



Home of Algernon Charles Swinburne

A. C. Swinburne grew up at East Dene, a large stone mansion and estate in the village of Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight, which his father bought as a holiday home in 1841. At the age of five, he was baptised in the old village church. Swinburne was a poet and novelist and was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature each year from 1903 – 1909 (with the exception of 1908). Due to being a vibrant, rather rebellious character who enjoyed the excesses of life, his health suffered, and at the age of 42, he moved to Putney in London to be looked after for the rest of his life by his friend Theodore Watts.



Despite dying in Putney in 1909, Swinburne was later buried in the grounds of St Boniface Church, Bonchurch (according to his will), where his grave can be found. An atheist, he requested that there was to be no Christian ceremony at his funeral. The poet, who had been influenced by some of his beliefs, wrote this poem "A Singer Asleep" whilst sitting next to Swinburne's grave.

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From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,
The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be Pillowed eternally.

II

- It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

III

O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavements lay
Glassing the sunshine into my bent eyes,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise, -

IV

The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel who
Blew them not naively, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

V

I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep
Into the rambling world-encircling deep
Which hides her where none sees.

VII

And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,
And mariners wonder as they traverse near,
Unknowing of her and him.

VIII

One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
"O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very arts are love incarnadine?"
And her smile back: "Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine." . . .

IX

So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains -
Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes -
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

BONCHURCH, 1910



LITERATURE ACTIVITY

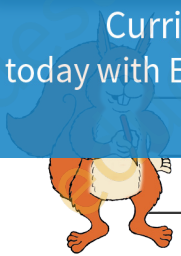
- ▶ Hardy's poem reflects on the many things he loved about his friend. Whilst visiting St Boniface Church, find a quiet spot (perhaps by Swinburne's grave) and reflect on the qualities of one of your close friends.
- ▶ You could think about their likes, dislikes, influences, traits, characteristics and generally what you like about them. Use the poem 'A Singer Asleep' to inspire a piece of poetry about one of your closest friends.
- ▶ You could write your first draft in Bonchurch, then amend it later.
- ▶ In order to challenge yourself, you could try to use a similar rhyme scheme to Hardy's



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Swinburne's own poetry

Many of Swinburne's poems are fairly complex, but some are quite simple and capture the innocence of children.

Look at the following poem:

A Baby's Feet by Algernon Charles Swinburne

A baby's feet, like sea shells pink,

Like rose-hued sea flowers toward the heat
They stretch and spread and wink,
Their ten soft buds that part and meet.

No flower bells that expand and shrink
Gleam half so heavenly sweet,
As shine on life's untrodden brink
A baby's feet.



Analysis challenge!

Consider the following questions about the poem:

1. List all of the comparisons that are made to a baby's feet. What do you notice?
2. Why do you think that he has made the reference to angels kissing a baby's feet?
3. In the second stanza, what is the effect of the simile that is used?
4. What movement of a baby's feet do you think that 'wink' refers to?
5. "As shine on life's untrodden brink" ... what is Swinburne describing here and how does it reinforce a baby's innocence?

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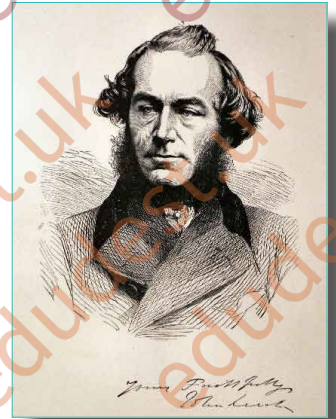


Charles Dickens & John Leech

One of the most famous visitors to Bonchurch was Charles Dickens, who stayed at Winterbourne House during the summer months of 1849, where he wrote chapters twelve to eighteen of *David Copperfield*.

One of his friends, John Leech (an illustrator, right), socialised with Dickens in Bonchurch; these two men were great friends and Leech illustrated some of the scenes in Dickens' novels (more notably *A Christmas Carol*).

Examples of Leech's illustrations can be seen below.

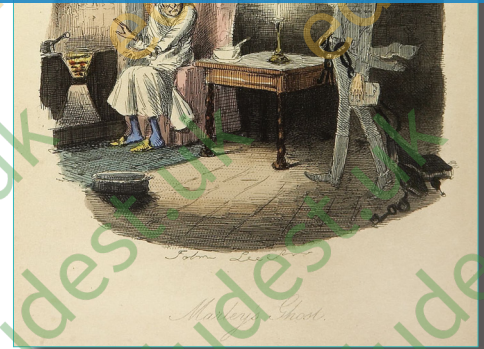
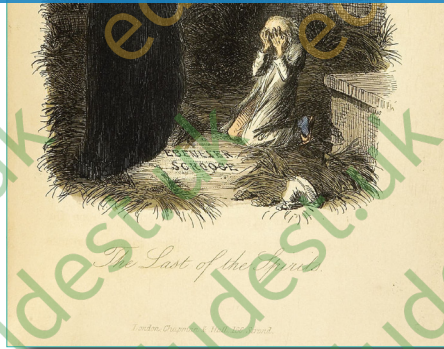


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ART ACTIVITY

Victorians would have sketched many things around them as they did not have photography like we do today.

- ▶ Can you work out which scenes from Dickens' novels are being represented here?
- ▶ Look at how John Leech uses lines to create his images.
- ▶ Whilst in Bonchurch, sit down somewhere and have a go at drawing some of the people/scenes around you in his style.



ACTIVITIES

Bonchurch is steeped in history and is believed to be one of the oldest settlements on the Isle of Wight.

Old St Boniface Church has a nave and chancel which dates back to the eleventh century and has been a popular place for tourists to visit on their travels. The poet Algernon Charles Swinburne was baptised here and later buried in the newer St Boniface Church up the hill which was consecrated in 1848.

Sketching Bonchurch!

- ▶ Sketch both churches on your walk around Bonchurch. You could reproduce one of the images using different media.
- ▶ You could also sketch any images which you find interesting inside the church or church grounds (such as stained glass windows, different grave stones etc.).
- ▶ There are many other interesting sights around Bonchurch village, such as the pond, Jacob's Ladder (a set of 102 steps), and a range of architecture and natural scenic views.

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Both churches in Bonchurch have interesting features. Spot the Church Features!
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Piscina



Headstone in unique local design



Wall painting of Last Supper



Double headed window



Sunday School seat



Tomb for a married couple



LOCAL MYTHS & LEGENDS

Read through these Bonchurch myths and legends, and then have a go at writing your own!

St Boniface Down

From the old Ventnor Station, the spring was three quarters of the way to the top of St Boniface Down. It was the most revered of the three springs on the Island. On the Saint's Day in June, young people from Bonchurch would climb to the spring and decorate it with flowers. It was believed that if they climbed without stopping or looking back their one wish would be granted. In more recent times land movement has caused the spring to dry up and it is now only a damp patch on the hillside.

Hobby Hobson (Hopsonn): Orphan of Bonchurch



After 1650, 'Hobby', an orphan of Bonchurch, was apprenticed to a tailor in the village of Niton. One day a squadron of the Royal Navy was passing and the villagers ran down

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the flag and returned it to his captain. When the English sailors saw the flag they shouted victory, which upset the French crew enough for the English to win a real victory.

Hobby's successes in the Navy continued and he was knighted by Queen Anne in 1702. When off duty he returned to his village with some of his fellow officers and asked the tailor to accommodate them. The tailor's wife provided what food and wine she could and was overwhelmed with joy when she found out who the great man was.

Here is the tale of my myth/legend...



