

Keats Mile Notes

Start 1: Northumberland Place

- **Imagine the geography** – river Tame, Rat Island, bridge
- **Keats potted biography:** 31 October 1795 – 23 February 1821
- personal impression a young man, with a tortured soul born of the distresses he had had to face throughout his short life.
- At the age of eight lost his father in a tragic accident, followed five years later by his mother who died of TB. He and his siblings were appointed a guardian whose apparent miserliness with the Estate ensured that he was unable to fulfil his potential, having to struggle financially whilst trying to move in circles which could have furthered his literary career.
- His younger brother Tom also contracted TB and it was caring for Tom that brought Keats to Teignmouth in 1818 for a few months. Tom died later that year after they returned to Hampstead from Teignmouth.
- Early in 1820 Keats realised his own contracted TB was well advanced and left that winter for Rome with his friend Joseph Severn where he remained until his death in February 1821, aged only 25. On his grave was written “Here lies one whose name was writ in water”.
- Whilst in Teignmouth Keats completed ‘Endymion’, wrote ‘Isabella’ (aka ‘The Pot of Basil’) and three pieces of “doggerel” verse which he included in letters to his friends, most notably the artist B R Haydon. These were ‘Teignmouth’, ‘Dawlish Fair’ and ‘The Devon Maid’. He also wrote in other letters ‘The Human Seasons’, ‘The Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds’ and ‘Mother of Hermes! and still youthful Maia!’.
- Not appreciated as a poet in his own lifetime - his early works were lambasted by the critics who described them as products of a ‘cockney’ poet.

- **Biographer Amy Lowell (1925)**

- "the stigma of oddness is the price a myopic world always exacts of genius"

- **Amy Lowell poem** - first stanza.

Mr. John Keats crams his hat well on
Over his ears and walks up and down
The soggy streets of Teignmouth town.
Mr. John Keats walks along the streets
Of Teignmouth and asks every soul he meets
If the sun ever shines in Devonshire,
Whether the weather they live with here
Is sometimes what one might really call fair,
With the sun in the sky and a brisk to the air?
The hat of Mr. John Keats is wet,
But his eyes are sharp and ferret-set,
He is seeking the sun with a quicksilver-rod,
Noting the veer in a neighbour's nod,
Gauging the drift of a neighbour's words
As they might be a flock of South-come birds.

Stop 2: Bank Street

- Post Office, Globe Inn (Cockram's London Hotel)
- **Keats Arrival** – 2 day coach journey, sitting outside, in violent storm – “devastation across a wide swath of southern England with loss of life on both land and sea.”

Quote from letter to Benjamin Bailey 13th March:

“Say what you will of Devonshire, the truth is it is a splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, foggy, haily, floody, muddy, slipshod County”

- **Thomas Luny** – not mentioned but cf artist friend Benjamin Robert Haydon
- **Mary-Ann Jeffery (Prowse)**

Star of high promise! Not to this dark age
Do thy mild light and loveliness belong:
For it is blind, intolerant, and wrong,
Dead to empyreal soarings, and the rage
Of scoffing spirits bitter war doth wage
With all that, bold integrity of song :
Yet thy clear beam shall shine through ages strong,
To ripest times a light and heritage
And those breathe now who dote upon thy fame,
Whom thy wild numbers wrap beyond their being,
Who love the freedom of thy lays, their aim
Above the scope of a dull tribe unseeing,
And there is one whose hand will never scant,
From his poor store of fruits, all thou canst want

Stop 3: Regent Street

- Library - Leigh Hunt and the Examiner

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY,

Connected with which, are a News-Room, Billiard-Rooms, and Shew-Shops, kept by Mr. Croydon, the proprietor, stands in Regent Place, and is an elegant building, designed and erected by the late W. Rolfe, Esq., of London. It was first opened to the public in June, 1815, and this favorite watering place, at length, obtained an object which had been long desirable. Articles of fancy may be purchased here; the news of the day collected, and discussed; and opportunities afforded of obtaining the pleasures of social and profitable intercourse.

Stop 4: Station Road

- Marsh
- Theatre - Edmund Kean
- “The sensual life of verse springs warm from the lips of Kean ... his tongue must seem to have robbed the Hybla bees and left them honeyless! There is an indescribable *gusto* in his voice, by which we feel that the utterer is thinking of the past and future while speaking of the instant. When he says in Othello, ‘Put up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,’ we feel that his throat had commanded where swords were as thick as reeds. From eternal risk, he speaks as though his body were unassailable. Again, his exclamation of ‘blood! blood! blood!’ is direful and slaughterous to the last degree; the very words appear stained and gory.”
- **Letter to John Reynolds 14th March:**
“I went to the theatre here the other night which I forgot to tell George, and got insulted, which I ought to remember to forget to tell anybody; for I did not fight, and as yet have had no redress - ‘Lie thou there sweetheart’. The quotation is from Pistol’s address to his sword as he lays it down after an argument in Henry IV part 2 iv 173
- Devon Maid & Bridget of Brimley (Thomas Aggett)

Devon Maid

WHERE be ye going, you Devon maid?
And what have ye there i' the basket?
Ye tight little fairy, just fresh from the dairy,
Will ye give me some cream if I ask it?

I love your meads, and I love your flowers,
And I love your junkets mainly,
But 'hind the door, I love kissing more,
O look not so disdainly!

I love your hills, and I love your dales,
And I love your flocks a-bleating;
But O, on the heather to lie together,
With both our hearts a-beating!

I'll put your basket all safe in a nook,
Your shawl I'll hang up on this willow,
And we will sigh in the daisy's eye,
And kiss on a grass-green pillow.

Bridget of Brimley

Now Sweetheart be good,
And don't be contrary,
Pray put on your hood
And lock up the dairy,
Together we'll roam,
Ay, trip it so trimly
Through the meadows and home,
Come, Bridget of Brimley.

Here's a grass, tell our lot,
You witch, read it steadily;
"We love" – "we love not" –
"We love" – ay so readily.
But throw now I pray
Light where I see dimly
The hour and the day
Bright Bridget of Brimley.

Stop 4a: Eastcliff

- Bathing machines, baths (seawater to steam), Dr Turton (conchologist)

Stop 5: Point

Charles Causley

By the wild sea-wall I wandered
Blinded by the salting sun,
While the sulky Channel thundered
Like an old Trafalgar gun.

And I watched the gaudy river
Under trees of lemon-green,
Coiling like a scarlet bugle
Through the valley of the Teign.

When spring fired her fusilladoes
Salt-spray, sea-spray on the sill,
When the budding scarf of April
Ravelled on the Devon hill.

Then I saw the crystal poet
Leaning on the old sea-rail;
In his breast lay death, the lover,
In his head, the nightingale.

Epistle to Reynolds

Dear Reynolds! I have a mysterious tale
And cannot speak it. The first page I read
Upon a lampit rock of green sea-weed
Among the breakers; 'twas a quiet eve,
The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
Along the flat brown sand; I was at home
And should have been most happy,— but I saw
Too far into the sea, where every maw
The greater on the less feeds evermore.
But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I far was gone.
Still am I sick of it, and though to-day
I've gather'd young spring-leaves, and flowers gay
Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,
The Shark at savage prey, the Hawk at pounce,
The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,
Ravaging a worm — Away, ye horrid moods!
Moods of one's mind! You know I hate them well.
You know I'd sooner be a clapping Bell
To some Kamschatcan Missionary Church,
Than with these horrid moods be left i' the lurch.
Do you get health — and Tom the same — I'll dance,
And from detested moods in new Romance
Take refuge. Of bad lines a Centaine dose
Is sure enough — and so 'here follows prose.'

Stop 6: New Quay Inn

- Ode to Teignmouth & geographical allusions
- Ferry
- Endymion plaque – 4 books with opening line “A thing of beauty is a joy forever”

Endymion

- I will delight thee all my winding course
From the green sea up to my hidden source
About Arcadian forests; and will show
The channels where my coolest waters flow
through mossy rocks; where, 'mid exuberant green,
I roam in pleasant darkness, more unseen
Than Saturn in his exile

Stop 7: Keats House

- The House debate
- Quote from letter re view:
“I made up my mind to stop indoors, and catch a sight flying between the showers: and, behold, I saw a pretty valley, pretty cliffs, pretty brooks, pretty meadows, pretty trees, both standing as they were created, and blown down as they were uncreated.”
- Wilfred Owen - April 1911
 - Three colours have I known the Deep to wear;
Tis well today that Purple grandeurs gloom,
Veiling the Emerald sheen and Sky-blue glare.
Well, too, that lowly-brooding clouds now loom
In sable majesty around, fringed fair
With ermine-white of surf: to me they bear
Watery memorials of His mystic doom
Whose Name was writ in Water (saith his tomb).
 - Eternally may sad waves wail his death,
Choke in their grief 'mongst rocks where he has lain,
Or heave in silence, yearning with hushed breath,
While mournfully trail the slow-moved mists and rain,
And softly the small drops slide from weeping trees,
Quivering in anguish to the sobbing breeze.

How Teignmouth changed Keats?

- Breathing Space
- Unshackled from Endymion
- Confronting death
- Introspection
- A new poetry
- In a letter to Haydon he wrote “I will clamber through the clouds and exist”

Keats' Friends:

- Benjamin Bailey (13/3) - theologian
- John Hamilton Reynolds (14/3, 25/3, 9/4, 10/4, 27/4, 3/5) - poet, critic, playwright
- Benjamin Robert Haydon (14/3, 8/4) - historical painter
- (John) Taylor & Hessey (21/3, 24/4) - Publishers
- James Rice (24/3) - lawyer
- Leigh Hunt - mentor, literary publisher