**Derek Jarman (1942-1994)**

**Lived in Dungeness 1986-1994**

Derek Jarman, painter, poet, film-maker, was born in 1942 in Northwood, Thanet (not quite ‘behind the great white cliffs of Dover’ as stated by Jarman in *Chroma*), and died at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, Smithfield in the City of London in 1994. In the last volume of his diaries *Smiling in Slow Motion*, Jarman poignantly records a fall of snow at Dungeness on 20 December 1993 and his relief at the receipt of a letter from the Reverend Ford confirming he can be buried at St Clement’s Churchyard, Old Romney.

It isn’t perhaps surprising that Derek Jarman should have fallen in love with Dungeness in general and Prospect Cottage in particular when happenstance and a desire for fish and chips at the Pilot Inn brought him to Romney Marsh – the ‘fifth continent’ of the \_*Ingoldsby Legends\_* – in 1986 at the age of 44. He would later be moved to declare: ‘Dungeness, Dungeness, your beauty is the best, forget the hills and valleys’ (in \_*Derek Jarman’s Garden\_*, his last book) and was even able to detect ‘wonderment’ in the nuclear power station.

By his own account, Jarman had no plans to build a garden, an improbable project in this ‘bleak and beautiful interzone’ (Olivia Laing), but following his purchase of Prospect Cottage for £450 (freehold) and his subsequent diagnosis as HIV positive, he set about creating the garden that would serve as ‘therapy and pharmacopoeia’ (\_*Derek Jarman’s Garden\_*). He came to see his garden as a paradise, contrasting it with other gardens he saw as ‘like bad children – spoilt by their parents, over-watered and covered with noxious chemicals’ (\_*Derek Jarman’s Garden\_*). Jarman’s garden merges imperceptibly with the beach and has no fences. ‘My garden’s boundaries are the horizon,’ he declares in \_*Modern Nature\_*.

The garden flourished in this harsh, inhospitable landscape, against the elements and the odds, but as it thrived, so Jarman’s condition worsened as AIDS tightened its grip. By 1990 his sight was failing as a result of toxoplasmosis. Typically, this prompted an obsession with colour, which would find expression in both his ‘book of colour’ \_*Chroma\_* and his last film \_*Blue\_*.

Derek Jarman’s creativity was truly extraordinary by virtue of its scope and its exuberance. Prospect Cottage, Dungeness and Romney Marsh collectively constitute a fitting memorial to the man, the life and the work.

Article by Jeremy Page

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