



## 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. He stayed in Shanklin.

He spoke with enthusiasm of the beauties of Shanklin, but found that the sea often kept him awake, as he was not used to it. He linked this to the passage in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, 'Do you not hear the sea?'

Keats crafted his own famous sea-sonnet:



Find a place to sit where the sea can be watched. Read the poem 'On the Sea' by Keats (your teacher may read it to you).

## SONNET

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their mood.

Take a few notes, based on your observations:

How is the sea presented to you? \_\_\_\_\_

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What sounds can you hear? \_\_\_\_\_

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What can you see, and what colours or images does the sea produce? \_\_\_\_\_

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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!



## ENGLISH WRITING TASK:

- ▶ Draft your own poetry response to the sea before you, using your notes and knowledge of its different moods, sounds and behaviours.
- ▶ You could try to use the same rhyming structure as Keats. You may, however, want to use your own – the choice is yours!

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## Themes of the Sea...

Gerard Manley Hopkins spent one summer at Shanklin Manor in 1863 where he completed several poems. Later, in 1918, he completed one on the sinking of the HMS Eurydice off the coast of the Island, an extract from which can be seen below:

### THE LOSS OF THE EURYDICE

Foundered March 24. 1878

7

A beetling baldbright cloud thorough England  
Riding: there did stores not mingle? and  
Hailropes hustle and grind their  
Heavengravel? wolfsnow, worlds of it, wind  
there?

8

THE Eurydice—it concerned thee, O Lord:  
Three hundred souls, O alas! on board,

1

Some asleep unawakened, all un-  
wakened, some in the sea

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Felled and furred them, the hearts of oak!

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9

And flockbells off the aerial  
Downs' forefalls beat to the burial.

3

For did she pride her, freighted fully, on  
Bounden bales or a hoard of bullion?—  
Precious passing measure,  
Lads and men her lade and treasure.

4

She had come from a cruise, training seamen—  
Men, boldboys soon to be men:  
Must it, worst weather,  
Blast bole and bloom together?

5

No Atlantic squall overwrought her  
Or rearing billow of the Biscay water:  
Home was hard at hand  
And the blow bore from land.

6

And you were a liar, O blue March day.  
Bright sun lanced fire in the heavenly bay;  
But what black Boreas wrecked her? he  
Came equipped, deadly-electric,

Too proud, too proud, what a press she bore!  
Royal, and all her royals wore.  
Sharp with her, shorten sail!  
Too late; lost; gone with the gale.

Hopkins described Shanklin in a letter to a friend as:

*'...a delightful place. If you were here you would have soon forgot the clouded Forth, the gloom that saddens heaven and Earth. [...] The sea is brilliantly coloured and always calm, bathing delightful, horses and boats to be obtained, walks wild and beautiful, sketches charming, walking tours and excursions, poetic downs, the lovely Chine, fine cliffs, everything'.*

### ACTIVITY

- Write your own description of Shanklin, in Gerard Manley Hopkins's style.
- What did you find beautiful about it?





## John Keats in love...

John Keats was very much in love with his neighbour, Frances Brawne.

He often wrote her love letters (some of which were composed on the Isle of Wight) and these have been cited as being amongst the most famous love letters ever written.

The depth of his feelings for her are clear in the following extracts:

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*"You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you: how I would die for one hour."*

Unfortunately, Keats contracted tuberculosis and it was suggested that he move to a warmer climate.

He died in Rome in 1820 and it is said that Frances Brawne mourned his death for six years. None of the love letters which Brawne wrote to Keats survive.

*"My dearest Girl,*

*Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else – The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you again[s]t the unpromising morning of my Life – My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you – I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again – my Life seems to stop there – I see no further.*

*You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving – I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of soon seeing you. I should be afraid to separate myself far from you."*



## Writing Activity

Using the theme of 'love' or 'love and loss', craft a poem or piece of prose writing, inspired by the story of Keats and Brawne. You could relate this theme to a personal experience as love can come in many forms – for example: love for a place, a person, a sport, a season, a pet, an emotion.

In your prose writing or poem, you could describe how you feel when you experience your love of something/someone, then describe how you feel when the object of that love is no longer there.





## 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.

### History 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 be?