

*Philip R. Stone*

111 Dark Places  
in England  
That You  
Shouldn't Miss

111

emons:

# Foreword

For my Rachael Dorrian and our 'Paddington Bear' adventures.

I have been writing about people visiting the dead for a long time. I first turned to the 'dark side' when a student of mine introduced me to 'dark tourism'. That is, the act of traveling to sites of death, disaster, or the seemingly macabre. The idea of tourists visiting places that portray heritage that hurts is filled with many dilemmas. Of course, people have long been drawn to sites of death and fatality. In ancient times, gladiatorial games were a leisure mainstay of the Roman Empire. During the medieval period, public executions of criminals were spectator events. And, in 19th century Europe, morgue tours to encounter corpses were a common travel itinerary.

As a social scientist, I am fascinated as to why particular deaths are remembered, by whom, and how our dead are (re)presented within the visitor economy. Sadly, the world is littered with sites of tragedy. Our mistakes and misfortunes are exposed by landscapes of adversity, accidents, and calamity. Visiting and remembering our dead is a cultural phenomenon – we attach importance to certain kinds of death and the dead. In turn, the dead can become significant to the living and warn us of our mortality. Yet, commemoration is challenged by politics of remembrance, commercialism, and conflict in memorialisation, as well as the ethics of interpretation. Dark tourism is further challenged by consumer behaviour and visitor experiences.

I wrote this book to provide an authoritative yet accessible guide into the dark places of England. Each of the 111 places in this book offers a provocative and emotive account of the site and its uniquely dark story. I wrote it for you to discover the sites, do additional research on its themes, and respect the difficult heritage of places of pain and shame. Ultimately, this inimitable guidebook permits you to sightsee in the mansions of the dead, while having deference to those deceased.



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### 3 Exercise Tiger Memorial

*The forgotten dead of friendly and enemy fire*

‘Exercise Tiger’ was the codename of a training operation to prepare troops for D-Day and the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe (see ch. 70). Supreme Commander of Allied Forces Dwight D. Eisenhower wanted drills for the invasion to be as realistic as possible, including the use of live ammunition. Slapton Sands in Devon was chosen as the exercise location because the beach closely resembled Utah Beach, a site of the Normandy landings. Over 3,000 local residents were told to leave six weeks before the exercise with no explanation. Then, on 27 April, 1944, as Exercise Tiger commenced, live artillery shells slaughtered over 400 American soldiers due to a timing blunder. Kept secret by authorities for decades and still not formally recognised by the US Government, the calamity was the worst case of friendly fire during World War II.

The shocking event became a double tragedy on 28 April, 1944, when nine German E-boats passing through Lyme Bay stumbled upon the exercises. They opened fire on the mock-invasion, killing 639 men. The harrowing scenes of corpses washing up onto the beach would be replicated on D-Day six weeks later at Normandy.

With over 1,000 soldiers slain, the irony is that Eisenhower achieved realism in his dress rehearsal attack. Survivors received no leave to recover from the trauma of Exercise Tiger. They were sworn to secrecy, under threat of court martial, and a media blackout followed so as not to compromise the impending landings of D-Day.

In 1984, the late Ken Small raised a sunken Sherman tank from local waters – a remnant of that fateful day in 1944. After much bureaucracy, Small ‘purchased’ the tank from the US government for \$50. He pursued the idea of a memorial to end 50 years of silence. The Sherman tank, with a plaque to commemorate Small’s endeavours, now rests on a cobbled plinth and honours the sacrifices of those who died.



**Address** Exercise Tiger Memorial, Torcross, Devon, TQ7 2TQ, [www.exercisetigermemorial.co.uk](http://www.exercisetigermemorial.co.uk) | **Getting there** By car, take A 379 to Torquay | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Lynmouth Flood Memorial Hall is where a devastating flood in 1952 created conspiracy theories about secret RAF cloud-seeding experiments (Lynmouth Street, Lynmouth, Devon, [www.visitlyntonandlynmouth.com](http://www.visitlyntonandlynmouth.com)).

## 24 Dracula's Birthplace

*Romantic views inspired Bram Stoker's dark mind*

In 1890, Bram Stoker, author of the 1897 Gothic novel *Dracula*, visited the seaside town of Whitby. Staying at Mrs Veazey's guesthouse at 6 Royal Crescent, Stoker would take strolls and savour romantic seascapes of the picturesque town. Amidst the windswept headland, dramatic abbey ruins, a church surrounded by swooping bats and the town's association with jet (a black, semi-precious stone used in mourning jewellery), Dracula was born in the mind of Stoker.

Stoker visited the library in Whitby and discovered an 1820 book recording a 15th century Moldavian (now in Romania) prince named Vlad Tepes, or 'Vlad the Impaler'. Impaling his enemies on wooden stakes, Vlad was nicknamed Dracula, meaning 'son of the dragon' or 'devil' in the Wallachian language. Stoker began to form his literary ideas. During his visit, Stoker also discovered an 1885 shipwreck of the Russian vessel *Dmitry* from Narva, which ran aground at Tate Sands near Whitby's harbour, carrying a cargo of silver sand. The shipwrecked schooner in *Dracula* became the *Demeter* from Varna that carried Dracula to Whitby, with a cargo of silver sand and boxes of earth.

As Stoker's fictional, undead protagonist reached England's shores, the *Demeter's* crew all dead and her captain lashed to the wheel, an immense black dog was the only survivor. The canine Dracula leapt ashore, ran up the 199 steps towards St Mary's Church and the abbey, and morphed into a blood-sucking, coffin-dwelling, Transylvanian mass murderer. In the graveyard at St Mary's church, there is a real tombstone of a man named Swales. In the novel, Swales becomes Dracula's first Whitby victim. Today, you can sit on the memorial bench and gaze at the panoramic views that inspired Stoker to create Dracula in all his gothic splendour and horror. The bench, erected in 1980 by the Dracula Society, marked the 68th anniversary of Stoker's death.



**Address** Khyber Pass, West Cliff, Whitby, Yorkshire, YO21 3DQ | **Getting there** Train to Whitby, then a 12-minute walk | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** The Dracula Experience brings the Bram Stoker's novel to life through immersive actor performances in a building once owned by Sir Isaac Newton (9 Marine Parade, Whitby, [www.draculaexperience.co.uk](http://www.draculaexperience.co.uk)).