

A Cornish Walk

THE HOUSE ON THE STRAND

SHADES OF DU MAURIER IN TYWARDREATH

Words and photographs by **Sue Kittow**

Daphne du Maurier has been a favourite author of mine since I was a child and, having been asked to link a walk to the newly branded Fowey Festival, I re-read *The House On The Strand* which takes place in Tywardreath and Treesmill. I was once more stunned by her descriptions of the landscape, of her ability to keep me turning the pages - to create a dark and powerful sense of unease that lingered, and had me longing to tread the same paths.

Tywardreath means “House on the Strand”, as the village was once surrounded by tidal waters on all sides bar the east, and the ground beneath the church was a creek. A Benedictine priory was founded here soon after the Norman conquest, and the possessions included the church, St Sampson’s Chapel at Golant, and huge nearby estates. The monks were a corrupt, drunken and dissolute bunch, as described in du Maurier’s novel; knowing it was true adds to the fascinating reading.

With that in mind, Mr B, MollieDog and I headed off to Tywardreath on a bitterly cold day to follow in the footsteps of the protagonist, Dick - though as *The House On The Strand* is a time-travel novel, I hoped we weren’t going to be transported back to the 14th century. I’d trip over my skirts, and get fearful giggles seeing Mr B in a doublet and hose.

We parked in Church Street and walked along, following the main street as it curves right almost opposite the church. At Woodland Avenue, we went straight ahead along Wood Lane, then turned right at the end and almost immediately left, onto a public footpath which is part of the Saints’ Way, indicated by a Cornish cross symbol on the post. ➔



RIGHT: TYWARDREATH CHURCHYARD

Walking past a treehouse, painted lavender with a bright pink sign saying OUR HOUSE, we headed down this steep path with birds tweeting and daffodils smiling: we were out of the easterly wind here. Large chunks of the dry stone walls had been washed away by recent rains, which had left a gully down the middle of the path. We headed down steep steps underneath a railway line, into a marshy area where flag iris grew in abundance.

Crossing several footbridges, we played Pooh Sticks (I won), then crossed a second footbridge over a mini-canal. We turned right here, but a little way along, a bridge had collapsed, making that route impassable, so we had to go back to the second footbridge and head straight on, underneath a massive fallen tree, up a steep and stony path.

A train rattled past us on our right, reminding me of the journey across the valley that Marcus took in the novel, one that led to his death. It was all too easy to imagine, and I hurried on, struggling uphill in Mr B's coffee-fuelled wake.

At the top of this hill, we turned right and followed a quiet road to Lanescot, past blue periwinkles and primroses nestling in the hedges. After a farm, we came to a junction overlooking the Luxulyan Valley, where we met a lady on a very beautiful horse called Alaska.

We crossed the road and headed up a track by Berry Brow, where Mr B decided it might be interesting to take a small diversion. Sadly, his map reading skills left a lot to be desired; finally he got us back on track, but the diversion added a good 45 minutes to our walk, plus a lot of expletives.

At a public footpath on the left, we headed along a brambly path, through a kissing gate, into several fields of horses (putting Moll on the lead). I was a little nervous of the horses, but we got through both fields unscathed, though Moll freaked and we had to lift her over the gate. Safely on the other side, she barked bravely and then ran.

We followed a waymark sign past an ivy-covered engine house in a field on our right, along a metalled track which led to a road and turned right. At a junction we turned right, and climbed up the hedge to see the view. Five buzzards soared on thermals overhead, and around us were endless fields of varying colours. Apart from Par in the distance, there was little sign of habitation: you could almost smell how old this land is, and we could have been back in the 14th century were it not for the whine of a distant chainsaw.

Heading down a road with high hedges on either side of us, Mr B scoured the banks to see if there was anything old and valuable, as he does - there wasn't, although there were plenty of rabbit warrens.

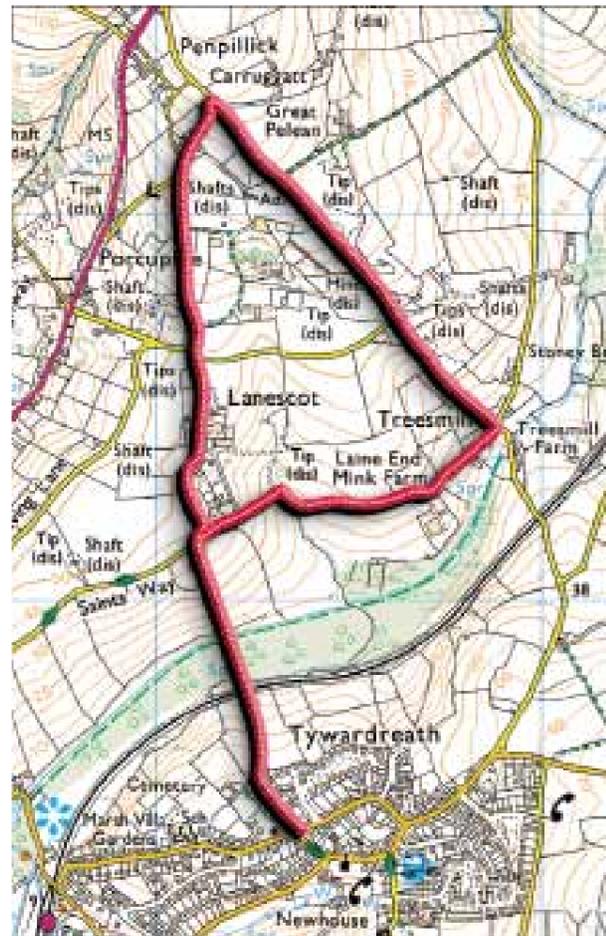
"That doesn't sound like a British bird," said Mr B and sure enough, we had arrived at Wingz Animal Sanctuary, which houses a variety of birds and animals not native to this country. At the bottom of this steep hill, we took a public bridleway on the right saying Gold Path, meaning it's part of a national route.

This area is Treesmill. The path wound round to the right through a kissing gate, and we crossed a big ploughed field with the hedge on our left. The air was still, and felt very ancient: no wonder du Maurier wrote such a powerful novel here. Tales of the past almost ooze from the ground.

This field led to another kissing gate and into a very muddy

lane with hedges studded with violets, stitchwort and dried bracken. Arriving at a larger path, we came to a junction and turned left. This led us back to the road where we turned left again back down the steep path that we'd walked up from the footbridges by the mini-canal, then back under the railway bridge and on to Tywardreath.

Next to the church we headed down a hill to where the Priory had been. Looking down the marshy valley, we could see where much of the novel takes place, and could almost hear the monks squabbling and the clip-clop of horses' hooves. It left us with the sense of time long ago that Daphne du Maurier evokes so well. 📍



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INFORMATION	
▶	OS Explorer 107 St Austell & Liskeard
▶	Length: Approximately 4.5 miles
▶	Time: 2 hours
▶	Refreshments: New Inn, Tywardreath 01726 813901; Rashleigh Arms, Polkerris, Par, 01726 813991. www.therashleighinnpolkerris.co.uk
▶	Daphne du Maurier Society presents Fowey Festival of Music and Words, from May 8 to 18. www.foweyfestival.com/events
▶	Sue Kittow stayed at Trenyhton Manor, 01726 814797, www.cleisure.com/trenyhton/trenyhton-manor-hotel
▶	Discover Cornwall by Sue Kittow is published by Sigma Press £8.99