

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND BOVEY TRACEY- walk in his footsteps

We know from Gerard Manley Hopkins' journal that he stayed in Bovey Tracey in the summer of 1867 after completing his finals at Oxford (Humphrey House ed. 1959. *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Oxford University Press, p.156). It was a visit of sixteen days in which Hopkins accomplished a great deal. His itinerary was not unlike the excursions today's visitors might make. However one difference is that apart from walking on Dartmoor he even walked from Bovey Tracey to Newton Abbot and back, not many people do that nowadays. Perhaps not surprisingly Hopkins noted the weather and how it frequently changed from rain to storms and then some fair patches. His journal has eloquent descriptions of our lovely countryside, and the colours around him.

Hopkins came to stay in Bovey Tracey with his friend Edmund William Urquhart. Urquhart was also a student at Oxford and was a particular confidante of Hopkins' with regard to the latter's conversion to Catholicism. Urquhart was a curate at the parish church from 1866-1873. Urquhart lodged on East Street (Fig. 1). The 1871 Census listed Urquhart's lodgings on the North side of East Street, which was nineteen residences below Bell House or five residences up from the start of East St as it left Mary St. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly which house this was as many houses had extra buildings behind which have now been demolished or incorporated into the main house.



Figure 1. East Street. David Lewis Collection

Hopkins arrived on August 26 1867, no doubt by train as this would have been the only way to make the journey in one day (House, p.153). The next day Hopkins and Urquhart walked up Sharp Tor. The weather was fine between showers (House, p 153).

The following day, August 28, was dull with rain spitting on the moor but they managed to walk on Black Moor and in Colhayes [sic] Woods (House, p.153) Black Moor is on the eastern slopes of

Haytor and has open access, it also has outstanding views of Bronze Age settlements, although Hopkins made no reference to these (Fig. 2). The woods of Colehays are private land.



Figure 2. Black Moor looking towards Haytor February 2019 . Frances Billinge

August 29 was another dull day which became fair and finished with a bright sunset. Hopkins and Urquhart walked to Bullaton Rocks and he noted a fine elm in the farm yard there (House, p.153) Bullaton rocks can be visited via a public footpath.

On 30 August Hopkins and Urquhart p.154 they walked to Plumley which was a to be significant for Urquhart as his future 'intended' Miss Caroline Harris lived there (House, p.,154). Her brother William Augustus Harris was at Baliol 1863-7 and so was an Oxford contemporary of Hopkins. Urquhart and Caroline Harris married in 1872.

Despite spitting rain followed by hard rain on 31 August Hopkins and Urquhart spent it walking alongside the West Teign river, now referred to as the River Bovey (House, p.154; Fig. 3) . There are many places along the river which have public access and the trees give useful cover in wet weather.



Figure 3. River Bovey. Frances Billinge 2018.

Sunday September 1 was a beautiful day and Hopkins went to Chudleigh and Ugbrooke for Mass (House, pp.154-5). At this time Bovey Tracey had no Catholic church and the nearest place to hear Mass was Ugbrooke. Hopkins walked back to Bovey Tracey and then returned to Ugbrooke for Benediction in the afternoon. Attending both services was not unusual for Catholics. After Benediction Hopkins returned to Bovey via Gappath, and he noted, 'which they pronounce Gappa'. Hopkins' path took him over Chudleigh Knighton Heath and he wrote that what he would call a heath the locals called a 'heathfield'.

The next day had some good sunny weather and they drove over the moor to Hay Tor (House, p.155). They probably travelled in Jabez Mugford's conveyance from the *Union Hotel*, now the *Cromwell Arms* (Fig. 4). Jabez had many businesses and the developing tourist trade did not pass him by (The Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser 25 December 1867, p.4, advertised Mugford's coaching business).



Figure 4. Union Inn later in the 1800s illustrating the coaching trade. Mann family archive.

From Haytor they drove down the steep hill to Widecombe. Urquhart noted that the spire was Somerset in character. It is an unusual spire for Devon but is similar to the one at Totnes. Hopkins remarked on the cultivated vale where the church stood as having many sycamores. They drove on to Hound Tor which Hopkins stopped to sketch.

They then proceeded to Manton Church which Hopkins 'saw through', and finally to Becky Falls. An advertisement for the falls in that year described it as within walking distance of the station at Bovey; you do not see many people taking that walk nowadays! (The Western Times 16 August, 1867, p.6 1867).

That night thunder and lightning and hard rain kept Hopkins awake at 2 a.m.

This day's itinerary can easily be followed. All the sites are open access except Becky Falls which is a tourist site and its charges and opening hours are online. There is a public footpath near the falls.

As you might predict September 3, being the day of the flower show and industrial exhibition, brought fog and rain. This annual show also featured the Industrial and Art Loan Department's exhibition of artistic pottery. Hopkins wrote to his mother about this this next day (House on pp.155-6).

The weather on 4 September was fine rain and wind. They visited Plumley and the Harris family again and walked home by starlight. Hopkins noted that the locals believed in pixies, 'and there is a Pixies meadow near Sharp Tor' (House, p.156).

On 5 September Hopkins visited Bovey Tracey Parish church and noted its medieval carvings (Figure 5). In the afternoon they both travelled the three or four miles to Ingsdon to call on the Munroes and Miss Bowies who were related to each other (House, p.156). They were caught in a shower of rain on the way back.



Figure 5, Bovey Tracey Parish Church. Private collection 2017.

The 6 September saw them visiting the buildings of the new House of Mercy by Woodyer. This was a very imposing building for the recently established 'convent' in Bovey Tracey which was quite a controversial development for that time (Figs 6 and 7).



Figure 6. The Devon House of Mercy. By kind permission of Bovey Tracey Heritage Trust



Figure 7. Devon House of Mercy. Frances Billinge 2017.

After this they called on the Miss Warrens who lived at Hazelwood House two miles north of Bovey Tracey. From there they visited Botor Rocks with Susannah Warren and her nephew for what was described as a 'tryst,' going with them to Bullaton Rocks where Hopkins and Susannah sketched (House p.156; Lesley Higgings ed., 2015. *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins- Vol III, Diaries Journals and Notebooks*. Oxford University Press, p. 399). Hopkins remarked on the sun shining on the tor and the valley. They returned to the Miss Warrens' for tea who showed them some of their father's watercolours. They returned home in the dark 'stumbling down deep dark lanes'. Charlotte and Susannah Warren were the daughters of the vicar of Edmonton. Charlotte superintended and helped to support the Bovey Tracey parish school. Her sister Susannah was author of various works for the Society for the Preservation of Christian Knowledge.

September 7 was a fine day and they visited family friends, the Gurneys, in Torquay. Hopkins gave a vivid description of the colour of the sea. Gurney walked with him to Watcombe and Babbacombe Bay and also visited Butterfield's church, All Saints, at Babbacombe. At Watcombe they met up with the Morrises with whom they went to Kings Kerswell. From Kings Kerswell they walked to Newton and then back to Bovey Tracey by train. Frederick Gurney was a curate in Bovey Tracey (House pp.156; Higgings p. 375 confirms it was Frederick Gurney they visited as William Bright who went to stay with Urquhart after Hopkins left noted this in his diary; Higgings, pp. 404-5 describe the visit)

The next day, 8 September, was a Sunday and this time Hopkins walked to St Joseph's at Newton Abbot for Mass as he had missed the train. He noted an early mist with clouds followed by fine weather. The Mass was said by Mr Kenlem with whom Hopkins then had breakfast. The church at Newton Abbot had recently had its consecration mass celebrated by Father Spenser. Hopkins was then driven by cart to the Augustinian convent of the perpetual Adoration at Abbots Leigh (Higgings, p.376 places this above Langford Bridge in Newton Abbot district).

The following day was wet, and like any modern tourist seeking shelter Hopkins visited the local Bovey Tracey pottery again (House, p.157; Fig. 8).

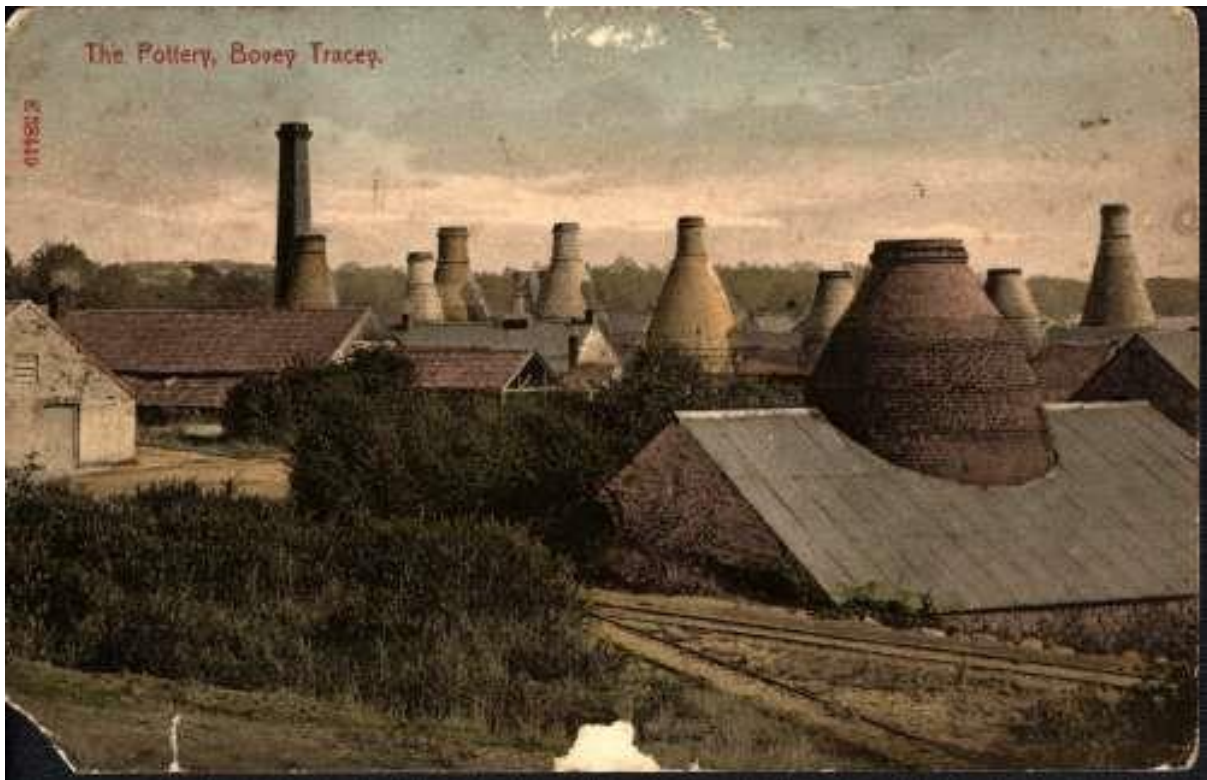


Figure 8. Bovey Tracey Pottery. Bovey Tracey Heritage Trust

Hopkins left Bovey Tracey to return to his work at The Oratory in Birmingham on Monday 10th September sixteen days after his arrival. We can only imagine that the views he saw helped to inspire his poetry. Urquhart continued to live in Bovey Tracey and on the 1891 Census he was a curate living at St Mary's next to St John's church.

Acknowledgement

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