In December 2021, I joined a walk to the Chattri, a memorial dedicated to the Indian Army soldiers of the First World War. The Chattri sits high on the South Downs, on the outskirts of Brighton- it’s in a beautiful setting, however, it is hard to reach and to many it is hidden.

Seeing the Chattri was an important event for me. It evoked feelings and thoughts of dislocation and belonging and fuelled a desire to explore more of my own history. My family is from Guyana in South American and three generations ago, they left India as indentured labour to travel to the colony of British Guiana.

After the walk, we had a tour of the Pavilion and the Dome and Dulani spoke of how these sites were transformed into a military hospital during the First World War and between December 1914 and February 1916, the Estate treated over 2,300 injured Indian soldiers. In total, 12,000 were hospitalised in different places around Brighton.

In December 2023, our writing group were invited back to see the Pavilion and the Dome and also the newly refurbished Corn Exchange.

It was another evocative experience and what follows are my reflections from that day.

*Shirini Heerah*

**Reflections at the Dome**

I don’t know, here we go again

The Dome is up the road

It’s only 15 minutes away

but it’s miles for me to connect

I’m steeped in complex history

in the Royal Pavilion Estate

as I stretch my eyes to see or touch

any reference to the Indian soldiers of old

A centre of cultural richness

a dome, a stable, a regal home

a hospital, a dance hall, a piano and a writing zone

The Corn Exchange refreshed

an acoustic heaven in wood

with a Sunday audience that rises up

from a stage that can move back and forth

The Pavilion, soft carpet and muffled tones

A Chinese warrior on a chandelier

looks down at a peacock on the floor

Red, gold, gilded and bright

I seek the soul

Imagining the Indian men lying here

What would they have thought –

a palace to recover in or a waiting room to hell?

I look for signs of their sacrifice

photos on the wall

some permanent visual reminder

to tell everyone of their temporary home

There’s an exhibition upstairs, I’m told

Bring it down, make one of the rooms a ward

Let’s fill the space with their voices in this iconic quarter

- that royalty and world class artists have adorned!

Back in Anita’s room, the archive materials await

Images, posters and programmes

coated with history and laminate

Scattered there, names from my youth

David Essex, Jimi Hendrix, Abba – smiling in the grounds

David Bowie’s contract – he was paid £125!

And suddenly, I’m sad that so many years have gone.

I sit, I contemplate, and then my bones begin to warm

at those concerts and shows that I remember made my heart soar

Anoushkha Shankar, Akram Khan, Amina Khayyam and her Kathak dance

the Indian women survivors in Nirbhaya (Fearless), who asked those who’d been abused to stand

and David Olusoga in the festival vibe and his decolonisation of history talk

Outstanding performances, I will never forget

at this site that calls for reorientation – an adjustment of sorts –

with minarets that reverberate shadows of the past

and architecture that leaves me cold

The Dome is on my doorstep

It’s a venue to behold

but whenever I come here, I’m aware

it takes time for me to own