Journal extracts: Kent 2007-2018

**1/10/2007** I’ve just sent off the MS of ‘The Skies Over Thanet’ [the MS that subsequently became *Crab & Winkle*]. The title’s from a Turner quote and fortuitously there’s an item in today’s *Guardian* about meteorologists taking note of Turner’s sunsets. Apparently, as JMWT was painting [in Kent] the atmosphere was affected by eruptions in Indonesia, half a world away.

**15/10/2007** Virginia Woolf was in Rough Common – at ‘Moat House’, addressed as Blean, but just off the R.C. road, in 1910, one of her early breakdowns. The house was rented by Clive and Vanessa. The ‘rest cure’ didn’t work and she went into hospital, but she did write a nice paragraph about the surrounds.

**23/12/2007** Dungeness – English Surrealist painters invariably dealt with the seaside. Surrealism was almost washed ashore from France. An anthology could be called ‘Flotsam’.

**15/1/2008** A moment on the bus where the streaks of green and brown and the rain across the windows becomes the one and only moment. A strange happiness. Then I have to get off and walk through Canterbury. Collapsed umbrellas in bins.

**15/2/2008**

After two very foggy days it clears and gets colder. The first daffodil in the yard is out, plus a couple of snowdrops, shoots of bluebells and another as yet unplaced bulb. The climbing plants, seemingly dead, have come back to life.

**7/1/2009** [Faversham] The snow from two nights back hasn’t melted. Interesting to see what plants seem to have survived well – lavender, thyme, oregano. Tarragon dies naturally in winter.

**16/4/2009** The black poplar’s leaves start as reddish-brown then become green. The trees seem luminous at a distance. The dark green leaves on the forest floor are dog’s mercury.

**21/4/2009** At Wilgate Green, between Throwley and Painter’s Forstal: small white butterfly with bright yellow wing-tips (m. orange tip, the f. has grey tips).

**2/9/2009**

Paradoxically perhaps, I find myself the inhabitant of a county no-one I’ve met knows a lot about. A ‘home county’ but off the radar of many Brit. writers despite its history ([Ford](/20c/20c-fordmadoxford-biography), [Conrad](/19c/19c-conrad-biography) &c). History asserts itself in one particular: the Kent coast was for years accessible more by sea than by land. Hence association with smugglers, escaping Kings &c. And only an hour and a bit out of London, where they seem to know more about Yorkshire.

**18/9/2009** A puffin over the Oare Marshes (strayed from the north Pacific).

**30/11/2009** The backyard soil hasn’t dried out for weeks – it’s all sodden, though the primulas and various other plants seem to like it. The Xmas lights are on. The town adolescents are slightly mad. I actually welcome the darkness, the season. It makes sense of everything else.

**2/2/2010** Yesterday, sunlight, a walk. Bitten by a dog near Monkshill.

plant snowdrops

snowdrops eaten by pheasant (partly)

**25/6/2010** Just sit down in the quiet bar of my local when the madwoman of Faversham enters. She has a stock set of shouted phrases, usually animus toward a (long dead) partner, his drinking, being thrown out of the house. She repeats: ‘any more of that and we’re not coming for Christmas’. Further: ‘she’s a very good willing girl which you’re not Elizabeth’; ‘actually I’ve got some quite nice jewellery at home and I don’t give a damn’; ‘turn on her husband . . .right old cow he was’. Etcetera for however long.

**6/7/2010** At the Anchor: The vista from the bar down a corridor and through three rooms looks as though there must be a mirror somewhere; that it’s only half the length it appears. But the objects at the end aren’t reflections. The clientele: boatyard people and ‘women of a certain age’. Neither sex has a ‘use-by-date’. A wet looking long-haired greyhound and a black dog that drags its arse along the floor.

**9/7/2010** Last night – three ducklings in the yard. Today – eight, plus the duck. With the aid of neighbours the chicks are boxed (to take down to the lake) but the duck is uncatchable. It hangs around at a distance then (worryingly) disappears. I release the ducklings and luckily the duck returns. The pond will have to suffer.

**7/1/2011** [Flying back:] There’s a clear patch of sky over our part of the East Kent coast. The Faversham and Oare Creeks are visible at high tide in from the eastern end of Sheppey. Then it pours driving back through Surrey.

**3/10/2011** On the walk back past Davington Priory the sound of a trumpet (played well), smoke drifting into the churchyard from the Geldof residence (from a barbecue?). A diagonal of sunlight illuminating gravestones.

**12/12/2011** Storms expected, the night before departure for Seville. I hope the tiles stay on the roof. When R and I visited Britain in November 1987 we saw the effects of the ‘big wind’ which had flattened trees near the M25. The Kent cricket ground’s famous tree (within the boundary) was blown down.

**28/5/2012** In the yard, three nests: pigeon (in pyrocanthus), blackbird (over the path trellis) and redbreast (in the brickwork of the back wall). A storm holds off. Maybe it hits London.

**4/2/2013** It’s sixty years since a great inundation of the east coast happened (1953). I’ve seen photographs of the event in Whitstable – a king tide plus strong north winds that flooded all the lower areas of that town. If it happened again I wonder if the marshes between here and the coast would act as a barrier or sponge.

**7/7/2013** Allhallows on the Hoo Peninsula is a glorified caravan park and it’s impossible to get anywhere near the water. I drive on to Grain on a Mad Max road. Grassland, concrete, a wood mostly hiding the National Grid from the village. Southend across the water to the north, Sheerness to the east, possibly Whitstable in the distance. No swimming here, just fishing and the English version of ‘taking the sun’.

**5/8/2014** If there are no longer any sparrows in London then I figure they’ve all moved here, to Faversham, in particular to our back garden.

**13/3/2015** On the ‘two creeks’ circular walk from Faversham I notice a patch of colour in a bush beside the track. It is a laminated copy of William Blake’s ‘London’.

**25/6/2015** I decide to travel back via London Victoria and catch the 3.05. At Farningham Road there are some bangs under my carriage (the second last) and shortly after the train stops on the viaduct. It stays there without power for two hours. Social media soon lets it out that someone had thrown themselves in front of the train from the platform of the Farningham Road station. The driver was a trainee and will certainly need counselling but no-one could have stopped the train in time. The metallic clanks meant that the body had bounced all the way under the train stripping the conducting ‘shoes’ down one side and cutting off the power. After a while police and emergency crews walk around and through the train. The body is apparently and understandably ‘not a pretty sight’. Eventually the train is shunted to the Medway where I change. I get home around seven. Last Friday when we went to Yorkshire our trans-Pennine train (Leeds – Hebden Bridge) was turned back because of an ‘incident’ (i.e. body on the tracks). This is a not infrequent cause for delay in the rail services and the companies have developed euphemisms to cover the tragedies. These just don’t work in a networked age.

**8/7/2016** Breakfast out at The Yard (‘the usual at the usual’). Ken would like this place. There’s a cool wind through the open door. The coat hangers seem to have a permanent collection of coats – you would have to hang yours somewhere else. Ahead of me a bad portrait of Judi Densch. The strange sight of a man with a notebook (me) among others with iphones. We live to view our own obsolescence.

**6/8/2016** An afternoon walk to Goodnestone and back. En route, wheat, hops, barley, strawberries, blueberries – the strawberry rows with an intense odour. A young Polish girl tries to find the home of a lost dog. I finish off a notebook over a pint of stout in The Sun.

**30/8/2018** At Rochester new housing advertises itself as ‘The Home Of [Great Expectations](/dickens/great-expectations-curated-walk)’.

**3/9/2018** Over the weekend, the Hop Festival. The town crazy for a few hours. We ventured out into it two or three times to check out the bands and the ambience generally. The Sun has its music in the beer garden so our backyard, two doors down, seems like the stalls. On the Saturday I picked up a hop vine for the fireplace and threw out the old one. On Sunday morning we walked over to Goodnestone and back through the farms.

**7/9/2018** For a moment the barmaid in The Sun looks like the one in Manet’s painting.

**17/10/2018** The bar from this perspective would look good as an Edward Hopper painting. The silent regular sits to the right, displaced from his usual stool, with his dog sleeping on the floor. there are a few illuminated objects, shelf lights, taps. Glimmer from a bucket of ice.

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