



John Keats in Shanklin

John Keats visited the Isle of Wight in April 1817 with the intention of staying over the summer whilst recovering from illness.

Keats stayed in Shanklin (and later in Carisbrooke). He speaks with enthusiasm of the beauties of Shanklin, but in a postscript written the following day, mentions that he has been nervous from want of sleep, and much haunted by the passage in Lear, 'Do you not hear the sea?' - adding without further preface his own famous sea-sonnet (details from the biography by Sir Sidney Colvin (1887)).

On the Sea

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1. Read and analyse the poem *On the Sea* (right)
2. Write an analytical summary - ensure you comment on Keats' use of language, form and structure, and explore the effects he creates.
3. Now read the opening stanza of *Endymion* (printed on page 2) - this poem was written in part whilst Keats was staying on the Island.
4. Annotate the poem as you have for *On the Sea*, then write a detailed comparative summary of the two.

*Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,
That scarcely will the very smallest shell
Be moved for days from where it sometime fell.
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.
Oh, ye! who have your eyeballs vexed and tired,
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye! whose ears are dinned with uproar rude,
Or fed too much with cloying melody--
Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth and brood,
Until ye start, as if the sea nymphs quired!*

John Keats, 1817



ENDYMION (Stanza 1)

*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth*

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*From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
Against the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.*

John Keats, 1818

Arts, Literary & History Trail - SHANKLIN - KS5



Keats wrote a letter in 1817, describing his impressions of Shanklin and Carisbrooke. An extract can be found below. The full letter can be found at: <http://www.john-keats.com/briefe/180417.htm>

'My dear Reynolds, -

Yesterday I went to Shanklin, which occasioned a great debate in my Mind whether I should live there or at Carisbrooke.

Shanklin is a most beautiful place - sloping wood and meadow ground reaches round the Chine, which is a cleft between the Cliffs of the depth of nearly 300 feet at least. This cleft is filled with trees & bushes in the narrow parts; and as it widens bedomes

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- the little waterfall - then the white cliff - then St. Catharin's Hill - "the sheep in the meadows, the cows in the corn." - Then, why are you at Carisbrooke? say you - Because, in the first place, I should be at twice the Expense, and three times the inconvenience - next that from here I can see your continent - from a little hill close by, the whole north Angle of the Isle of Wight, with the water between us. In the 3rd place, I see Carisbrooke Castle from my window, and have found several delightful wood-alleys, and copses, and quick freshes.

As for Primroses - the Island ought to be called Primrose Island: that is, if the nation of Cowslips agree thereto, of which there are diverse Clans just beginning to lift up their heads and if an how the Rain holds whereby that is Birds eyes abate - Another reason of my fixing is that I am more in reach of the places around me - I intend to walk over the Island east - West - North South - I have not seen many specimens of Ruins - I dont think however I shall ever see one to surpass Carisbrooke Castle...'



Consider: How much of the Shanklin that Keats liked can be experienced still?



SHANKLIN - A SHORT HISTORY

In 1791 Shanklin had a population of about 100, and like most coastal villages locals made their living from fishing. Their thatched cottages were clustered around the top and the bottom of Shanklin Chine. Slightly higher up the hill was the medieval church of St John and Shanklin Manor, but all of this was about to change.

George III had popularised sea bathing, however the French Revolution of 1789 made travel abroad dangerous, so resorts sprang up

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the Chine and secondly Shanklin was the gateway to the Undercliff. The climate of the Undercliff meant that the vegetation was lush and excitingly different: a place where people could convince themselves that they really had gone abroad.

By 1831 the population of Shanklin had risen to 255, and a whole host of holiday villas were being built. Many of these have now been converted into hotels so they still fulfil their original function. In the nineteenth century families would rent a whole house and decamp there with some of their servants for anything between three weeks and four months.

By 1851 the population of Shanklin had increased to 355 full time residents, but the population would be nearly double when all of the villas were occupied. As a consequence of this the old medieval church was not large enough and it was extensively remodelled in 1859; this is in contrast to Bonchurch and St Lawrence where they built new churches. At the same time, it was rededicated to St Blasius, whose history is more fully explained on the church's website.

The next turning point in the history of Shanklin was the arrival of the railway in 1865. Now in truth the railway did not go into the village of Shanklin, but a point nearly a mile away from it. Regent Street was built to connect the railway station with what became known as the Old Village with its collection of thatched cottages. The space between the two was rapidly filled with all manner of shops, schools, businesses, a theatre and more houses.

By 1900 Shanklin had spread and joined Lake, which in turn had spread and joined Sandown. The population is now nearing 9,000 and tourism continues to be a big part of the life of the town.

Activity:

When travelling round Shanklin (or any other town on the trail) look for buildings that have changed their use - look closely - can you spot doors missing, windows bricked up? Why might this have happened?