



## Shandy Hall and Laurence Sterne

Chris Pearson & Patrick Wildgust

**S**handy Hall was built around 1430 as a medieval long hall in the village that was then called Cuckwold. Originally named High Hall, it is sited on high ground at the west end of the village and was originally a timber-framed house with an open hall, central hearth, and solar (an upper-storey room often found in medieval manor houses and used as the family's private living area and sleeping quarters).

Many original features exist, including medieval wall-paintings, and the Grade 1 listed building has had architectural additions in every century; every side of the building looks different. The first family to live there were the Dayvilles, who were then as significant in the area as the Bellasis family of Newburgh Priory. Later families include those of James Hartas (town bailiff); George Spensley (surgeon) and the Reverends Thomas Newton (father and son). In the 19th century the house was divided into two dwellings, and just before it was turned into a museum the Dales and the Smedleys lived there.

The most celebrated inhabitant was Laurence Sterne, who came to live in Shandy Hall in 1760. Sterne was born in Clonmel, Ireland, in 1713. His father was an ensign in the army and in his first years Laurence moved from barracks to barracks. At ten years old he went to school in Hipperholme, Halifax, under the patronage

of an uncle, and after his uncle and his father died he was supported by cousins to study at Jesus College, Cambridge, winning a scholarship founded by his great-grandfather, Richard Sterne, a former Archbishop of York. He graduated in 1737 and was ordained into the Church of England as a deacon in the same year. With the help of another uncle, Dr. Jaques Sterne, Precentor of York, he began to make a moderately successful ecclesiastical career. He was ordained priest in 1738 and granted the living of Sutton-on-the-Forest, to which he added the living of Stillington six years later. He married Elizabeth Lumley in 1741, but their daughter Lydia was the only one of several children to survive infancy.

Sterne had already published the first two volumes of 'The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman' when he came to Coxwold and his ambition for success ("I write not to be fed, but to be famous") was immediately realised. He became famous virtually overnight and, with a portrait painted of him by Joshua Reynolds within the first few months of his book's release, a celebrity.

His friends celebrated his success by christening his new home 'Shandy Hall', the word 'Shandy' being a dialect word for 'wild', 'merry', and 'odd'. He made frequent visits to London but found the peace he needed

## Shandy Hall and Laurence Sterne

for writing at Shandy Hall, living there until his death, and writing the subsequent seven volumes of 'Tristram Shandy' and 'A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy' in a room which now contains the principal part of the museum's collection.

Sterne had been afflicted with illness – a form of tuberculosis - throughout his life. He travelled to France in 1762 to try to improve his health and although he returned to England, his wife and daughter remained in Montpellier. In last years of his life he fell in love with Eliza Draper, a married woman half his age, and wrote 'A Journal to Eliza' when she returned to India with her husband in 1767. He made a "sweet little apartment" at Shandy Hall for her, in the hope that she would one day come there as his wife and muse. She never did. Sterne died in 1768, and was buried three times: once at St

George's, Hanover Square, London; secondly when he was recognised after being disinterred by grave robbers and used in an anatomy lecture in Cambridge; and thirdly, when development took place in the 1960s on the London burial ground, his skull and a femur were taken to Coxwold and buried outside the church where he used to preach.

The living of Coxwold had been presented to Sterne by Lord Fauconberg of Newburgh Priory, and Shandy Hall remained in the Bellasis (later Wombwell) family until 1968 when ownership was transferred to the Laurence Sterne Trust. The house was restored and was opened as a museum by comedian and writer Frank Muir in 1973. Along with its two acres of gardens it is now open to the public, and holds exhibitions and events to encourage knowledge and appreciation of Sterne's life and work.



### Find out more

The Laurence Sterne Trust,  
[www.laurencesterne.org.uk](http://www.laurencesterne.org.uk).

Books by and about Laurence Sterne can be purchased through the website.



*Shandy Hall, Coxwold*



*Revd. Laurence Sterne*



*Laurence Sterne's study*



*Shandy Hall, Coxwold*



*The gardens, Shandy Hall*