



Francis Bacon in Wivenhoe

by Marina Warner

The painter Francis Bacon had a studio in Wivenhoe for a while in the Fifties in a terraced cottage in Queens Road. He had close friends in the village – the artist couple Denis Wirth-Miller and Richard ('Dicky') Chopping, who still live by the Harbour and have a drink now and then in the Rose & Crown. They are both getting on these days – but fifty years ago, they were roaring boys. Their hospitality was a matter for marveling ('Oh, Dicky was so outrageous!' is a typical reply to questions about those days.) Dicky at the time was designing the covers of the James Bond series of novels: it so happens that the images of Dr No and OO7 and M. and Miss Money Penny which the films later crystallized owe a great deal to his lurid graphics. Enduring icons of the Cold War, they were made in small-town Essex.

Bacon's cottage is abandoned now: the story goes that after Francis Bacon's death in 1992,

Denis and Dicky did not want to sell or rent their friend's place because they felt it should remain a shrine to his memory.

On the broken steps up to the front door these days, junk mail lies sodden and torn. At the back of the house, an entrance to steps leading to a cellar stands half open. These carelessly fastened doors contrast strongly with the cottage's most disconcerting feature: the windows on the front don't open at all. They have no frames and no fastenings or locks or handles, but are completely glassed in, a single sheet set straight into the bricks and mortar.

Maybe the wooden frames of the original sash windows rotted and in the absence of the occupants were replaced as cheaply as possible. Or maybe Francis Bacon, who famously painted interiors in his studio with only a naked bulb for light shut himself behind windows that couldn't open in order not to see the country, the estuary, the corn fields outside.

Quay House, was once the home of Sir John Martin-Harvey, one of the last great Victorian actor/managers best known for his play 'The Only Way', an adaptation from Charles Dickens' 'A Tale of Two Cities'.

Below: The Rose & Crown, Wivenhoe Quay

Below right: Quay House



Wivenhoe Quay

Photography: Elli Constantatou