



Bonchurch: Home of the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne

Bonchurch and East Dene (Swinburne's home for many years) are situated in a valley or chine which has its own micro climate.

It is a beautiful place that can easily stimulate the creative spirit.

On-site Activities

1. Visit Swinburne's grave at St Boniface Church, just up the hill from East Dene. Being an ardent atheist, Swinburne asked for no Christian ceremony. Despite this, some prayers were still read out at his funeral. What are your thoughts on this? Do you think that Swinburne was a hypocrite, no Christian ceremony but buried in a Church - how can you explain this?

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- Investigate the Pre-Raphaelite movement and the life of Algernon Charles Swinburne.

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- Swinburne was often criticised for concentrating on the sounds and music his poems created at the expense of sense. Look at some of his poetry online. Would you agree? Does it matter?
- Consider the event in 1879 which caused Swinburne to become somewhat of a recluse but almost undoubtedly contributed to his prolonged life.



3. Find a place in one of the churches or in the village where you feel moved to write a few lines of poetry or make some sketches.
4. Who do you think burials are for, the living or the dead? Discuss this.
5. Consider the idea of change of character from rebel to respectful. Attempt an artistic or literary response to this concept.
6. Consider Swinburne's life. Write your own fitting elegy for his gravestone.



Arts, Literary & History Trail - BONCHURCH - KS5



Poem for Analysis

'A Singer Asleep' by Thomas Hardy - Written at the grave of Algernon Charles Swinburne

I

In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down all night, all day,
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;

VI

- His singing-mistress verily was no other
Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
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,

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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 laughter, 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.

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

- ▶ Swinburne wrote the poem 'A Dedication' about the sea. This could be a useful poem for poetry analysis and practice.
- ▶ Why do you think he may have written this poem after living in Bonchurch near the sea?