

sight evolved both disgust and admiration - how did they get it up there? It's believed that this unique sight was destroyed during an arson attack, but I found the head of a teddy in Queens Ward - was it the same one?

There must be ghost stories associated with a site of this size and history, but they've yet to surface. (There are whispers of patients being bundled in the

If you can ignore the staring empty windows & the razor cut curtains which flap through broken glass, the creep show is only just starting. There are still artefacts inside...

driers, of bodies being found in the tunnels, but that does sound far too "Prisoner Cell Block H"). But I spent one dismal morning taking some exceptionally weird pictures in the Chapel, full of orbs and ghostly mists. Another group of explorers related a tale where they were relaxing in the old Staff Canteen when they all heard a voice from outside the door. Upon jumping up to investigate, they found no-one there.

For those who jog or ride horses around the site, I can only apologise if you've been spooked out by bad, eerie piano music. There's a baby grand piano in Lettsom Ward, and we cannot resist playing doomy music whenever we're there.

But, there's a far more sombre place close to Lettsom Ward, tucked onto the back of the water tower courtyard, a building almost detached from the rest of the hospital. It's difficult to find, but those who do will never forget it. Welcome to the mortuary.

It's all still there - the large porcelain slabs complete with drainage channels, the huge chiller with enough room for about fifteen bodies, the chapel of rest

where the deceased would've been laid out, the mortician's equipment store complete with overalls and wellingtons. We also noticed that the bins were un-emptied, but we didn't look further.

Thus ends my brief list of highlights, since these unexpected sights and vistas are just the tip of the iceberg. But seeing such thrills is demanding. Since closure, Cane Hill has rotted; the floors are unsafe, some of the roofs have collapsed, there's asbestos in the boiler house and there is broken glass everywhere. Arson attacks have destroyed the main hall leaving brickwork in a precarious state. And security regularly patrols - you could spend your night in a cell - but not of the Cane Hill variety.

But, it's not all bad news since you can still look at some of the buildings. So for an extra fright this Halloween, take a walk down the public footpath from Portnalls to South Coulsdon station and relish the delights of the gloomy foreboding female ward blocks and the menacing burnt Administration Block. Despite its broken down state, some of the buildings are listed, and many still have a grim beauty.

In the end, the group on that internet message board decided to spend the night in a wet, miserable field with a few standing stones. As for me, I'd still dare to spend a night in the Chapel at Cane Hill; but then again, I must be mad.

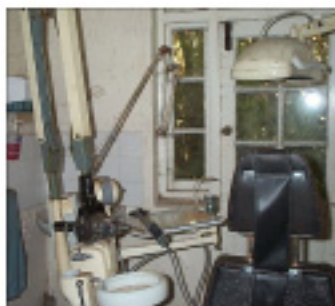
Simon Cornwell is an urban explorer who specializes in Victorian and Edwardian asylums.

He would be very interested in hearing from former employees of the hospital, as he'd like to expand the Cane Hill section on his website. His e-mail address is simon@simoncornwell.com.

For more on Cane Hill visit: www.simoncornwell.com/urbex



I was particularly taken with this painting. Considering the number of Cane Hill patients who ended it all on the railway at the bottom of the site, it did seem a little tasteless to paint an oncoming steam train on the wall. So, the tranquil scene of the sunset, the fluffy white clouds, the idling river, the single file trees and the one-dimensional sheep was topped off with The Flying Scotsman bearing down upon the observer at a furious rate of knots.



A dentist's surgery in a lunatic asylum? Welcome to someone's worst nightmare. All still intact, and waiting for the next patient, and slowly sinking through the rotten floor under its own weight...



The morgue, complete with autopsy tables and storage for 15 bodies. Why they needed so much storage remains an uncomfortable mystery.