

BRAM STOKER IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

MIKE SHEPHERD

In 1892, Bram Stoker sought his special place. It had to be in the north of Scotland, preferably on the east coast, and the air bracing (not ever a problem here...). Studying maps, he now knew that it must lie somewhere along the coast between Peterhead and Aberdeen. Accordingly, Bram took the train from London to Peterhead, and walked south. After eight miles he discovered the fishing village of Port Erroll, now called Cruden Bay, and instantly fell in love with the place.

The Irishman and part-time author took his August holidays here from now on, his job as a London theatre manager left behind; holidays where he could also write books – *Dracula* amongst them.

It is curious that Bram Stoker chose an Aberdeenshire village as his destination of choice, not the least because he normally mixed with the elite of London society back home. Nevertheless, he loved ‘yarning’ with the fishermen, and took interest in their ancient superstitions, many of which were undoubtedly pagan in origin. And to understand the fisher folk he needed to understand their Doric dialect.

What is not well-known is that Bram Stoker wrote two novels set in the Cruden Bay area with much of the dialogue in Doric. This easily makes him the most famous author to write in the dialect; here’s an example, ‘Ye are muckle sad laddie. Do I no ken a look like that when I speer it, and know that the Fates are to their wark. What maks ye greet laddie; what maks ye greet?’ You have to pinch yourself to believe that the author of *Dracula* wrote these lines.

Although Bram Stoker used Port Erroll as his base, on occasion he would venture out to explore the rest of Aberdeenshire. In 1896 (while writing *Dracula*) he toured the Moray Firth coast spending at least one night in the Garden Arms Hotel in Gardenstown.

And in 1897, three months after *Dracula* was published, he took a cycling trip through Deeside from Braemar to Aberdeen. The scenery enthralled him, ‘When we had passed Ballater and climbed the hill up to the railway bridge we stopped to look back; and in sheer delight she caught hold of my arm and stood close to me. And no wonder she was moved, for in the world there can be few places of equal beauty of a similar kind. Right above us to the right, and again across the valley, towered mountains of rich brown with patches of purple and lines of green; and in front of us in the centre of the amphitheatre, two round hills, looming large in a delicate mist, served as portals to the valley which trended upward between the hills beyond. The road to Braemar seemed like a veritable road of mystery, guarded by an enchanted gate.’

Bram Stoker’s last trip north was in 1910, two years before he died. Although he was very ill, he made the effort: Bram wanted to see his beloved Aberdeenshire one more time.



Abraham Stoker (1845 - 1912)