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Love at first sight.

It is with love from Shropshire that we send you this little book of musings on the most heart-catching of England's quiet counties.

But, reader, beware. As you innocently leaf through, you may well find yourself being led astray. You may become the latest in a long line of conquests. Yet another unsuspecting visitor to be smitten and beguiled by Shropshire.

At least this is one affair of the heart of which your partner will approve. Providing, of course, that you bring them with you.



A right royal ramble

The Boscobel Oak, in Shropshire, is one of very few trees in the realm in which a King has slept. Charles II was the royal snoozer in question. He slept in the said oak to avoid capture by Cromwell's bloodthirsty hordes. On his return to the throne, Charles famously had a fling with that buxom purveyor of oranges, Nell Gwynne. This Nell, however, should not be confused with Little Nell, the character created by another Charles – Dickens. Curiously, the real Little Nell is buried not far from Boscobel, in the Shropshire village of Tong, while another Dickensian character – Ebenezer Scrooge – can be found buried in Shrewsbury. This was the home of Charles Darwin who proposed that we are all descended from monkeys, a species renowned for their tree-climbing abilities. Perhaps he drew a little inspiration from the frankly wanton behaviour that occurs every May in Aston-on-Clun, when the Arbor Tree – confusingly a black poplar – is dressed and much merriment ensues. The occasion? Royal Oak Day, of course, in honour of Charles II.



The Much Wenlock Olympics

The modern Olympic Games were first revived in Much Wenlock, Shropshire, in 1861. The brainchild of William Penny Brookes, his lofty aim was to provide the locals with an alternative to one of their favourite pastimes: drinking. We are relieved to report, Shropshire's many delightful pubs seem to have survived his attentions. In fact, many of our innkeepers have branched out into serving fine food too. Presumably egged on by the presence of an abundance of gourmet restaurants. We don't know what happened to the Olympics.



The Queer old dean

The ability of the Reverend Spooner to get his words tumpy-torvy was legendary. His dinner toast to Victoria, “our dear old Queen”, for example, came out quite, quite differently. Could it be that the unfortunate cleric’s tongue-tied state can be explained by his Shropshire roots? There are numerous fine pubs and local brews to be sampled around the county, many of which would have been familiar to the Reverend. Naturally, you don’t have to be in holy orders to stay ‘til last orders. This abundance of alcoholic refreshment may also explain why Shropshire has so many fine hotels, B&Bs and other establishments dedicated to the art of ‘sleeping it off’.

More owl soup, anyone?

Michelin Stars – so prized by restaurants and gourmets everywhere – are not awarded lightly. More restaurants in Ludlow, Shropshire, have earned this accolade than anywhere else in the kingdom. (Apart from some place called ‘London.’) It comes, however, as no surprise to the locals. Their healthy appetites have long been sated by such hearty delicacies as Wine Jelly, Shropshire Fitchet Pie or even Owl Soup, these days made without the owl. For those concerned with calories and the like, we Shropshire folk find that the effects of fine living can be balanced by the fine walking available on the local hills.

Owl Soup

1 plump young barn owl

1 carrot, sliced

1 onion, sliced

1 stick celery, chopped

bouquet garni

1 pint of beef stock

Port

Lemon juice

**Roast the carcasses in a hot oven, 400°c (gas mark 6),
for 20 minutes. Fry vegetables 'til golden brown.**

Put in the carcasses; add the boiling stock and bouquet garni.

Simmer for 2 hours, strain and remove the meat from the bones.

Blend with slightly reduced stock.

Return to pan and season with port, lemon, salt and pepper.



From monks to monkeys

Medieval monks didn't spend all their time illuminating manuscripts, you know. The fictional Brother Cadfael of Shrewsbury Abbey fancied himself as something of a Sherlock Holmes, solving crimes between prayers. Funnily enough, Sherlock's inventor—Arthur Conan Doyle also lived in Shropshire, near the village of Shelvock. Perhaps the greatest 'detective story' of all, however, belongs to Shrewsbury lad Charles Darwin. His theory of evolution finally solved the mystery of why so many people look like monkeys.

Teed off?

Scotland may have invented the ancient game of golf. But it's in Shropshire, arguably, that the game can be played at its best. Those well-known wielders of the club, Sandy Lyle and Ian Woosnam for instance, both hail from here. Something in the water? More likely, it's the rock. One of the world's most varied geologies has effortlessly sprouted quality golf courses that offer many diverse landscapes and challenges. As for those who bleat plaintively about being 'golf widows', fear not. The equally wide selection of fine shopping, restaurants and other attractions will provide a welcome distraction.





Knight, *knight*

King Arthur, say the locals, was born, lived and died in Shropshire. No, really. Perfectly sane academics make the case that he was actually a king of the Votadini tribe. They did their pillaging and what-not around Viroconium, close to modern Wroxeter. He married a local girl, too. The good lady Guinevere – or Ganhumara – came from Oswestry. Although there is no record of where they held their wedding or their reception, it's safe to assume that it was somewhere around here. The tradition continues today. It appears that huge numbers of modern couples find that Shropshire's romantic landscapes, stately homes, fine hotels and suchlike give their nuptials a legendary quality too.



His and *hers* holidays

That native of Shrewsbury, Charles Darwin, would probably explain the battle of the sexes in evolutionary terms. We're not sure who's winning at the moment. But, just to be on the safe side, a trip to Shropshire may serve as something of a truce. The boys will happily play with the quite remarkable toys to be found at our hands-on museums, aircraft collections and many golf courses. The ladies, no doubt, will want to indulge their passions for designer shopping, great gardens, stately homes and gourmet restaurants. If Darwin is correct, the resulting romantic harmony may well ensure the arrival of at least one more generation of the human race.

An apology to the USA

It was the Shropshire Regiment who – during the 1812 war with America – burnt the US President’s House, causing him to paint it White. Sorry about that. This display of warlike tendencies was a little unusual, given that most of our military types weren’t actually very interested in fighting. After a couple of battles, Robert Clive of Market Drayton preferred hobnobbing with nabobs in India. And Captain Matthew Webb of Wellington gained his fame and glory by being the first to swim the English Channel. The good Captain indulged in tots of fine brandy during his swim. A practice encouraged, no doubt, by his enjoyment of the many restaurants, hotels and pubs that still abound in the county today. Captain Webb, sadly, perished whilst trying to swim over Niagara Falls in – of all places – America.



Diverting as this little tome may be, seeing Shropshire in the flesh is infinitely more pleasurable.

To bring this experience closer, send for our brochure, lovingly produced at no small expense. You can obtain one by telephoning 0870 6010532. Alternatively, visit our web site www.shropshiretourism.info

Browse through the brochure at your leisure and choose from the many different places to stay and things to do. Then, book your visit.

If only all stories had such *a happy ending.*