

Dickens' Broadstairs

June 21, 2014

A number of friends have asked me how I like the house newly purchased for the "Resistance" in Kent, England. I like it. It is spacious and it is being beautifully set up by a fellow-exile from the Society of St Pius X, Fr Stephen Abraham. Only Heaven knows how it intends the house to be used in the near and distant future, but it is meanwhile a delightful refuge, five minutes on foot from the sea which God created, and which the liberals cannot touch.

Several famous English artists and writers from the past have also found refuge in this delightful corner of north-east Kent. Most famous of the artists is J.M.W. TURNER (1775–1841). Born in London where he spent most of his working life, from age 11 he spent several formative years in Margate, some four miles up the coast from Broadstairs. Here he discovered the sea, which with its light effects was a lifelong inspiration for his painting, and to Margate he frequently returned later in life.

Also in Margate the most famous poet in English of the 20th century, T.S. ELIOT (1898–1965), composed in an open-air pavilion still standing on Margate's beach, a substantial section of the third part of his most famous poem, *The Wasteland* (1922). He had come to the seaside town as a refugee from London where an unhappy marriage had seriously affected his health. He did not stay long, but went on to Lausanne, Switzerland, where thanks to the care of a good doctor he completed his recovery and *The Wasteland*. But the prospect of the sea at Margate had no doubt helped.

Another famous poet, at least in England, was a frequent visitor to Ramsgate, two miles down the coast from Broadstairs. Samuel Taylor COLERIDGE, one of England's five outstanding Romantic poets, is best-known for his long poem,

The Ancient Mariner. He loved bathing in the sea at Ramsgate, perhaps also for health reasons. In any case, the colder the sea, the more he liked it.

Most famous of all, however, was a frequent visitor to Broadstairs itself, the novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870). He first resorted to Broadstairs in 1837, as a quiet place in which to complete his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, but he so fell in love with the antiquated little seaside town that he often returned with his family to write, or to rest from writing, through the 1840's and into the 1850's. His name and names of his novels, or of characters from his novels, are to be found all over the old town that he knew. It is now surrounded, not to say strangled, by Victorian and modern suburbs, but Broadstairs still celebrates every year its most famous visitor with a Dickens Festival in June.

Dr. David Allen White, a Catholic teacher of literature and music who is well-known to many Catholics striving to keep the Faith all over the English-speaking world, is a great lover of Dickens. Since he is passing through London this summer, he agreed to visit Broadstairs in order to hold on August 2 and 3 a 24-hour weekend seminar on Dickens, open to the public and including three conferences and Sunday Mass, and a visit which he will guide to the Dickens Museum in town, set up in a little old house known to, and visited by, Dickens himself. If you are interested in attending, let us know soon (through info@dinoscopus.org), because if numbers have to be limited, first come will be first served. Meals will be provided in-house, but visitors will have to find their own accommodation outside. Beware, it will be the height of the holiday season.

Dickens was not Catholic, but Dostoevsky called him "a great Christian." Dickens certainly had a warm and open heart, and a brilliant pen.

Kyrie eleison.