

Virginia Woolf
ENGLISH HOURS
PETER TOLHURST

FOREWORD
RONALD BLYTHE

From childhood holidays in Cornwall to her time in Sussex Virginia Woolf was engaged in a passionate affair with the English countryside. Striding across the downs or perched on some rocky headland she was among a distinguished band of writers and poets for whom walking was both therapeutic and inspirational. Here she is in 1906 at Blo' Norton Hall on the Norfolk/Suffolk border:

... I tramp the country for miles with a map, leap ditches, scale walls and desecrate churches, making out beautiful brilliant stories every step of the way

Mood and atmosphere were always more important to her than cloistered antiquity – in Wells she was soon up on the Mendips, in the Fens she revelled in ethereal sunsets and dramatic cloudscapes. She soon tired of Rye, preferring the dissolution of form on Romney Marsh at dusk and evening always cast a welcome veil over the 'freckle of red villas' that threatened the sanctity of Monk's House and her beloved downs.

On a trip to Haworth Woolf questioned the wisdom of literary pilgrimages but throughout her life she was fascinated by the relationship between landscape and literature. It is clear from her tour of places in Hardy's fiction before visiting the great Dorset novelist at Max Gate that she was not above reverence.

Armed with her diaries, letters and stories Peter Tolhurst is the perfect companion in search of the landscapes that inspired much of her writing and eased her troubled mind. Along the way he revisits Woolf's Cornwall, her time in East Anglia, in Wiltshire, on the Borders and in the Yorkshire Dales. He explores the Sussex countryside, the setting for short stories and her last novel *Between The Acts*. The result is a beautifully illustrated and moving tribute to Woolf's highly original sense of place which will appeal to all those who love both literature and the English countryside.

Virginia Woolf's ENGLISH HOURS is a 200 page hardback (197x250mm)
with 175 black & white photographs.
ISBN 978-0-9565672-5-3 Price £20
OUT ON SEPTEMBER 11th 2015

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