

## Shandy Hall, Coxwold

We met our guide Patrick Wildgust, tenant and curator of Shandy Hall, at Coxwold Church and soon had a sense of the presence of Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) preaching to a large congregation. We walked the short distance out of the village to Shandy Hall.

The Hall lies close to the road, a low brick-built house with a stone slate roof, attractive for being intimate rather than stately. It was this homeliness that Sterne liked about the house, a haven of peace from his reluctant involvement in politics and increasing fame as an author and preacher. It was 'Parsonage House' that he rented and to which he, his wife and daughter moved from York in 1760, after completing the first two volumes of his best-known novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. The house became known by his friends as Shandy Hall after the fictional home of the Shandy family, 'shandy' being a local dialect word for odd or crack-brained.

All twenty-two of us squeezed into the kitchen to hear Patrick speak knowledgeably about Laurence Sterne and this literary house. He showed us a first edition of the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*, the frontispiece omitting that it was published in York, as Sterne saw his market in London, and surprisingly also omitting his name as the author. Other unusual features were a black page, which commemorates the death of Parson Yorick, and pages of marbling.

The house was built around 1430 as a long hall, timber-framed in two parts, a hall and a solar. Many of the original features still exist including medieval wall paintings. The discovery of these during restoration helped the Laurence Sterne Trust, established in 1967, to raise funds, the house being unoccupied and near derelict at the time. The Historic Buildings Council awarded a grant and others followed. The house is now a Grade 1 listed building. When Sterne came, it had already been changed considerably to make a parsonage; he made further extensive alterations including the building of a coach house, a cellar, a two-storey brick extension and a new garden frontage.

In the study, Sterne's writing room, a print of his portrait by Joshua Reynolds hangs behind the table. The original small entrance hall was once open to the roof before a fire scorched the timbers which are visible in the loft. We moved on to the dining room with its 17th-century panelling. In the parlour, the old meeting room, are the original wall paintings, now behind a hinged panel; these also occur above in the first floor solar with IHS clearly visible.



A work table or writing table, late 18th-century, of pine with a painted and grained finish. The graining, which rarely survives, may have been to imitate oak or a more generic 'hardwood'. The table was owned by Laurence Sterne and sold after his death. Courtesy The Laurence Sterne Trust (Photo Jeremy Bate)

Most of the artefacts throughout the house are associated with Sterne but of a later date and not there in his day. We were particularly interested in a small pine table and a bust of Sterne by Joseph Nollekens, modelled from the life in 1766 in Rome. The final room in our tour was the square extension built by Sterne which presents a box-like view to the garden front.

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