherhood’). The French Republic used increasing levels of violence to achieve its aims. Monarchs from other countries became fearful that the revolution would spread and tried to crush it. Many nations fought against the newly formed French Republic, with Britain entering the conflict in 1793. This was both a territorial war (of conflicting nations) and an ideological war (of conflicting ideas).



A propaganda poster from 1793, representing the First French Republic, which reads: ‘Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity or Death.’ © Bibliothèque Nationale de France

## BLACK PRISONERS OF WAR FROM THE CARIBBEAN

Throughout the French Revolutionary Wars, the island of St Lucia witnessed several fierce battles, and changed hands between the French and British many times. Many of the formerly enslaved people who lived on the island left the **plantations** they had worked on and agreed to join the French Revolutionary Army to fight against the British, who were still a slave-owning nation. They hoped that revolutionary ideas would improve their own situation.

On 26 May 1796, during a battle, the French **garrison** holding Fort Charlotte on St Lucia surrendered to the British forces. Soldiers of European and African descent were put onto ships, some with their families, and transported to Britain as prisoners of war. Many did not survive the journey and at least 268 prisoners and 100 British soldiers died en route. In October 1796, 2,080 black and mixed-race soldiers, 333 European soldiers and 99 women and children arrived at Portchester Castle. The women and children were later sent to Forton Prison in nearby Gosport.



The island of St Lucia, in the Caribbean. © Public Domain

## THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK PRISONERS OF WAR

Life was especially hard for the prisoners of war from the Caribbean because of the cold, damp weather, which many of them had not experienced before. Some of the prisoners suffered from **frostbite**, and many who did even lost toes.

Dr Johnston (**commissioner** for prisoners of war at Portchester) wrote many letters to the **Transport Office** about the prisoners' health, diet and living conditions at Portchester Castle, expressing particular concern for those from the Caribbean.

A special diet was arranged for the black prisoners, which included extra potatoes and soup before bedtime and beer flavoured with ginger, which was thought to be warming. They were also given extra clothes but the European prisoners often stole their clothing and belongings.

In the end, many of the black prisoners were moved onto two newly commissioned prison ships, moored in Portchester Lake, a **harbour** outside the castle. It was believed that this would provide warmer and more secure accommodation for the prisoners. By the end of January 1797, about 1,600 black prisoners were living on the two prison ships.

The men and women from St Lucia, St Vincent and other islands were eventually **exchanged** and sent to France while others joined the British army and navy or returned to the Caribbean.



Sketch of an unknown French soldier by Emile-Jean-Horace Vernet, c.1830.



Captain Louis Delgrès is commemorated here on this French stamp.

Captain Louis Delgrès, a mixed-race soldier who was imprisoned at Portchester, returned to the Caribbean and became a key figure in the continuing struggle against slavery. He led an anti-slavery campaign in the Caribbean, taking up arms against France. On 28 May 1802, he and his followers were surrounded at Matouba in Gadeloupe. They blew themselves up rather than be captured and enslaved.

## THE NAPOLEONIC WARS (1803–15)

The Napoleonic Wars were a series of wars fought during Napoleon I's rule over France. Napoleon Bonaparte had gained popularity after leading several successful military campaigns during the French Revolutionary Wars. He became powerful in France in 1799 and, in 1804, he was crowned Napoleon I, Emperor of the French.

The Napoleonic Wars saw the First French Empire conquer almost all of Europe. To supply the French army with the troops needed for the conflict, Napoleon introduced mass conscription in France and its newly acquired lands. The wars involved nearly all European nations, with Britain remaining at war with France throughout the entire period of the Napoleonic Wars.



'Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor', a portrait of the French ruler, painted by Robert Lefèvre in 1812.

## PRISONERS OF WAR FROM NAPOLEON'S ARMY

In July 1808, Napoleon suffered a humiliating defeat against the Spanish army, who were **allies** of the British, at the **Battle of Bailén** in southern Spain. The Spanish imprisoned 7,000 French captives on the tiny, deserted island of Cabrera in the Mediterranean, five miles off the coast of Majorca.

Life for the prisoners on Cabrera was hard. They suffered from disease and starvation and many of them died. Despite the appalling conditions, one group of prisoners passed the time by creating a makeshift theatre on the island, where they performed classic French comedies.

Eventually, the Spanish transferred the prisoners of war on Cabrera to their British allies. They arrived at Portchester Castle in June 1810. In the 18th century, warring nations tended to exchange prisoners of war at regular intervals. But during the Napoleonic Wars, this system broke down. The last prisoners of war left Portchester Castle in 1815, when the Napoleonic Wars ended.



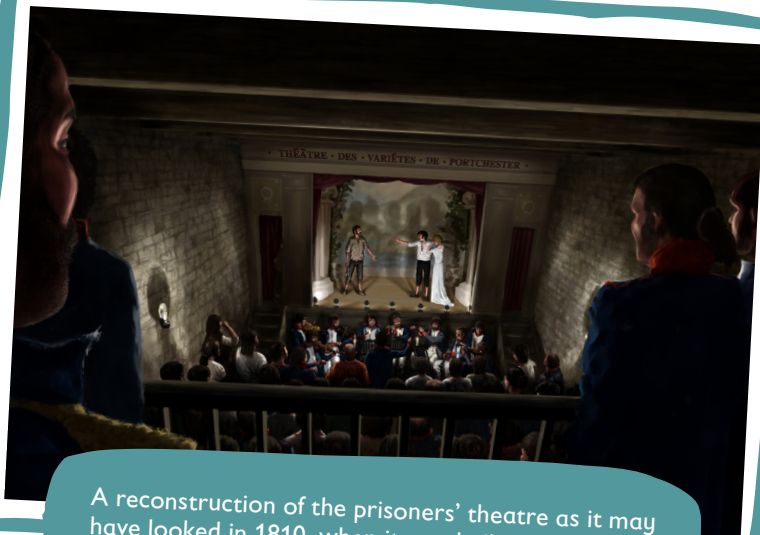
An 18th-century map showing the tiny island of Cabrera (seen here in yellow), which lies five miles south of Majorca, where 7,000 prisoners of war from the Battle of Bailén were kept in appalling conditions.

## FRENCH PRISONERS PUTTING ON PLAYS

When the prisoners of war arrived at Portchester Castle from the island of Cabrera in 1810, a group of them formed a theatrical **troupe** almost immediately. The troupe, 'Société of the Théâtre des Variétés of Portchester Castle', was led by Jean-François Carré, who had worked as a stage technician in a famous theatre in Paris. Captain William Paterson, who was in charge of Portchester Castle and its prisoners, provided the prisoners with **timber**, canvas and other materials so that they could build a stage, scenery and boxes for their performances. They created a theatre on the ground floor of the keep where they put on performances for up to 300 audience members. The keep itself housed up to 3,000 prisoners. It's likely that prisoners in the upper floors of the keep could listen to the performances below, and were following the storylines without being able to see the performance.

Between September 1810 and January 1811, the prisoners staged at least seven individual three-act plays, six of which were **melodramas**. With his Paris connections, Carré, the troupe's leader, was sent the scripts of some of the latest hit plays, so the prisoners were performing them at Portchester very soon after they had premiered in Paris. The prisoners wrote out other plays from memory but they also created their own. Two members of the troupe wrote a three-act melodrama, *Roséliska*, taking their inspiration from one of the Paris plays.

Performances at Portchester Castle, including the music, dance, scenery and costume, were produced to a very high standard. The troupe had an orchestra, dancers and painted scenery. Many of their plays also involved multiple costume and set changes.



A reconstruction of the prisoners' theatre as it may have looked in 1810, when it was built on the ground floor of the keep by French prisoners of war.

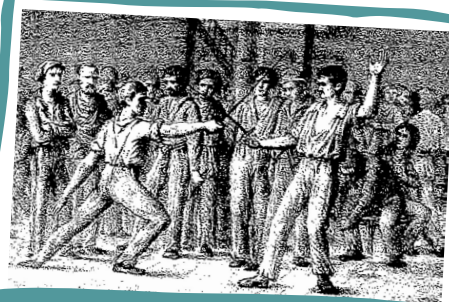
Captain Paterson attended many of the performances and kept a remarkable private collection of **playbills**, letters and scripts relating to the prisoners' theatre at Portchester. It seems that the prisoners' theatre was a source of great personal interest, perhaps even pride, for Captain Paterson.

The French prisoners wrote letters of thanks to Captain Paterson, and staged a short play in his honour.

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PERFORMANCES

Before being conscripted into Napoleon's army in France, the prisoners of war at Portchester Castle worked as bakers, soldiers, carpenters, doctors, and even actors, musicians, dancers and a stage technician: Louis Gille was a former art student from Paris, Jean-Francois Carré was a stage technician at the Opéra Comique, Pierre Perret was a dancer at the Opéra, and Marc-Antoine was a horn player who trained at the Conservatoire.

There were 66 prisoners in the theatrical troupe at Portchester. Hippolyte Sutat was known for playing the lead female role. He was 22 years old in June 1810, when he arrived at Portchester Castle. He had a slender build, and small stature at 5 feet 6 inches, with brown hair and blue eyes. Jacques Belin de Balu often played the role of the villain. He was 33 years old when he arrived at Portchester Castle. He is described as 'stout' at 5 feet 7 inches, with black hair and hazel eyes. Lafontaine usually played the heroic lead male role.



Prisoners entertaining themselves on one of the prison hulks in Portchester bay in the early 1800s. From Lardier's book *Histoire des pontons et prisons d'Angleterre pendant la guerre du Consulat et de l'Empire* (1845).

## TENSIONS WITHIN THE TROUPE

Members of the theatrical troupe at Portchester channelled their creative energies into the theatre. It kept them busy, protected them from homesickness and boredom, perhaps even helping them to come to terms with the trauma of war and captivity. Despite these benefits, disagreements often emerged. In his memoirs, Joseph Quantin writes: 'We had authors and new plays, and consequently cabals, jealousies and literary quarrels.'

Antoine Tardif, a prisoner of war, convicted of the Winchester Affair of the murder of Jean-Louis Lequey, a fellow-prisoner, at Boreham, was executed on Monday the 24th inst. from Winchester at Boreham, at which place he arrived about eleven o'clock, and was conducted to the King's Arms Inn attended by the Catholic Priest, who solemnly administered to him the sacrament, and imploring the forgiveness of God. This he obstinately refused, and insisted upon being taken immediately to the place of execution. The rope was then put round his neck, and he was conveyed in a cart from there to the prison yard, where he immediately, with the greatest resolution, mounted the scaffold prepared for him, in presence of 7000 prisoners. The priest again exhorted him to penitence, and to seek pardon of his fellow-prisoners; but he still persisted in his resolution, saying, the prisoners had insulted themselves with him. The cap was then drawn over his face, which he partly removed with his hand, but it was again drawn over him by the

A newspaper clipping from 1813 describing the crime and punishment of Antoine Tardif. *The London Chronicle*, Volume 114, p.140.

On one occasion, these tensions had fatal results. On 8 March 1813, at 7.30pm, a French prisoner, Antoine Tardif, stabbed a fellow prisoner, Jean Lequey, to death in a jealous rage. According to *The Times*, Tardif 'had ground the point of his knife sharp for many days and bound the handle with twine so that his hand would not slip'.

Tardif was found guilty of murder and was sentenced to death by hanging. According to the *Hampshire Telegraph*, the motive for Tardif's vengeful act was 'an expressive jealousy against [Lequey] on account of his superior talent in writing little pieces for the stage'.

# GLOSSARY

TRICKY TERMS AND  
WHAT THEY MEAN

Below is a list of words you might come across while exploring the story of the prisoners of war at Portchester. Use this Glossary to find out what they mean.



**abolish(ed)** – to formally put an end to a system or practice, e.g. the French monarchy

**allies** – two or more countries coming together for a common goal, usually for military or political reasons

**airing ground** – a secure outdoor space where prisoners could go to get some fresh air and exercise

**Battle of Bailén** – a major conflict in 1808, during the Napoleonic Wars. The Spanish, occupied by France, wanted independence from Napoleonic rule. Napoleon sent his army (under the leadership of General Dupont) to restore control, but they faced a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Bailén, and the Spanish captured thousands of French prisoners of war.

**colonies** – countries or areas under the control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country

**commissioner** – a person chosen by the government to complete a specific task and carry out its requests

**exchange** – an agreement between two enemy countries to swap prisoners of war

**French Republic** – a system of government in France, formed during the early years of the French Revolution, as an alternative to the monarchy. It was founded in September 1792 and ended in 1804, when Napoleon became emperor and created the First French Empire.



'The Surrender at Bailén', an oil painting by José Casado del Alisal, showing the French army surrendering to the Spanish in 1808, resulting in the capture of over 7,000 French prisoners of war. © Museo del Prado



The French tricolour flag officially came into use in 1794, with three colours symbolising the values of the French Revolution: freedom, equality and fraternity (or 'brotherhood').

**French Revolution** – a time of political and social change in France that led to the end of the monarchy. The French king Louis XVI was executed in 1793. The revolution ended when Napoleon Bonaparte (r.1804–14) took power in November 1799.

**French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1802)** – a series of conflicts between the revolutionary French Republic, which wanted freedom and equality but used increasing levels of violence to achieve these ideals, and several European countries who feared the revolution and tried to crush it

**frostbite** – an injury caused by freezing of the skin and the tissues underneath

**garrison** – a group of soldiers stationed within a castle or fort with the task of defending it



**guillotine** – a machine with a heavy blade placed between two posts with grooves cut into them, allowing the blade to slide up and down, for the purpose of chopping off a person's head

**harbour** – a sheltered spot on the coast, either natural or man-made, where boats can land and be left safely

**keep** – the central tower of a castle, often used as a final refuge during a siege



The keep at Portchester Castle was first built in the 1100s. Originally a symbol of Norman power, then a royal palace for medieval kings, it eventually became a place to keep prisoners.

**melodrama** – a style of theatre, translated as 'music theatre', that first became popular in France in the 1800s. It uses exaggerated characters, exciting storylines and atmospheric music to stir the emotions of the audience.

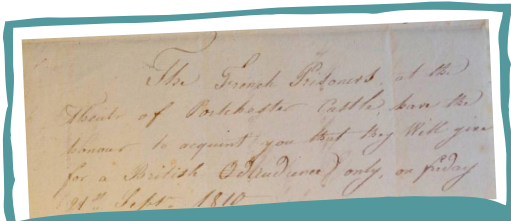
**monarchy** – a system of government in which one person (usually a king or queen) is the principal decision-maker and often the main law-maker

**Napoleonic Wars (1803–15)** – a series of wars fought between France (under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte) and several other countries, including Britain. Napoleon was eventually defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium in 1815.



**plantation** – an estate, with buildings and a large plot of land, where crops like coffee, sugar and tobacco are grown

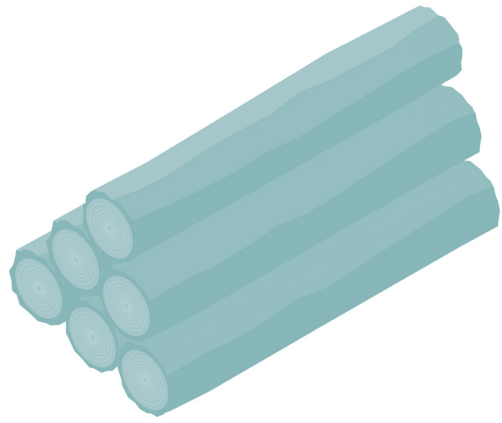
**playbill** – a poster produced to advertise performances to the public. The playbills that have survived from Portchester were handwritten by Pierre Charles Limozin, one of the prisoners of war at the castle. They provide the list of plays that will be performed, their dates, as well as the start and finish times.



A section of the playbill advertising the first performance at Portchester, from a collection of materials kept by Captain William Paterson, now stored in the V&A Theatre and Performance Archive. © Victoria and Albert Museum

**prisoner of war** – a person, often a soldier and their family members, who has been captured by the enemy army during a war

**rations** – a fixed amount of something (e.g. food) allowed to each person during a time of shortage, e.g. during a war, to ensure these items don't run out



**timber** – wood used for building or carpentry

**Transport Office** – the government department in charge of overseeing the transport of prisoners of war in and out of Britain, including matters relating to their welfare while in captivity and arranging their return home

**troupe** – the French term given to a group of actors, dancers and entertainers who tour around different venues putting on shows

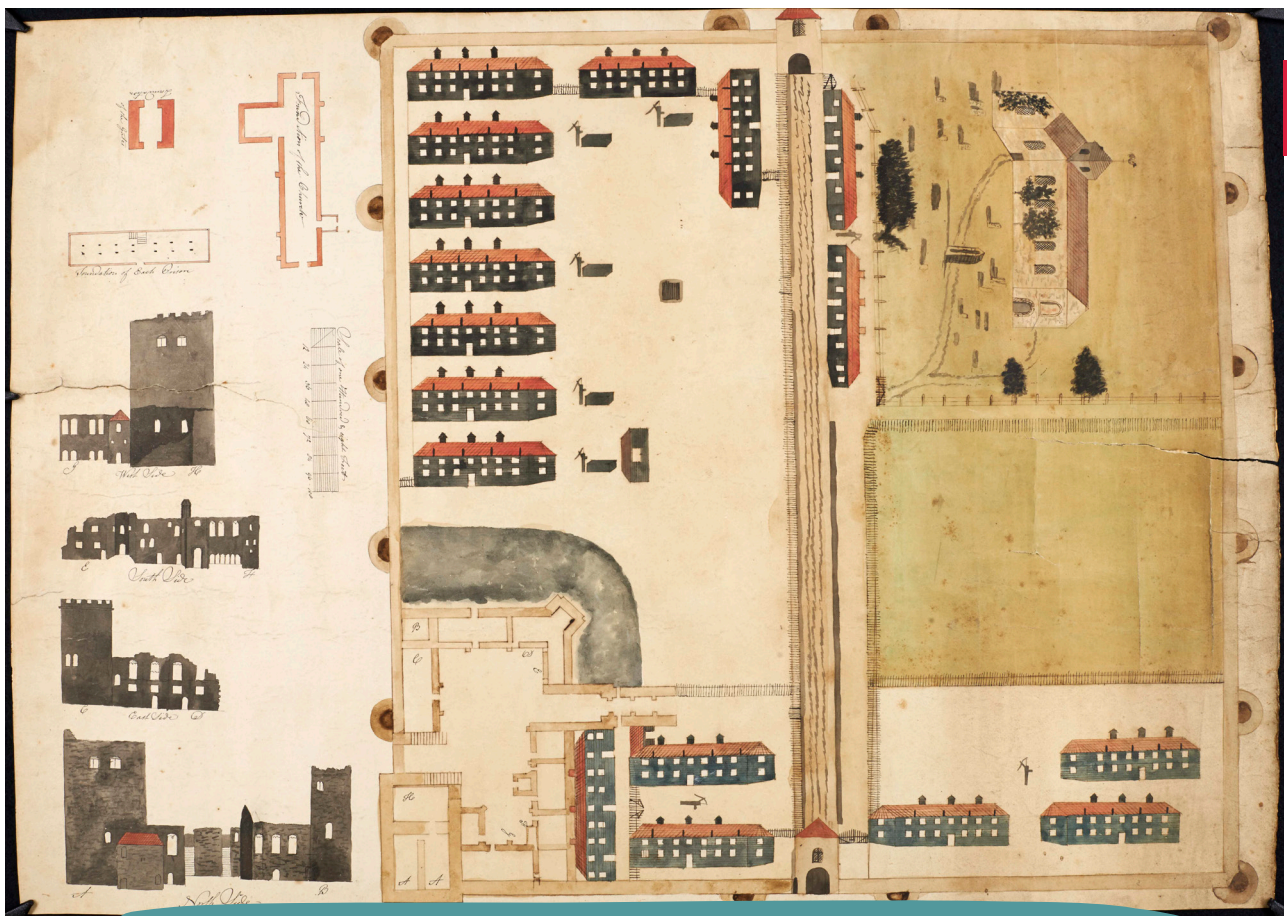
# SOURCES

PEER INTO THE PAST

A historical source is something that tells us about life in the past, such as a document, a picture or an object. It may be a primary source, from the time, or a secondary source, created later. Our experts have chosen these sources to help you learn about the prisoners of war at Portchester Castle.

## SOURCE GROUP 1 – HISTORIC IMAGES OF PORTCHESTER CASTLE

### A. PRISON PLAN



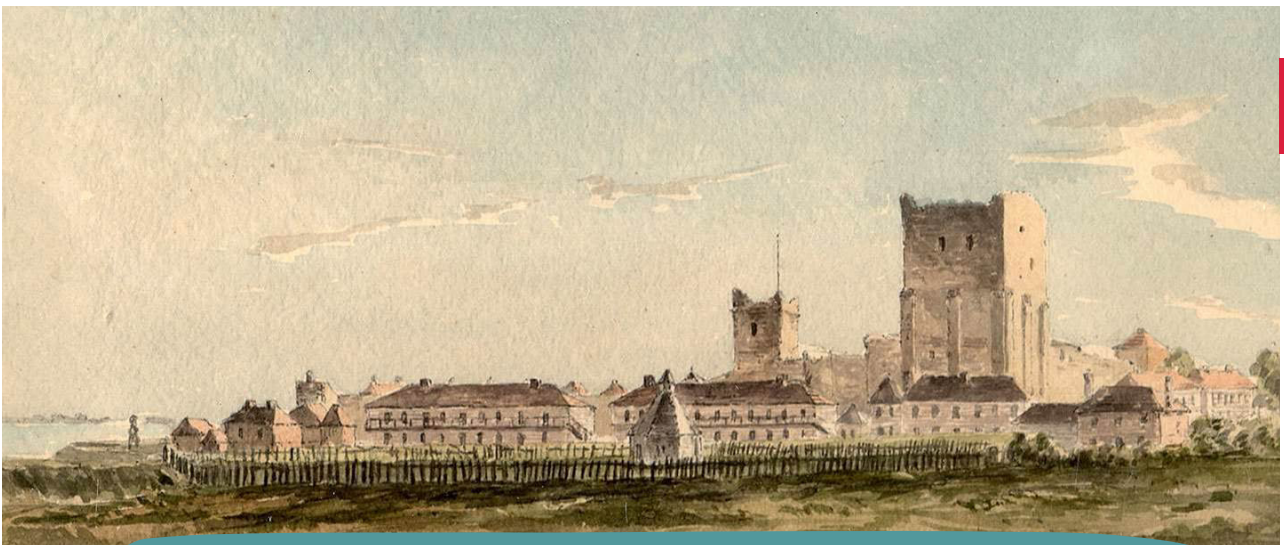
This plan, made around 1800, shows the layout of the prison. Each of the nine main prison blocks (top) could hold 500 prisoners. © Courtesy of the Portchester Society/Hampshire Record Office 51A05/1

## B. PRISON MARKET



Prisoners were allowed to sell crafts on the main road through the fort, as shown in this watercolour by Captain Durrant, who was stationed at Portchester 1803–13. A prison guard can be seen in the foreground, wearing red. The market stalls are set up along the fence, with the prisoners selling their goods, wearing regulation yellow uniforms. © Hampshire Cultural Trust

## C. VIEW FROM OUTSIDE



Portchester Castle in use as a prison in about 1810, by Captain Durrant © Hampshire Cultural Trust

## SOURCE GROUP 2 – ITEMS MADE BY PRISONERS OF WAR

### A. FISH-SHAPED BONE GAMING COUNTERS

Some of the prisoners of war carved things from animal bones, like these gaming pieces, which were made by a prisoner held at Portchester Castle in the 1700s.



### B. BONE DICE

These dice are from various dates, with the earliest at the top dating to the 17th century, the dice on the left and the bottom to the 18th century, and the one on the right dating to around 1810. They were carved and sold or used for gaming by prisoners of war at Portchester Castle.



### C. STRAW-WORK BOX

A wooden box covered in straw-work decoration, probably made by a prisoner at Portchester Castle in about 1810.

© By kind permission of the Nick Walker Collection



## SOURCE GROUP 3 – CAPTAIN PATERSON

### A. CONCERNED FOR THE PRISONERS' WELFARE



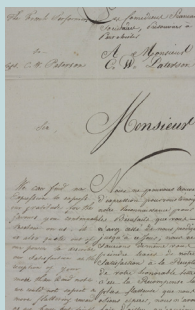
A letter, written in 1810 in French and English, from Limozin, a French prisoner held at Portchester Castle, to Captain Charles William Paterson. Limozin informs Captain Paterson that he is one of the wounded who hopes to be returned to France. He has an injured left hand. In addition, his wife, who was pregnant, died in childbirth leaving his three children motherless and being looked after by a struggling sister-in-law. Limozin has heard no word from them since being wounded and captured by the Spanish. He asks Captain Paterson to facilitate his return to France. His letter provides biographical details – his full name is ‘Pierre Charles Limozin’, he is 40 years old [‘âgé de 40 ans’], and he was a sergeant major of the first regiment of the Paris guard [‘sergent [sic] major au 1er Regt. De La Garde de Paris’].

Captain Paterson took pity on Limozin, and agreed to send him back to France to care for his children in the aftermath of his wife’s death.

© V&A Collections, Department of Theatre and Performance, ref: THM/415/3/8



### B. WELL-RESPECTED BY THE FRENCH PRISONERS

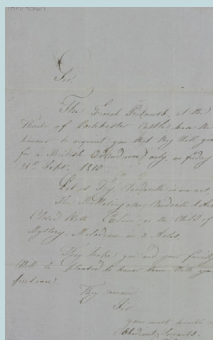


A letter from Limozin, written in French and English, on behalf of ‘The French Performers’ or French prisoners [‘Les Comediens francais societaires, Prisonniers à Portchester’]. This letter thanks Captain Paterson for his kindnesses to them and the note he had just sent.

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### C. INVITED TO PERFORMANCES AS A SPECIAL GUEST



A letter from Limozin, on behalf of the French prisoners, inviting Captain Charles William Paterson and his family to a performance on Friday 21 September 1810. Limozin also explains that the performance will be ‘for a British audience only’.

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# SOURCE GROUP 4 – COSTUME, MUSIC AND STAGING

## A. COSTUME EXAMPLES



An illustration of the actor Joigny as the villainous Count Conrad in *Les Chevaliers du Lion* (The Lion Knights), a melodrama first performed in Paris in 1804.



The character Constance of Portugal, in *Jean de Calais* (1810). Some of the prisoners saw plays like these before they went off to war, and designed costumes for use at Portchester based on what they remembered from back home. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France

## B. MELODRAMA MUSIC EXTRACT

A musical excerpt from Act 1, Scene 12, of *Roséliska*, a play written by the castle's theatrical troupe. The play was recreated in 2017, performed in the castle's keep, and produced by Professor Astbury and Past Pleasures Ltd. The original score has been lost, so a new piece was arranged in 2017 by Diane Tisdall, to accompany the performance, based on music from Paris melodramas of the time.

Listen to the audio here (1 min 30 sec):

<https://soundcloud.com/ehaudio/roseliska-act-1-12-13/s-xrmFFUKwHSH>

The music accompanies these stage directions:

[1–15 sec] A masked man enters. When they see him, Fresca and Walko run off screaming loudly.

[15–30 sec] The masked man seizes Roseliska and, despite her efforts, abducts her.

[30–45 sec] Stanislas and his brother, alerted by Walko, run to her defence.

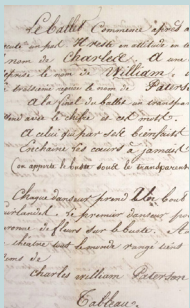
[45–60 sec] Stanislas takes back his wife and there follows a violent fight between Stanislas and the kidnapper.

[60–80 sec] Stanislas falls beneath the brigand's blows. Another arrives at that very moment and carries away Roseliska.

[80–90 sec] Tableau. End of Act 1.



## C. DESIGN OF THE THEATRE SPACE



An extract from a short play, *Les Etrennes du Coeur* (The Heart's New Year Gift), written and performed by the prisoners in January 1811, in Captain Paterson's honour to give thanks for his support. The stage directions reveal details about the design of the theatre space: the stage was raised and had a trapdoor so that a banner reading 'Long live Paterson' could be raised 'from under the stage'. Plus, a system of ropes and pulleys was in place and Captain Paterson was sat at the back of the room, in an elevated box, for the moment when a cupid 'crosses the house and flies to the box'.

© V&A Theatre and Performance Archive



## D. THEATRE RECONSTRUCTION



A reconstruction drawing by Peter Urmston showing the prisoners' theatre in use, as it may have looked c.1810.



A photo of the reconstructed theatre at Portchester, created in 2017.



## SOURCE GROUP 5 – RESPONSES TO THE PRISONERS' PLAYS

### A. HAMPSHIRE TELEGRAPH REVIEW

‘The French Prisoners at Portchester have fitted up a Theatre in the Castle, which they have decorated in a style far surpassing anything of the kind that could possibly be expected [...] It is no exaggeration of their merit to say, that the Pantomimes which they have brought forward, are not excelled by those performed in London.’

A review in the *Hampshire Telegraph*, 7 January 1811, p. 3.



### B. THE THEATRE ROYAL IN PORTSMOUTH

‘Il engageait M. le directeur du grand théâtre de Portsmouth à venir auprès des prisonniers français apprendre à diriger un théâtre. Ce directeur, piqué au vif, vint avec une nombreuse société visiter notre théâtre, il fut surpris de tout ce qu’il vit; après nous avoir fait beaucoup de compliments, il se retira.’

[‘He urged the director of the theatre in Portsmouth to come and learn from the French prisoners how to run a theatre. This director, needled by this, came to visit our theatre with a number of other people. He was surprised at everything he saw, and after having paid us many compliments, he left.’]

Gille, Philippe, *Mémoires d’un conscrit de 1808: les prisonniers de Cabrera*, 3rd edn (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1892), p. 268.

Philippe Gille was a French prisoner at Portchester Castle. In his memoirs, he explains that a reviewer from a local newspaper, the *Hampshire Mercury*, wrote to the director of the Portsmouth Theatre Royal, encouraging him to attend a show at Portchester to get some professional tips from the French prisoners. This appears to have irritated the director, who was perhaps jealous of the quality of the plays being produced, or felt that they were appealing to local audience members who could be attending plays at the Theatre Royal instead. Another prisoner, Joseph Quantin, confirms this in his own memoirs:

‘Le motif de leur jalousie était le grand nombre d’Anglais qui venaient de Portsmouth même à notre théâtre, et vantaient beaucoup la supériorité de nos décors’

[‘the motive of their jealousy was the great number of Englishmen who came from Portsmouth itself to our theatre, and boasted of the superiority of our decorations’]

Quantin, Joseph, *Trois Ans de Séjour En Espagne, Dans L’intérieur Du Pays , Sur Les Pontons , à Cadix, et Dans L’île de Cabrera*, 2 volumes (Paris: J. Brianchon, 1823), Volume II, p. 137.



## C. LETTERS FROM THE TRANSPORT OFFICE

‘... all theatrical representations must be immediately stopped, and not again permitted on any account whatever; as they are contrary to law, and we have no power to suffer the same nor if we had could we sanction the like at Portchester, where it is prohibited at all the other Depots’



A letter dated 1 February 1811, from the government’s Transport Office to Captain Lock, the prisoner commissioner at Portchester who had recently taken over from Captain Paterson, TNA: ADM 98/252.

The Transport Office may have made this decision because cross-cultural mixing between the French prisoners and English public was seen as dangerous, or perhaps because employees of the Theatre Royal in Portsmouth had complained about the competition. The theatrical troupe at Portchester Castle was fortunate that their new overseer, Captain Lock, like his predecessor, Captain Paterson, demonstrated compassion towards their plight. Two months after the termination of the theatricals at Portchester Castle, Captain Lock wrote to the Transport Office requesting that the performances be allowed to resume. The Transport Office responded:

‘... there is no objection to their being allowed to having amusements in the Prison, to which no Persons shall be admitted excepting their fellow Prisoners; but particular care is to be taken that no Strangers or Persons belonging to the Establishment or Guard be admitted either for money or otherwise’

Letter from the Transport Office to Captain Lock, dated 23 March 1811, TNA: ADM 98/252.

No playbills exist beyond 1811, but it is highly likely that the prisoners continued to produce plays (within the Transport Office’s rules) and perform them for one another until they were sent home.

## D. LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT

‘They found in their number several good actors and scene painters, whose taste and execution would not have disgraced our own best artists. They went briskly to work, all contributed their labour or talents, or little savings; lace was made of straw, dress suits of stained canvas, & paper fringe. Their theatre opened, all their own people assembled in turn, & were admitted at low prices into the Pit, the Boxes were very neatly fitted up, & frequented by all the first families in the neighbourhood. Several pieces, all irreprehensible, in a moral or political view, were well performed. The poor fellows were delighted with the encouragement they received, they thought of nothing else, & I do not hesitate to say that this little amusement which made them all happy, & led to the “nous ne sommes pas si mal ici” went farther to take away the disposition to mischief than the view of the force placed to guard them.’



A letter from Major-General Arthur Whetham, Lieutenant-Governor of Portsmouth, to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, dated 10 February 1811, TNO HO 28\_39. The general asks that the theatricals be allowed to resume because he thinks the benefits of the performances far outweigh the disadvantages.



# SPOTLIGHT ON *ROSÉLISKA*

Notes on the plot, characters and staging of the melodrama play written and performed by prisoners at Portchester Castle in 1810.

## SPOTLIGHT ON *ROSÉLISKA*

EXPLORE THE PLOT,  
CHARACTERS AND  
STAGING OF THE PLAY

While being held as prisoners of war at Portchester, two members of the theatrical troupe wrote a three-act melodrama, *Roséliska*, which was performed in the keep on Friday 2 November 1810. Find out more about the production below.

### THE HISTORY OF MELODRAMA

Melodrama is a genre of theatre, known for its exaggerated character types and sensational plots, which originated in France and became popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. After the turmoil of the French Revolution, French theatre-goers wanted to see plays that displayed extreme emotions, with clear storylines set in a traditional past, and happy endings in which good overcomes evil. Actors used exaggerated body language, facial expressions and speech, alongside heightened dialogue. Audience members often reacted to what was happening on stage by cheering, booing and gasping.

Melodrama translates as ‘music theatre’. Live music, played by an orchestra, was used to communicate the tone of each scene, highlight the entrances and exits of certain characters, support long movement sequences and create special effects, for example to evoke the sound of a storm outside.

The genre also thrived in Britain. Under the 1737 Licensing Act, only two theatres in London could stage ‘serious productions’. Melodrama, despite often dealing with serious themes and real-life topics, was not seen to be ‘serious’ due to the way it was staged. It therefore was an alternative to the ‘serious productions’ of the main London theatres and could be staged anywhere.

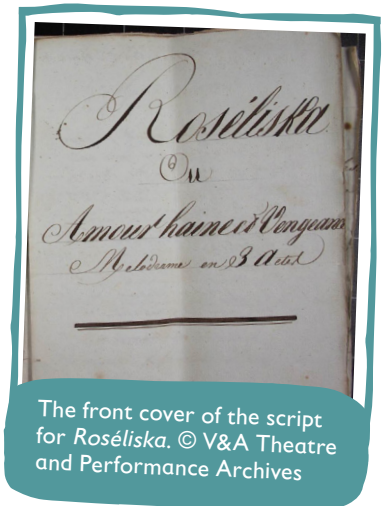
As the genre developed, it became common for melodrama storylines to include six stock characters: the mean villain, the sensitive hero, the persecuted heroine, the simpleton, the faithful friend and the villain’s sidekick. As melodramas at Portchester were performed by an all-male cast, female characters were allocated to the men considered to be ‘fair of face’.

## ROSÉLISKA IN CONTEXT

On 2 November 1810, the 'Société of the Théâtre des Variétés of Portchester Castle' staged its own three-act melodrama called *Roséliska*, written by two prisoners of war at the castle, Jean-Louis Lafontaine and François Mouillefarine. It is the only known full-length play written by the troupe that survives.

A letter from the prisoners to Captain Paterson about the play reads: 'May you feel concerned for Roséliska's fate, and we shall feel grateful and happy if by the offer of a few days' labour we have met with your approbation.' This suggests that the

prisoners wrote the script fairly quickly, with only 'a few days' labour'. *Roséliska* is based on a different play, *Metusko*, that was sent to the prisoners from Paris. They divert from the original storyline to explore a number of themes and experiences close to the prisoners' hearts – escaping from prison, the faithfulness of long-separated couples, and the humanity of a prison guard. Perhaps *Roséliska* was an attempt by the prisoners to make sense of the trauma and upheaval of their own imprisonment.



The front cover of the script for *Roséliska*. © V&A Theatre and Performance Archives

## PLOT SUMMARY

Set in Poland, the play opens at the castle of Count Stanislas and his wife, Roséliska. Stanislas has been at war in a distant land but is on his way home and his wife, Roséliska, is excited to see him again. Walko, Stanislas' servant, and Fresca, Roséliska's servant, are busy preparing for Stanislas' return. Before Stanislas gets home, his friend, Count Polowitz, tells Roséliska he is in love with her. Roséliska rejects Count Polowitz and tells him she is loyal to her husband. When he sees them reunited, Count Polowitz is jealous of Roséliska's love for her husband. With the help of his confidant, Metusko, Polowitz kidnaps Roséliska and imprisons her in his castle. Stanislas goes after Roséliska, but then is himself trapped and imprisoned in Count Polowitz's castle. Stanislas is able to loosen the bars of the window of his cell and escapes. Meanwhile, the guard watching over Roséliska, Caski, has a crisis of conscience and decides to disobey his master and free Roséliska. Stanislas leads an army to confront Count Polowitz at his castle, and in a dramatic final battle, Polowitz is defeated and Roséliska and Stanislas are reunited. Stanislas praises Caski for his bravery, and they all celebrate the triumph of good over evil.



A photo from the performance of *Roséliska* produced by Past Pleasures and the University of Warwick in 2017.

| Character                                  | Relationship                      | Character type         | Actor in 1810 | Notes for actor   |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|---|
| Roséliska                                  | Stanislas' wife                   | The persecuted heroine | Sutat         | The damsel. She is beautiful and kind, and often finds herself in distressing situations. Her body language is graceful, unless she is panicked when she becomes frantic. |
| Count Stanislas                            | Roséliska's husband               | The sensitive hero     | Lafontaine    | The hero. He has a strong sense of justice and gets angry when he sees good people suffering.   |
| Count Polowitz                             | Polish lord and Stanislas' friend | The mean villain       | Belin         | The villain. He is jealous and manipulative. His voice is deep and sinister. His body language is tense and suspicious.   |
| Metusko                                    | Polowitz's confidant              | The villain's sidekick | Mouillefarine | The villain's sidekick. He is loyal to Count Polowitz and encourages him to get his own way, at any cost.   |
| Caski                                      | Gatekeeper at Polowitz's castle   | The faithful friend    | Breton        | The guard watching over Roséliska. At first he acts cruel and strict. Later he shows his true empathy, compassion and bravery.  |
| Walko                                      | Stanislas' servant                |                        | Paullel       | The comic servant. He is friendly and honest. He overhears conversations and gets involved in things he shouldn't.  |
| Fresca                                     | Roséliska's servant               |                        | Gruentgentz   | The heroine's servant. She fancies Walko and their exchanges provide most of the comedy in the play.  |
| Polinski                                   | Stanislas' brother                |                        | Reverdy       | The hero's loyal brother who is the moral compass in the play. He stands up to the villain and tries to rescue Stanislas.   |
| Hokinski                                   | Stanislas' confidant              |                        | Godele        | A secondary character whose conversations with Stanislas are designed to show the hero in a good light.   |
| Officer of Polowitz's guard                |                                   |                        | Sintos        | A minor character who has one line in the play informing the villain that Stanislas is preparing to attack.   |
| Guards belonging to the house of Stanislas |                                   | Non-speaking extras    |               |   |
| Guards belonging to the house of Polowitz  |                                   | Non-speaking extras    |               |   |

## SCRIPT EXTRACTS

This edited script is based on *Roséliska*, written in French by two of the prisoners at Portchester and translated into English by Dan Hall.

This version includes five key characters: Roséliska, Stanislas, Polowitz, Caski and Metusko.

### SCENE 1

**Polowitz:** Are you trying to get away from me, madame?

**Roséliska:** I'm sorry, sir, but my husband arrives today and I must use all of my time getting ready for his return.

**Polowitz:** I am also looking forward to his arrival for Stanislas is a good friend of mine. [aside – speaking to the audience, Roséliska doesn't hear] If only it were in my power to delay his arrival.

**Roséliska:** This is without doubt the best day of my life. May heaven prevent it being ruined!

**Polowitz:** Madame, your husband has been away fighting a war. Are you sure he still loves you as much as he did when he left? I know my friend; he loses interest in things very quickly.

**Roséliska:** Please stop, sir. I won't have this discussion with you. I am certain of my husband's love for me. I would never expect a friend to say such a thing! Those are the words of an enemy.

**Polowitz:** Forgive me those words. I am not your enemy. The truth is ... I love you.

**Roséliska:** [shocked] You love me? How dare you say you love me?

**Polowitz:** My beautiful Roséliska, I have been keeping it a secret my whole life, but now my passion for you is tearing me apart.

**Roséliska:** Sir ...

**Polowitz:** You are trembling, I see, but the strength of my love for you is my only excuse. [he falls to his knees] I beg you, do not reject the words of a man who is on his knees. I cannot live without you!

**Roséliska:** I cannot remain here any longer. I must leave. I urge you to forget your love for me. [She leaves]

[She goes to leave. He attempts to hold her back. After several attempts she manages to escape.]



## SCENE 2

[Metusko enters]

**Metusko:** What is it sire? What is the source of your suffering?

**Polowitz:** As you know, I have always loved Roséliska. Well, the ungrateful lady rejected my vows of love. I do not know what I can do.

**Metusko:** Why do you hesitate to make yourself happy? There is only one thing that you can do. It's violent, but it is the only way you can have what you desire.

**Polowitz:** What is the way?

**Metusko:** You must kidnap Roséliska before Stanislas returns to her. You can hide her in the castle dungeons.

**Polowitz:** I heed your advice. I will have your plan executed!



## SCENE 3

[Roséliska has been kidnapped and is trapped in the dungeon in Polowitz's castle, Polowitz and Caski look on]

**Polowitz:** Caski, I leave you in charge of Roséliska, she who means the most to me in all the world. I reward those who serve me well, but an unfaithful steward will be made to suffer for his disloyalty!

**Caski:** Sire, I have proved my loyalty to you. You can count on me.

[Polowitz exits]

**Caski:** Oh, unfortunate Roséliska, what is to become of you? Cruel Polowitz, why has fate forced me to serve him? How happy I would be to see his despicable plans spoiled ...



## SCENE 4

**Stanislas:** Stop there, Polowitz, you villain! Give me back my wife, and fear for your life!

**Polowitz:** [he laughs] Ha! Now I can lock you in the dungeon and keep Roséliska all to myself.

**Stanislas:** Traitor! You can take our lives, but at least let us die together.

**Polowitz:** No, I'll hear none of this. You will pay for your arrogance with your life.

[Tableau (frozen image) showing Stanislas winning a fight with Polowitz.]





## SCENE 5

[Roséliska and Caski join Stanislas on stage]

**Stanislas:** Oh, Roséliska, I can finally press you to my heart once more.

**Roseliska:** Oh my husband! Finally I see you again.

**Stanislas:** Oh, my Roséliska, how much your virtuous soul had to suffer of the hands of the vile Polowitz.

**Roséliska:** That man, the virtuous Caski, did all that was in his power to help me and console me.

**Stanislas:** You are a brave, good man. I am so grateful. Tell me what you want and I will grant it to you.

**Caski:** Rewards, sire? You offend the heart of Caski. I have seen crime punished and virtue rewarded. That is the greatest reward there could be.

**Stanislas:** Come, my friends, and let's forget about Polowitz – a bad man who took the wrong path. We will now feel even more strongly the value of virtue.



## STAGING *ROSÉLISKA* AT PORTCHESTER CASTLE

Search the English Heritage YouTube channel for our video 'Recreating the Prisoners' Theatre' (4 min).

This film tells the story of the theatre and its recreation. It includes extracts from a performance of *Roséliska*, staged in the newly recreated theatre on 19 July 2017. The play was produced by Past Pleasures in conjunction with the University of Warwick.

You can watch a video of the full dress rehearsal here:

[www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/stagingnapoleonictheatre/roseliska](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/currentprojects/stagingnapoleonictheatre/roseliska)





# ACTIVITIES

Practical tasks to do in the classroom or at the castle, to deepen students' understanding.

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## WORKING WITH SOURCES



KS3

KS4

### Recommended for

KS3–4 (History, English, Drama)

### Learning objectives

- Develop enquiry skills and interrogate sources that relate to the performances at Portchester Castle.
- Use evidence to draw conclusions about life for the prisoners and details about the theatre at Portchester.

### Time to complete

45–60 minutes



Students will need to look closely at source material for this activity.

### SUMMARY

Using the historical information and sources provided in this pack, delve deeper into the story of the prisoners' theatre at Portchester, exploring the thoughts, feelings, actions and reactions of those involved. For context, read the 'Historical Information' section (on pages 8–14) and the 'Sources' section (on pages 18–26).

### SUGGESTED APPROACH

Print off copies of Source Group 3 (on page 21) and Source Group 5 (on pages 25–26). You could do a set for each student or have them work in pairs/small groups on one source, then rotate.

First, read the 'Top tips for exploring sources' on page 36.

Next, explore 'Source Group 3' (on pages 21) to find out about Captain Paterson, the prisoners' commander. Use the Teachers' Notes (pages 36–37) to prompt discussions around these source materials.

Now use 'Source Group 5' (on pages 25–26), alongside the Teachers' Notes (page 37), to explore various reactions to the prisoners' plays.

Finally, ask students to share three things they know now that they didn't know before, and facilitate a discussion about the opportunities and challenges of working with historical sources.

### MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Many of the source materials referred to in this activity are from a box of materials kept by Captain Paterson, including letters, playbills and scripts. It was passed down the family and eventually bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/archives/unit/ARC74762>

Discuss the important role that museums, libraries and heritage sites play in the preservation and presentation of historical objects, documents and buildings.

# WORKING WITH SOURCES

## TEACHERS' NOTES

### TOP TIPS FOR EXPLORING SOURCES

Analysing and understanding sources is a vital part of studying history. Primary sources are contemporary – from or around the time of the period of study. Secondary sources are created by people who were not there, for example a modern historian writing about an event. Particular care should be taken with archaeological evidence – excavated objects and deposits are primary, but they're always interpreted by archaeologists so are by definition secondary.

Here are some questions you should be asking about each source you study:

- What is the nature of the source? Is it an official document, a newspaper photograph, diary entry, portrait ...?
- Who produced the source? What do you know, or what can you find out about them, that will help you understand the source better? What were the circumstances of the producer when the source was created and does that have any bearing on the source?
- When was the source produced? At or around the time of an event, many years later ...?
- Why was the source produced? For what purpose?
- What does the source tell you? What can you learn from it? What does it leave out?
- Do you have any knowledge already that you can use to understand the source or place it into context? If you still have questions, these can help you draw inferences from the material.
- Is the source reliable? Can you trust what it tells you?
- How useful is the source? Remember sources can still be useful, even if they're not completely reliable. You may still learn something important about what contemporaries believed from any inaccuracies and biases.

### SOURCE GROUP 3 – CAPTAIN PATERSON

As a starting point, here are some ideas for what the sources tell us about Captain Paterson:

- He provided materials that enabled the prisoners to build a stage, sets, costumes and props.
- He was sent personal invitations to the premières of every one of the prisoners' performances.
- He attended many of their performances.
- The prisoners in the troupe warmly appreciated Captain Paterson's support. They even presented a tableau in which they adorned a bust of him with a laurel wreath – an expression of gratitude for his support.

Discuss with students some reasons why Captain Paterson was in support of the prisoners' plays. Answers could include:

- It gave the prisoners (many of whom were young, creative people) something to dedicate their time to, making them less likely to get bored and homesick. There are strong connections between boredom and antisocial behaviour within prison communities, so perhaps it was a way to keep them in line.
- After experiencing defeat at the Battle of Bailén in Spain, appalling conditions while in captivity on the island of Cabrera, followed by a long sail to Portchester, it was good for the prisoners' morale.
- Theatre, particularly melodrama, gave the prisoners a means through which to express their thoughts, feelings and anxieties. For example, *Roséliska* enabled the prisoners to make sense of the trauma and upheaval of their own imprisonment.

### SOURCE GROUP 5 – RESPONSES TO THE PRISONERS' PLAYS

Here are some inferences and deductions we can make from the sources about the various responses to the plays at Portchester:

- At first, local people were allowed into the castle to watch the French prisoners' plays. The evidence suggests that they loved what they were seeing. There was considerable anti-French sentiment in England during this period. Britain was at war with France and the French Revolution concerned European countries that were still ruled by a monarchy, like Britain. It is therefore very interesting that French prisoners of war and the local English population came together to enjoy the theatricals.
- Not everyone was so delighted with the theatre's success, however. The proprietor of the main theatre in Portsmouth complained – probably because he was suffering from the competition.
- The government ordered the theatre to be closed and reassigned Captain Paterson to ship duties.
- Realising how much the theatre meant to his prisoners, the new commander, Captain Lock, persuaded the Admiralty to reconsider the closure. After a few months it reopened, although now on condition that only the prisoners and garrison would be allowed to watch the plays.

Ask students to consider some of the reasons why the prisoners' theatricals got these responses. Some prompt questions include:

- How did the public/other theatres/government react to the prisoners' performances?
- Did the authorities fear French prisoners of war and the civilian population having contact with one another? Why?
- Was the closure of the prisoners' theatre to the public a commercial decision, instigated by the director of the Theatre Royal in Portsmouth?

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## ANALYSING *ROSÉLISKA*



KS3

### Recommended for

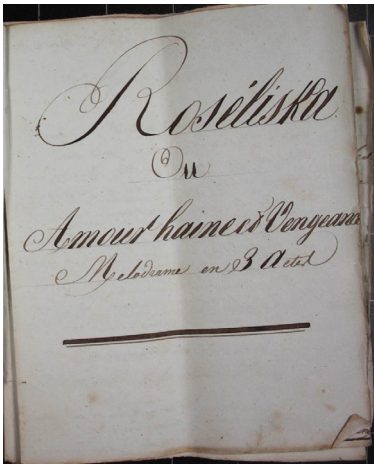
KS3 (History, English, Drama)

### Learning objectives

- Summarise the characters, plot and themes of *Roséliska*.
- Make connections between the themes of the play and the experiences of the French prisoners who wrote and performed it.

### Time to complete

Approx. 2 hours



The front cover of the script for *Roséliska*. © V&A Theatre and Performance Archives

### SUMMARY

Explore the characters, plot and themes of *Roséliska*, a play written and performed at Portchester Castle in 1810 by some of the French prisoners of war kept there.

### SUGGESTED APPROACH

- 1) As a class, read all of the information in the 'Spotlight on *Roséliska*' section of this pack (on pages 28–33).
- 2) Put students in pairs. Ask each pair to read through the character list again, focusing on these five characters: *Roséliska*, Stanislas, Polowitz, Caski and Metusko. They should now find one line from the script extracts to support the character descriptions of these five characters.
- 3) Working on their own, ask students to re-read the plot summary and make a story board (we suggest using eight boxes, with captions).
- 4) Now put students in groups of five. They should assign one character to each group member and read the script extracts out loud, this time trying to bring the dialogue to life. Now ask them to discuss the main themes emerging from the script. Some answers include: imprisonment, loyalty, betrayal, justice.
- 5) As a class, discuss how the storyline of *Roséliska* might reflect the lives of the prisoners of war. For example:
  - They might have been worried about the safety of their wives and families back home and longed to return home to them, much like Stanislas.
  - They might have hoped their wives remained loyal to them after a long period of separation, even in the face of temptation, as *Roséliska* does.
  - They might have wished that the prison guards they encountered while in captivity showed as much compassion as Caski did when he helped *Roséliska*.
  - *Roséliska* has a happy ending, in which the good characters conquer the evil ones. The prisoners might have wanted to see this kind of justice happen in their own lives.

Melodrama storylines tend to include six stock characters: the mean villain, the sensitive hero, the persecuted heroine, the simpleton, the faithful friend and the villain's sidekick.

Students might note that 'the simpleton' (a naïve comic figure) is absent in *Roséliska*. It can be helpful to analyse what's NOT in the script, as well as what is. Using their newfound knowledge of the prisoners and their situation, students could discuss possible reasons why the prisoners decided to omit 'the simpleton' from the script.

## MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Still working in their groups of five, students could go a step further and physically stage the *Roséliska* script extracts provided. It may be possible for us to arrange an opportunity for your students to perform their versions of *Roséliska* on the stage in the reconstructed prisoners' theatre at Portchester Castle. To enquire, please contact our Education Bookings Team either via [bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk) or on 0370 333 0606.

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## MAKING A MELODRAMA



### Recommended for

KS2–4 (History, Drama)

### Learning objectives

- Gain a practical understanding of some key elements of melodrama plays (plot, characters, costume, acting style, language and music).
- Create a character, costume and script in the style of 19th-century melodrama.

### Time to complete

Up to 6 hours of study (you could do this as 6, 1-hour lessons over the course of a term)



Students from Bay House sixth form taking part in a melodrama workshop at Portchester Castle in 2019.

### SUMMARY

Follow our step-by-step guide to explore the conventions of 19th-century melodrama and apply this understanding to make a melodrama scene from scratch. There are six steps to follow. This could be done as a scheme-of-work or extended project. You could complete one step per lesson, building up to a performance at the end of term.

### STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

First, we recommend you read the information about melodrama in the 'Spotlight on *Roséliska*' section of this pack (on page 28).

Next, follow this process to help students make their own melodrama scene. They should work together in teams of three. The Teachers' Notes on pages 41–43 go into more detail about how to carry out each of the six steps:

- 1) Plan a plot.
- 2) Develop a character.
- 3) Design a costume.
- 4) Create a scene.
- 5) Extension: add some music/sound effects.
- 6) Perform to an audience.

It may be possible for us to arrange for your students to perform their scenes in the theatre at Portchester Castle. To enquire about this opportunity, please contact our Education Bookings Team either via [bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk) or on 0370 333 0606.

### MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Students could create a poster/playbill to advertise their melodrama production to the local community. Include details about: the title of the play, the venue, the date and time of the show, plus the cast. For inspiration, look at posters from pantomimes that have recently been performed at a local theatre.



# MAKING A MELODRAMA

## TEACHERS' NOTES

Before carrying out these activities, put students into groups of three. They will work together on some parts of the process, and individually on others.

### 1) PLAN A PLOT

**Work together to invent a simple 'good overcomes evil' storyline with three stock characters (hero, heroine and villain).**

- a) In their groups, ask students to discuss examples of stories they already know where good overcomes evil, e.g. fairy tales, nursery rhymes, comic books, superhero movies. What do they all have in common? What makes them unique/different?
- b) Introduce the three characters: hero, heroine and villain. Ask students to list some typical characteristics for each.
- c) Ask students to choose a simple setting for their story, e.g. a castle, a haunted house, a rural village, a hotel. If they intend to perform at Portchester Castle, they could use the site as inspiration for the setting.
- d) Now get the group to think of a scenario that might happen between the three characters, in their chosen location. This should follow a clear structure:
  - i) Provocation: something annoys the villain and they come up with a nasty plan.
  - ii) Problem: the villain carries out their plan and the heroine is put in danger.
  - iii) Penalty: the hero steps in to solve the problem and the villain is punished.

Students should discuss the above as a group and, once decided, commit their storyline to paper.

### 2) DEVELOP A CHARACTER

**Use freeze frames, hot-seating, writing-in-role, plus voice and movement exercises to explore each character.**

- a) Before students can begin acting, they need to decide who will play each character. It seems that the theatrical troupe at Portchester Castle considered the attributes and strengths of each prisoner when casting them in a role. There were only male prisoners at Portchester in the period 1810–14, so men played female characters. Encourage students not to make casting decisions based on gender alone, because we no longer have the same casting restraints as they did in the past. Students should think about which character they would be best suited to, regardless of gender.
- b) Next, ask students to create a freeze frame (or tableau) of their chosen character. They should now exaggerate their posture on a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the least energy they can put into their embodiment, and 10 being the most. Explain that communication of character through exaggerated physical gestures is central to the melodrama acting style.

- c) Now ask each student to sit in a chair (the 'hot-seat') and have the two other group members ask them a series of questions about their character. They should stay in character and improvise their answers in the first person. It doesn't matter if they make up something random when put on the spot; it isn't set in stone and can always be changed later! The interviewers should start simple with simple questions such as 'What is your name?' and 'How old are you?', building up to deeper questions such as (to the heroine): 'How did you feel when the hero rescued you?'
- d) Get each student to select a key moment for their character, from the plot they invented earlier, and write a diary entry about it, in character. 'Writing-in-role' will help them to explore their character's thoughts and feelings in response to a crucial part of the story.
- e) Ask each student to select one line from the diary entry they have just written. They should read this aloud, with whatever voice comes most naturally. Now read the same line three more times, experimenting with different vocal deliveries: accent, pitch, pace, tone and volume (remembering that the acting style in melodrama is exaggerated instead of naturalistic – they might feel a bit silly, but that's okay!). Next, add two or three gestures to help them to communicate their character's thoughts and feelings more clearly. They can now perform this line to their group and get some feedback, remembering it's all a work in progress.

### 3) DESIGN A COSTUME

**Work on your own to research some melodrama costumes worn on stage in the 1800s and design a suitable costume for your character.**

- a) Provide students with some historical context: the costumes worn on stage at Portchester Castle in the 1800s were designed and made by the prisoners. Students should first look at the costume illustrations in Source Group 4 (on page 22) and read the accompanying character descriptions. These were costumes used in melodrama productions in Paris that the French prisoners in the theatrical troupe would have seen and been inspired by.
- b) Discuss with students what the costumes might tell us about the character and how far the costumes suit the character descriptions. Questions could include: Do you think the character is wealthy? Can you tell what kind of thing the character does for work or as a hobby? Are they old or young? Are they a good character or an evil one? How do you think they would walk and talk in this costume? Ask students to explain their answers.
- c) Next, students should write down five statements about their character that might influence how they dress. Now they know what they want to communicate to the audience through the character's costume, they can have a go at designing it.
- d) Ask students to show their work to a classmate, in a different group, who is performing the same character as them. Analyse what the costume shows about the character and evaluate how successfully it does this. Could anything be changed or added to communicate the character's traits even more clearly to the audience?

### 4) CREATE A SCENE

**Work as a team to stage a moment of conflict between the three characters.**

- a) Use improvisation to explore a moment of high drama in the plot. The middle section of the story might lend itself best to this, i.e. when the villain carries out his nasty plan and the heroine is put in danger.

- b) Next, use rehearsal time to refine this scene and get it ready for performance. It will start as something quite rough, which changes every time the group runs through the scene, but will eventually become more consistent, with students picking the best bits and developing it until the scene becomes more slick and able to be repeated. It's up to you how much rehearsal time is needed, based on how the groups are getting on.

## 5) EXTENSION: ADD SOME MUSIC/SOUND EFFECTS

**Use music/sound effects to support the stage action.**

- a) Explain that live music, played by an orchestra, was used in traditional melodramas to communicate the tone of each scene, highlight the entrances and exits of certain characters, support long movement sequences and create special effects, e.g. to evoke the sound of a storm outside. Use the musical excerpt provided in Source Group 4 (on page 23), as an example.
- b) Depending on ability levels, and resources available, students could do one of the following, to add extra layers of meaning to the scene they have created:
- i) Compose a piece of original music.
  - ii) Make their own sound effects using musical instruments or everyday objects.
  - iii) Find and use pre-recorded sound effects.

They should try to include at least three sound effects or pieces of music in their scene, e.g. when the villain enters some tense music could play, or when the heroine is thrown to the ground a crashing sound could be heard.

## 6) PERFORM TO AN AUDIENCE

This is what it has all been building up to! You could do this at school or on the stage in the recreated prisoners' theatre at Portchester Castle. If you're interested in this opportunity, contact our Education Bookings Team to make arrangements, via [bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk) or on 0370 333 0606.

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## DEVISING CONTEMPORARY THEATRE



### Recommended for

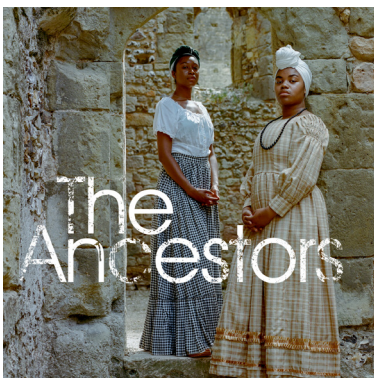
KS3 & KS4+ (Drama)

### Learning objectives

- Reflect on what we can learn from the prisoners devising theatre at Portchester Castle, and apply this to the creation of new work.
- Investigate the National Youth Theatre 'Freedom and Revolution' project as a case study.
- Devise a piece of theatre exploring themes and issues that are relevant to a contemporary audience.

### Time to complete

Variable, dependent on depth of study



*The Ancestors* was created, performed and filmed at Portchester Castle in 2021.

### SUMMARY

While melodrama might seem like an outdated form of theatre to us nowadays, it was very much 'on trend' in the early 1800s, and undoubtedly connected with audiences at the time. Society has changed greatly in the last 200–300 years and so too have the themes and issues that matter to us. This is reflected in the type of theatre we choose to make and watch. Throughout the centuries, theatre-makers have harnessed the power of theatre, devising plays that appeal to (or sometimes purposefully disrupt) audience members' tastes and sensibilities.

Use the case study below, plus our top tips for devising contemporary theatre (on page 46), to guide students through the process of creating an original play. We suggest they work in groups of 5–6 for this. The outcome will depend on the skills and ideas within the creative team, so we have offered general guidance, but have kept this broad to allow for varied creative responses.

### CASE STUDY

One example of new theatre work being produced for a contemporary audience is a play called *The Ancestors*, for the 'Freedom and Revolution' project, a theatre collaboration between the National Youth Theatre and English Heritage's 'Shout Out Loud' youth engagement programme.

Paul Roseby, CEO and Artistic Director of the National Youth Theatre, said: 'This new piece shines a light on vital lost voices, with a focus on women and particularly black women, and will be beautifully and poetically brought to life. The urgency of this work is more vital than ever before.'

Read more about this project here:

[www.nyt.org.uk/theancestors](http://www.nyt.org.uk/theancestors)

**national  
youth  
theatre**

**SHOUT  
OUT  
LOUD**

Made possible with  
**Heritage  
Fund**

## THE ANCESTORS SUMMARY

A site-specific outdoor production that explores the grounds of Portchester Castle and the voices of black revolutionaries that history has continued to silence, until now.

A clique of Caribbean maroon warrior women, a general of Haiti and his right-hand man, an ex-enslaved couple reclaiming their land, a group of black French-Caribbean soldiers held captive in Portchester, and their wives travelling across the Atlantic to be reunited with them. These are *The Ancestors* – manifesting in our world, in the hopes we can stop history repeating itself, but do we really hold the key? What dark forces are still currently at play?

## MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Shout Out Loud provides a platform for young people to explore heritage sites and collections across England, helping them to uncover untold stories from our past. By amplifying their voices, Shout Out Loud puts their ideas and stories at the heart of English Heritage. Shout Out Loud delivers a nationwide programme of youth engagement activity in collaboration with consortium partners the Council for British Archaeology's Young Archaeologists' Club, Photoworks, the National Youth Theatre, Sound Connections, and Associate Advisor, BBC Children's. Shout Out Loud is one of twelve Kick the Dust projects funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

In summer 2019, young people from both the National Youth Theatre (NYT) and METRO Charity had the unique opportunity to develop a new play at Eltham Palace, *Our House*.

Find out more about this project here: [www.shoutoutloud.org.uk/project/our-house](http://www.shoutoutloud.org.uk/project/our-house)

# DEVISING CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

## FIVE TOP TIPS

### **1** Decide how you want to work.

Are you going to work collaboratively as an ensemble, with everyone equally responsible for generating and developing ideas? Are you going to take on more prescribed roles, e.g. director, actor, writer, composer, designer? Whatever you decide, ensure the creative vision is shared by everyone in the team and that you have everyone's buy-in.

### **2** Know your audience.

Who is this play intended for? Consider what matters to them and make a piece that explores these themes and issues. It would be wise to make your piece of theatre about the things you have experience of within the creative team, to ensure that your audience is well-represented in the piece. It might also be worth doing some audience research. Throughout, keep your audience at the centre of the process. Think of your piece of theatre as an intelligent discussion between the actors and audience, rather than as a lecture.

### **3** Build in enough time for research and development.

Take inspiration from impactful pieces of live theatre you've seen elsewhere. Consider the most effective ways to communicate your ideas on stage. Test ideas through rehearsal, and don't be afraid to throw out things that aren't working, or to run with a bizarre idea that has potential. Take videos of your work in progress so you can watch it back from the perspective of the audience, and make changes to refine the stage action. You could also share unfinished scenes with your audience and get their feedback to help develop the piece.

### **4** Select a venue and decide on your audience configuration.

Measure the space and then mock this up in your rehearsal space. Think about how your audience will be configured in that space (e.g. end-on, in the round, promenade, etc.) and consider how much you're going to interact with your audience, because this will affect the staging choices you make.

### **5** Combine acting, lighting, set, costume, make-up, music and sound for maximum effect.

But don't let the storytelling get overshadowed by 'clever' staging. Audience members connect with good storytelling. How you choose to tell the story is up to you, but make sure it doesn't become a case of 'style over substance'.