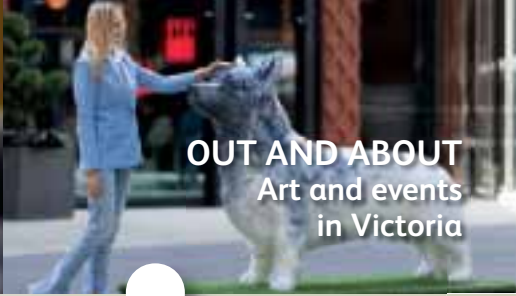


AUTUMN 2022

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talks travel



DRINK UP  
It's cocktail  
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OUT AND ABOUT  
Art and events  
in Victoria

# Victoria

LONDON STARTS HERE



CLASS ACT  
Back-to-school  
essentials



Just in time for Halloween, horror writer and historian Lauren Jane Barnett takes Alice Cairns on a spine-tingling tour of Westminster

**F**og rolling in off the river... ghostly apparitions in graveyards... cloaked figures in dark alleyways... London has long captured our imagination as the perfect setting for spooky stories. Little wonder, then, that it has inspired more horror films than any other major city in the world.

On October 18, horror historian Lauren Jane Barnett is publishing her new book – *Death Lines: Walking London Through Horror Cinema* – which explores eight areas of London through the lens of horror films. When it came to researching Westminster’s place in horror history, Lauren quickly discovered a recurring theme.

“Many of the horror films set in Westminster are about power, or the abuse of power – in particular, institutional power,” Lauren explains. “They ask questions about whether people are really better off with their government than on their own, and what

happens when those in positions of power fail us.”

One of the most famous examples of this idea can be found in the 2002 zombie film *28 Days Later*.

“There’s a scene where the main character, Jim, walks from St Thomas’s Hospital across Westminster Bridge. At one point, he’s standing on the bridge shouting ‘Hello?’ to the empty city, and you can see the Houses of Parliament behind him, these giant, deserted centres of power that have already failed to save the world. That’s such a chilling image. There’s a very similar scene in *Day Of The Triffids* (1962), and the fear factor comes from the idea of our most powerful institutions failing to save us when the chips are down!”

It would be impossible to talk about power in Westminster without discussing royalty – another institution that has inspired horror filmmakers throughout the years.



## Westminster's unmissable horror films...

**THE MEDUSA TOUCH (1978)** It's based on a book, and it's about a man who is psychic, although his psychic abilities can cause harm when he gets angry or stressed. A lot of the film is set in and around St James's Park, and it also includes the Cenotaph in Whitehall (as does *28 Days Later*). That's interesting because the word cenotaph means 'empty tomb', and in both those films, the entire city becomes an empty tomb.

**GORG0 (1961)** A classic monster movie about a giant sea creature. The scenes where it is trampling through Westminster and a desperate government is trying to stop it and failing, before accidentally blowing up Elizabeth Tower, are darkly funny.

# London's horror story

"A great example is *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), which involves this alien blob from outer space," says Lauren. "They finally manage to corner him in Westminster Abbey, and they place him on the scaffolding where only a few years earlier Queen Elizabeth had just been crowned. So they have this alien symbolically trying to take over Britain by being where the new Queen was, and they end up using these BBC cables to electrocute the alien – which is fascinating, because those same BBC television cables were what brought the coronation to the people. There's some amazing symbolism there."

*The Quatermass Experiment*, like so many of Lauren's favourite horror films, is about far more than cheap thrills and gore. Lauren argues that the best horrors have a unique power to probe our social and political anxieties, and to provide a cathartic outlet for feelings of powerlessness or uncertainty. She is

passionate about the idea that everyone can enjoy horror films – the trick is simply to find the right one.

"There are so many different kinds of horror movies. There are wonderful, eerie ghost stories; there are monster movies like *Jaws*; there's even a list of some 7,000 horror movies without a single drop of blood. That's because there are so many ways to get you thinking about what you're afraid of. Whether it's a rom com horror, a comedy horror, or whatever it is, I think the only person who truly doesn't like a single horror film is somebody who doesn't like movies at all."

And once you've found the right horror film for you, there's only one place to watch it.

"My favourite cinema to watch a scary film is the Curzon Victoria," says Lauren. "I love it there – comfy seats, lovely snacks, and it feels like the cinemas I visited when I was younger."