

# Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus

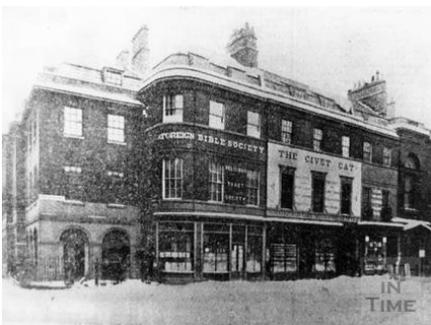
## Mary Shelley

1816-1818

THE  
ROMAN  
BATHS  
BATH

Tuesday September 9<sup>th</sup> 1816: Mary Godwin (later Shelley) arrived in Bath with her stepsister Claire Clairmont. During their summer in Europe Claire had become pregnant by Mary's friend Lord Byron and was no doubt looking for somewhere quiet to weather the inevitable scandal.

There are two addresses associated with the two women in Bath. Claire resided in 12 New Bond Street (adjoining the bottom of Milson Street), and though Mary used this address for much of her private correspondence, she also used 5 Abbey Churchyard and its associated reading room to begin writing.



Four months prior to their arrival in Bath, Mary and Claire, along with Percy Shelley, had been staying by Lake Geneva in Switzerland in the company of Lord Byron. The foul and stormy weather had kept them inside for most of their stay – by way of amusement Byron suggested they all write scary stories. “Perhaps a corpse would be reanimated” mused Mary “galvanism [the creation of electrical current] had given token to such things” and thus the seed of her most famous work was born – Frankenstein.

Bath seemed an appropriate place to continue her writing. Originally envisaged as a short story, Percy convinced Mary to turn Frankenstein into a full length novel. 5 Abbey Churchyard was well suited to her endeavour. Its reading rooms provide space for writing and research, while in the nearby Kingston Lecture Rooms she attended scientific lectures by academics including Dr Wilkinson, who proposed that electricity could be used to reanimate the dead. The idea must have resonated with Mary – reminding her of the lightning storms she witnessed in Switzerland, but also of her sister Fanny who committed suicide shortly after the Shelley party arrived in Bath.

Mary’s diaries reference the progress she was making on Frankenstein during her time in Bath, and in a letter to Percy on 5<sup>th</sup> December she writes “I have also finished the fourth chapter of Frankenstein, which is a very long one and I think you would like it”. This chapter recounts Victor bringing the creature to life, and its ability to learn the English language – Mary later edits this chapter into two shorter ones.

Mary leaves Bath in February 1817, having written a substantial part of Frankenstein during her time in the city. In 1889 the rooms along Abbey Churchyard were demolished to make way for an extension of the Grand Pump Room. Today the rooms that Mary frequented form part of the Roman Baths Museum, and the location of No. 5 Abbey Churchyard now holds the electrical substation that supplies electricity to central Bath.