



## **GOLDEN TREASURY OF LITERATURE TOUR**

*Rediscover the magic of your favourite childhood tales*

Secret gardens and smugglers' hideaways, mischievous scrapes and lashings of laughter: who can resist the excitement and warmth of children's classics? Rekindle their spell – or introduce the next generation – on a tour of Kent, where so many best-loved characters and scenes first came to life.

Discover the creators of Rupert Bear and Bagpuss, chortle along the coast with Billy Bunter, and sleuth with Sherlock Holmes in an enchanted garden. This autumn *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* flies again, while Dickens-lovers will find plenty to celebrate in Kent in 2012, the bicentenary of the author's birth.

### **DAY ONE: CANTERBURY TO MARGATE, BROADSTAIRS & RAMSGATE**

#### **MORNING**

We begin our tour in Canterbury, whose cobbled streets have drawn writers for centuries. Daniel Defoe for one, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, knew a thing or two about a good setting and praised the city's "antiquities" and "majestick" cathedral in his famous *Tour Thro the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724–7). In modern times Anthony Browne, Children's Laureate 2009–11, has chosen to live here and the city is making sure its bookshelves are well stocked with the new Beane art museum and library opening in spring 2012.

Choose from a bulging bag of goodies to fill your morning! Revel in childhood nostalgia at the **Canterbury Heritage Museum** where **Rupert Bear** has his very own museum – entirely fitting for a furry friend who has delighted millions since he first appeared in a *Daily Express* comic strip, *Little Lost Bear*, in November 1920. Artist Mary Tourtel (née Caldwell) who created Rupert was born in 1874 in the heart of the city at **52 Palace Street** – a plaque celebrates the fact – and she honed her skills at The Sidney Cooper School of Art in St Peter's Street. She is buried in **St Martin's Churchyard**. As well as lovable Rupert, Mary brought to life memorable pals like Bill Badger, Algy Pug and jolly Podgy Pig. In the museum you can discover how Rupert changed over the years and join in his adventures!

Also find there the real **Bagpuss** in Emily's shop window, original **Clangers**, **Ivor the Engine** and **Noggin the Nog**. Peter Firmin and Oliver Postgate, joint creators of the hit TV characters, did their handiwork just outside Canterbury on Peter's farm in Blean (the studio closed in the 1980s). In 1987 the University of Kent awarded the creators an honorary degree, on condition Bagpuss shared it with them – he appeared in full academic pomp in **Canterbury Cathedral** – while in 1999 *Bagpuss* was voted most popular children's programme ever in a BBC nationwide poll: not bad for a saggy old pink-and-cream cloth cat. Maybe nip along to **Palace Street Studio** where Peter Firmin's daughters specialise in hand-painted English bone china, including a range of Noggin the Nog, Bagpuss, Ivor and Clangers souvenirs.

If you prefer human adventure to animal magic, spend your morning on the trail of **Charles Dickens' inimitable characters**. Canterbury is on the proposed escape route from London organised for Sam Tappertit by benevolent Mr Varden in *Barnaby Rudge* – it remains a great getaway from the capital to this day! Dickens often visited from his seaside bolthole at Broadstairs, or drove over from his Gad's Hill home in a carriage with red-jacketed postillions.

*David Copperfield*, above all, conjures up sights you can still see. Mingle "with the shadows of the venerable gateways and churches", and in the **cathedral** experience "the sensation of the world being shut out". Compare **King's School** with Dr Strong's establishment, "a grave building in a courtyard with a learned air about it", and look up the **House of Agnes**, 71 St Dunstons Street: "a very old house bulging out over the road" that was home to David's second wife and is now a hotel.

## AFTERNOON

This afternoon we've another pick 'n' mix of treats. Grab your "licence to thrill" and head south with super-smooth hero **James Bond** in time for lunch at **The Duck Inn, Pett Bottom**. The pub was author Ian Fleming's "local" when he lived at Bekesbourne (1960–62) and it is mentioned in *You Only Live Twice* as being next to the cottage where the young Bond lived (cottage and pub are now one).

Strange but true, Fleming also dreamed up *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, inspired by the real-life exploits of flamboyant motor-racing driver Count Louis Zborowski who lived at Higham Park (not open to visitors) on the edge of nearby **Bridge**. The Count designed cars fitted with aero engines, naming three of them *Chitty Bang Bang*. Moreover, "our fine four fendered friend" roars back into life this autumn with the November publication of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Flies Again* (Macmillan Children's Books), the first of three new titles commissioned from best-selling children's author and scriptwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce. "Oh you pretty Chitty Bang Bang, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, We love you..."

If you don't dip south from Canterbury, make straight for the coast where **Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate** provide bucket loads of traditional seaside fun. Whiz around them all or indulge your fondest memories in just one.

The whole golden coast is the perfect backdrop for spiffing adventures with that chubby comic anti-hero **Billy Bunter**, whose creator Frank Richards (Charles Hamilton) lived at Rose Lawn in Percy Avenue, **Kingsgate**. "I say you fellows", Hamilton (1876-1971) wrote around 70,000 words a week under various pseudonyms and goes down in history as the most prolific author of juvenile writing ever. Bunter, the squinting, bespectacled "Fat Owl of the Remove" nevertheless remains his most famous character. The guzzling schoolboy attended Greyfriars, "pleasantly situated near the south coast of Kent" – some say modelled on a school at **Birchington** – and lots of local places crop up in his tales.

One moment Bunter is left for dead by a spy on a beach at **Margate** and nearly drowns. "Yaroooh!" But he is hauled to cliff-top safety. "He, he, he!" (Richards was inspired by a real rescue he witnessed at Botany Bay, Kingsgate.) Margate is also the climactic scene of *Bunter's Holiday Cruise*, when the shipwrecked holidaymaker the boys have picked up turns out to be the fugitive of a bank heist in Folkestone. Fear not, for all ends well and "Schoolboys, sir, enjoy themselves thoroughly at Merry Margate." Bunter, of course, knows where to get "a jolly good feed" – you'll also find plenty of tasty options – and the chums put **Dreamland** amusements high on their list of attractions: no doubt they would be pleased that ongoing renaissance there means a unique heritage theme park is promised for 2013.

On, then, to **Broadstairs**, where Horace Coker stood his Fifth Former pals yet another “magnificent feed” (*Bunter’s Holiday Cruise*). Wouldn’t they love **Morelli’s ice cream parlour**, where soda fountain and pink leatherette booths whisk you back in time. **Oliver Postgate** lived at Broadstairs and of course it was Dickens’ favourite “English watering place”, where he wrote much of *David Copperfield* in the mansion now called **Bleak House** (soon to be open to the public) overlooking the sea. Discover more about the Victorian author’s local connections in the **Dickens House Museum**, former home of Miss Mary Pearson Strong, the model for Miss Betsey Trotwood. Or time your visit for the Dickens Festival (16–22 June 2012).

**Hans Christian Andersen** joined Dickens in Broadstairs and Ramsgate in the late 1840s while on his way home to Denmark, maybe capping a business trip – the English versions of his fairy tales were first published in 1846 – with some seaside pleasure.

**Ramsgate**, too, is a resort for splendid excursions. Even *Swallows and Amazons* author **Arthur Ransome** made regular visits to Ramsgate Harbour (and he came to Broadstairs twice in 1913). On one trip he saw a picture of a child in a red cap, which sparked his idea for the famous headgear of pirate girls Nancy and Peggy Blackett. Ransome also used a voyage in his yacht from Ramsgate to Suffolk as reference for his book, *Peter Duck*. And the town appears again in *We Didn’t Mean to Go to Sea*, when Jim Brading complains about a gang of wreckers, The Ramsgate Sharks.

But let’s finish the day firmly on land with one of the most engaging characters of children’s literature, **Jennings**, and his loyal but dim ally, Darbyshire. Author Anthony Buckeridge (1912–2004) taught drama and English at **St Lawrence College**, Ramsgate, and soon appreciated how comic and creative little boys could be. At the end of the day he would tell stories to pupils, often in the dormitory before lights out. “Crystallized cheesestraws!” Irrepressible Jennings, causing chaos through his well-intentioned efforts to help, became a radio hit on the BBC’s *Children’s Hour* from 1948.

## DAY TWO: ALONG THE COAST TO ROMNEY MARSH & TENTERDEN

### MORNING

After breakfast, we swoop down to the coast– the fresh zing of sea air has tousled the hair of many a young adventurer along the way. Soon we’re breezing through **James Bond** landscapes: past **Sandwich** where Goldfinger and 007 play golf at Royal St Mark’s (real-life Royal St George’s) and **Kingsdown** near where Drax ran his sinister Moonraker plant. Author Ian Fleming lived at **St Margaret’s** and knew very well the dramatic potential of local beaches and cliffs.

We continue on past **Dover**, “full of historical interest. Reeking with it, in fact” according to **Billy Bunter**, though his grasp of specific details – “Spokeshave’s Cliff” (Shakespeare’s Cliff) and “Sunk Ports” (Cinque Ports) – is a little muddled (*Bunter’s Holiday Cruise*). **Charles Dickens** was more clued up when he stayed in **Folkestone** in 1853 while writing *A Child’s History of England* – maybe Bunter should have studied it for homework. Dickens, unlike Bunter, was also restlessly drawn to the great outdoors during intense periods of writing, noting during another stay in Folkestone in 1855 “how I roll down hills and climb up cliffs; how the new story is everywhere, heaving on the sea, flying with the clouds, blowing in the wind; how I settle to nothing.”

**H G Wells**, who came to live at **Sandgate** below Folkestone at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century, was rather more laid back: he spent much of his time visiting friends around Romney Marsh. (His former residence, Spade House, is now a retirement home and only viewable from Radnor Cliff Crescent.)

As we approach **Dymchurch**, thoughts turn to **E (Edith) Nesbit**, author of *The Railway Children* (1906). The novel draws directly on the happiest period of her childhood, at Halstead high in the North Downs near Sevenoaks where a railway line ran close to the family's garden. Later she lived near London, but from the 1890s she liked to come to Dymchurch for "working holidays".

Coincidentally, the children in Nesbit's classic 1902 *Five Children and It* move from London to the Kent countryside – where they discover a rather grumpy sand fairy, or Psammead, with eyes "on long horns like a snail's eyes." The Psammead (pronounced "Sammyadd") will grant a wish a day (it stretches out its eyes, holds its breath and swells alarmingly), but of course the children's wishes go comically wrong and so their escapades begin... The title has never been out of print, was made into a hit TV series in the 1990s and a film in 2004 with Eddie Izzard providing the voice of the Psammead. Former Children's Laureate Jacqueline Wilson is writing a modern re-imagining of the book, to be published by Puffin in August 2012.

Nesbit was intrigued by the wide skies and open spaces of **Romney Marsh** and loved to explore by bike or dog-cart. Like her, you can view the area's historic churches: she set her ghost story *Man-Size in Marble* at **Brenzett** church and you'll find her grave in the churchyard at **St Mary in the Marsh**.

Many other writers have been captivated by mysteries of the marsh, too. "Harry and Ginger thought the smuggling days of Romney Marsh were over long ago. But a cup of coffee on a midnight fishing expedition made them think again," **A Harcourt Burrage** writes in the intriguingly titled *Coffee and Fish for Two*. Words guaranteed to put readers on the edge of their seats! Largely forgotten now (dig out your *Empire Youth Annual* 1948), Athol Harcourt Burrage (1899–1951) came from a family of popular writers from Redhill and was a prolific scribbler of boys' adventure stories.

Canterbury-born **Richard Barham**, author of 19<sup>th</sup>-century *The Ingoldsby Legends*, knew the marsh was a place apart when he claimed the world was divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Romney Marsh. And **Russell Thorndyke** based his murderous adventures for children here when he was living in Dymchurch. *Dr Syn* (1915) recreates life on the marsh in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when "owling" (smuggling) was big business, and fighting militia and hiding booty in local churches – **Brenzett, Appledore, Snargate** – were all in a night's work. The sensation, of course, is that Dr Syn leads a double life: vicar of Dymchurch by day, leader of smugglers by night.

## AFTERNOON

Spend your afternoon exploring marsh and churches at leisure. Or follow a gentle journey further inland. During her Dymchurch sojourns E Nesbit had been writing *The Wonderful Garden*, but the year it was published, 1911, saw an even more famous book come to light: **Frances Hodgson Burnett's** *The Secret Garden*. Frances wrote the story while living at **Great Maytham Hall, Rolvenden**, from 1898, firing her imagination in its 18<sup>th</sup>-century garden: "a lovesome, mystic place, shut in partly by old red brick walls... it was my habit to sit and write there under an aged withered tree, grey with lichen and festooned with roses."

Great Maytham Hall is now private luxury apartments, but the old walled rose garden beloved of Burnett remains a prominent feature of the grounds. See a memorial to the author at **Rolvenden church**.

Nearby, at **Tenterden**, the sounds of **Kent & East Sussex Railway** beckon and thoughts turn to **Thomas the Tank Engine** and co. The Reverend Awdry made up his original railway stories in the early 1940s, to tell his two-year-old son, Christopher, who was suffering from measles. Now Christopher writes them too; he is also patron of the Kent & East Sussex Railway. Check if Thomas is visiting, or simply hop aboard a vintage steam or historic diesel train for

a magical ride through 10.5 miles of beautiful countryside. For special occasions there's luxury dining on the Wealden Pullman and selected dates feature "Sherlock Holmes Murder & Mystery".

### DAY THREE: GROOMBRIDGE PLACE & CHATHAM

#### MORNING

"Come Watson, come, the game is afoot." Today we get hot on the trail of **Sherlock Holmes**, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's pipe-smoking, "most perfect reasoning and observing machine." Dust off your deerstalkers and head for **Groombridge Place Gardens and Enchanted Forest**, near Tunbridge Wells – or perhaps you know it as Birlstone Manor from *The Valley of Fear* (1915). Identifying the "Jacobean brick house" is an open and shut case once you see it, across a "beautiful broad moat, as still and luminous as quicksilver in the cold winter sunshine."

When Doyle wrote the book he was living nearby at Crowborough and was a frequent visitor to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century moated manor, sometimes to take part in séances, which were all the rage at the time. Holmes and Watson are called to Birlstone following a brutal murder, but is the victim John Douglas or "the bicyclist from Tunbridge Wells"?

Take a stroll while you ponder the conundrum – the Drunken Garden with its crazy, lurching topiary was a favourite of Doyle, and maybe you'll also recognise the lake and gardens of the 2005 film adaptation of **Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice***. But keep your eyes peeled: it's claimed Groombridge is haunted, not by Douglas or a cyclist, but by an ostler who allegedly drowned in 1808. Doyle describes an encounter with the restless ghost in his (non-fiction) *At the Edge of the Unknown*.

Next we set course for an afternoon at Chatham. You could take a route past **Penshurst Place**, renowned for its medieval Baron's Hall and intimate Tudor walled gardens. Less well known is that sound recordists from the **Harry Potter** film series recorded floor creaks in the Long Gallery to use as sound effects. Further north, **Maidstone** will be familiar to **Dickens** fans as the "illustrious town" of Muggleton in *The Pickwick Papers* – nothing to do with the muggles of Harry Potter, of course.

#### AFTERNOON

At **The Historic Dockyard Chatham** salty tales of naval adventure race across 80 acres and through 400 years of maritime heritage. The dockyard's historic warships, cobbled streets, and Georgian and Victorian architecture are irresistible to filmmakers – certainly, Guy Ritchie and the stars who came here to shoot scenes for **Sherlock Holmes** (2009) found the right backdrop for the battle of wits and brawn against evil Lord Blackwood. Can you spot where the boxing scene was shot in the tarred Yarn Store, the prison scenes, the hanging, mysterious alleyways, the coach chase – all filmed around the dockyard.

**Chatham** was the childhood home of **Charles Dickens**, who moved here aged five with his family in 1817. So began a lifelong love affair with the Medway area. Charles' father John was a clerk in the Royal Navy pay office and the family lived at **No. 2 (now No. 11) Ordnance Terrace**, then briefly at a house in The Brook (now demolished) before returning to London in 1822. These early years were the happiest of little Charles' childhood and long walks with his father fuelled his imagination with people and places that would reappear later in his novels. The BBC adaptation of *Little Dorrit* was partly filmed at the dockyard, as was the 2007 adaptation of *Oliver Twist*. A museum offers fascinating information and talks on Dickens, as well as general marine artefacts.

If you've time, pick up the plot at **Dickens World**, Chatham Maritime, the fun indoor attraction themed around the life, books and times of the great novelist. Experience the *Great Expectations* dark boat ride with Magwitch,

Dotheboy's Hall Victorian School Room (with touch-screen technology) and meet some of Charles Dickens' unforgettable characters.

## **DAY FOUR: ROCHESTER & AROUND WITH DICKENS**

### **MORNING**

With the bicentenary of **Charles Dickens'** birth in 2012, it's an ideal finale to our tour to revisit further colourful scenes that caught his eye, beginning in **Rochester**. From his childhood strolls with his father, to the end of his life when he came to live at Gad's Hill, the city captivated him: almost his last written words, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, joyously record "Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful". Little wonder Rochester features in his books more than any other town outside London, variously disguised as Pip's hometown in *Great Expectations* and Cloisterham in *Edwin Drood*. Time your visit for the first weekend in December and you will bump into various characters at the annual Dickensian Christmas Festival.

Amble along the historic **High Street** "full of gables with old beams" and you'll spy plaques on many buildings highlighting how they featured in Dickens' novels. Pre-book a costumed guided tour with Footsteps in Time, or follow a self-guided walking trail (leaflet from Medway Visitor Information Centre). Then view Elizabethan **Eastgate House**, which transformed into Westgate House in *The Pickwick Papers* and the Nuns' House in *Edwin Drood*, and admire the author's beloved Swiss Chalet in the garden (brought here from Gad's Hill). There are the "eminently convenient and commodious premises" that served as **Mr Pumblechook's House** in *Great Expectations*, **Rochester Cathedral** ("it's like looking down the throat of Old Time"), and **Rochester Castle** ("What a study for an antiquarian!").

The **Guildhall**, the establishment where Pip is bound as an apprentice in *Great Expectations*, is now a museum where you can pore over Dickens-related objects, watch a film on his local connections, and discover further sites of interest to tour. Before you set off, have a burrow in the bookworms' paradise **Baggins Book Bazaar** on the High Street, England's largest secondhand and rare bookshop: you might find a long-lost childhood treasure.

### **AFTERNOON**

Dickensian destinations are all around, and high on the list of must-sees is **Gad's Hill Place**, three miles out of town at Higham. "My poor father used to bring me to look at it, and used to say that if ever I grew up to be a clever man perhaps I might own that house, or another such house," Dickens recalled in 1857. Spurred by his childhood dream – and the success of his novels – he did buy Gad's Hill Place and lived there from 1856 until his death in 1870. These days his home is a school, but you can see it clearly from the road and tours can be arranged. While here, view Dickens' "local" the **Sir John Falstaff**, whose landlord would send beer over to him at the house when Charles was too busy to prop up the bar.

Continue to **Shorne** and **St Peter and St Paul Church**, described in *The Pickwick Papers* as "One of the most peaceful and secluded churchyards in Kent, where wild flowers mingle with the grass, and the soft landscape around forms the fairest spot in the garden of England." Find the half-timbered **Leather Bottle inn at Cobham** where Dickens sent the Pickwickians to look for love-struck Mr Tupman. Then tour the spooky **Medway marshlands** evoked in *Great Expectations* (though Dickens says they are around the Thames rather than the Medway). Who can forget the poignant opening scene of the book, when Pip visits the graves of his family: the little lozenge-shaped children's tombstones in the churchyard of **St James, Cooling**, may well have given Dickens inspiration.

Maybe round off your day with refreshment at **The Ship and Lobster**, Gravesend, thought to have been the model for The Ship public house where Pip and Herbert rest during their attempt to spirit Magwitch out of the country. Many a toast will be raised to the great Victorian novelist this year.