



KENT'S GREAT STORYTELLERS

The latest Bond film, ***Quantum of Solace***, throws the spotlight on more than just its Hollywood stars . it also highlights how Ian Fleming was inspired to write the bestselling novels by his favourite county Kent.

This year is the centenary of Fleming's birth and in Kent you can track down the inspirations behind some of the most famous Bond novels and films . even the 007 tag for Bond came from the number of the London to Dover coach. Fleming played golf regularly at the **Royal St George's Golf Club** in Sandwich and afterwards enjoyed a dry martini in the clubhouse shaken not stirred of course. The golf game in *Goldfinger* is a classic and can easily be traced from the public footpath which runs across the course from the Quay car park in Sandwich to the sea.

The coastal route from Margate to Dover is ***Moonraker*** and ***Goldfinger*** country. Browse the historic streets of Sandwich, so familiar to Fleming, and carry on to **St Margaret's Bay**, where Fleming had his weekend home, White Cliffs which he bought from his friend Noel Coward. Here he entertained Somerset Maugham, Evelyn Waugh, Patrick Leigh Fermor and the Duff Coopers. Look for the white house with green shutters to the north end of the beach.

In Dover visit the castle, described in *Moonraker* as "a wonderful cardboard castle". And the same novel features Sir Hugo Drax, whose rocket research establishment was "on the edge of the cliffs between Dover and Deal". Perhaps Drax's house is one of those in the middle of Kingsdown Golf Course. "On the edge of the trees there were the lights of a large house half hidden behind a wall, six feet thick." The steep cliff path can easily be found at Oldstairs Bay, Kingsdown, leading down from the golf course.

Fleming and Noel Coward are both celebrated in **The Pines Garden Museum** at St Margaret's Bay, where there is an extensive collection of memorabilia. This makes an excellent stop on the James Bond Country Tour along the cliffs between St Margaret's and Kingsdown. But keep strictly to the paths James Bond and Gala Brand were lucky to survive the landslide engineered here by Sir Hugo Drax.

A good stop for lunch or dinner is the **Duck Inn at Pett Bottom**, near Canterbury, where Fleming was a regular visitor. You can see his favourite seat, marked with a plaque, in the garden. Fleming immortalises the Duck Inn and the village in ***You Only Live Twice***.

Did you know? Fleming lived in Kent for many years and the links remain. His nephew Matthew was captain of Kent's cricket team and Gemma Arterton, one of the stars of ***Quantum of Solace***, was a pupil at Gravesend Grammar School for Girls.

Fleming sold 100 million books worldwide but he is by no means the first author to take inspiration from Kent. Literary types have loved the county for centuries and it's no wonder. It has a spectacular coastline, rolling green acres and historic towns and it has inspired authors as diverse as Chaucer, Dickens and Vita Sackville West.

Canterbury is a good place to start your literary trail. Imagine Geoffrey Chaucer's motley band of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of the martyred Thomas Becket in the cathedral and call in at *The Canterbury Tales*, a reconstruction of their adventure. You could also take in **The White Horse at Boughton-under-Blean** which was a popular stop-off point for pilgrims. The village is mentioned in the prologue to ***The Canon Yeoman's Tale***: "*At Boughton-under-Blean us did o'ertake a man clothed all in black, and underneath he had a surplice white, his hackney was of dappled grey so bright*".

Chatham is Dickens territory. The naval town was the author's childhood home while his father was a clerk in the Royal Navy offices. You can soak up the atmosphere of his books at Dickens World in Chatham Maritime, with its cobbled streets, costumed characters and street entertainers. Then visit the nearby village of **Cooling** to discover the evocative backdrop to Pip's childhood in **Great Expectations**, where the poignant lozenge-shaped tombs in the graveyard of St James's Church gave Dickens the idea for the graves of Pip's little brothers.

Travel to Rochester, where you can pick up a leaflet, *In Dickens' Footsteps*, from the Visitor Information Centre on the High Street and spot all the places he wove into his stories, as well as Gad's Hill Place, where he spent his final years.

Next we head for the coast and **Broadstairs**, Dickens's favourite seaside resort. You cannot think how delightful and fresh the place is and how good the walks, he wrote. You can see Bleak House, where he completed ***David Copperfield*** and there is the splendid Dickens House Museum on Victoria Parade. The Royal Albion Hotel, on the seafront, was one of Dickens's favourite haunts and Bleak House can be seen from the hotel bedrooms.

Lastly we head to Sissinghurst Castle Garden, now a National Trust property famed for its beautiful gardens. The atmospheric grounds were created by Vita Sackville-West, the novelist and poet, and her husband Harold Nicolson, also an author and diarist. You can see the Elizabethan tower, where Sackville-West spent her days writing, admire the lime walk and orchards or take a stroll around the lake or through the woods – the walks are open all year. Vita and Harold's grandson Adam has continued Sissinghurst's literary tradition – he has written several books including his memoir ***Sissinghurst: An Unfinished History***, which was published this year.

Another contemporary writer at home in Sissinghurst village is Victoria Hislop, who has written two bestselling novels and is married to fellow author and TV presenter Ian Hislop. Her novels, ***The Island*** and ***The Return***, have captured the imagination of millions of readers in recent years.

For further literary links and visitor information see www.stepintokent.com

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November 2008

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Press Visits: Press tours and visits can be arranged. Hi res imagery is also available

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