

## A TIME AND A PLACE

*"Into the work of Crabbe there steals again and again the sea, the flat coast, the local meannesses, and an odour of brine and dirt – tempered occasionally with the smell of flowers." – E.M. Forster*

George Crabbe, eighteenth-century poet, clergyman and surgeon-apothecary, is best known for his poem 'Peter Grimes', the tale of a sadistic fisherman that inspired Benjamin Britten's opera of the same name.

Grimes' brutal crimes and 'tortur'd guilt' play out within the bleak, improbably beautiful setting of Aldeburgh, the Suffolk coastal town where Crabbe was born and brought up. But while the poet has fallen in and out of fashion, Aldeburgh and its landscape have continued to captivate writers and artists, including Britten, Ronald Blythe, Susan Hill and Maggi Hambling, all drawn to the stark coastline, eerie mudflats and open skies.

A new book, **A Time and a Place**, by journalist and local resident Frances Gibb engages afresh with the poet's writing – tracing, for the first time, the resonance of Aldeburgh and more widely Suffolk in his life and work.

In a biographical anthology, she delves into his creative struggles, religious faith, romantic loves and opium addiction. Above all, she explores the continual lure – for Crabbe and those who have followed – of what he called a 'little venal borough' and the land and sea beyond.

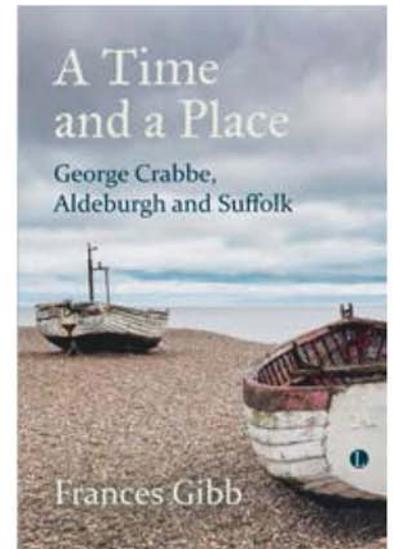
Crabbe had a love-hate relationship with the town, Gibb explains. "It was an ambivalence that provided a catalyst for the creation of many of his poems - Peter Grimes in particular. As the writer E.M. Forster put it: "It was not a straightforward antipathy. It was connected with a profound attraction. He might leave Aldeburgh with his body, but he never emigrated spiritually.""

The poet spent most of his life in Suffolk. He was born the son of a collector of salt duties at Slaughden, before the dwellings there were lost to successive tides. On leaving school he trained as an apothecary's assistant and surgeon but his family had no funds to support his ambitions. He ended up rolling butter casks for his

father on the quay and hated it. So one day he made the life-changing decision to throw it all in and try his luck as a poet in London.

But even when, later in life Crabbe left Suffolk and moved inland - ultimately to the softer climes of Wiltshire

- Aldeburgh and Suffolk remained "as an unbroken thread" through his writings", Gibb says - "they were the flavour and piquancy that gave his poetry its hard, realistic edge."



\***A Time and a Place** will be published on April 28 (Lutterworth Press, @luttpress) with a launch at the Aldeburgh Bookshop on May 13th.

Frances Gibb is an award-winning journalist and former Legal Editor of The Times. She read English at the University of East Anglia and has an honorary masters degree with the Open University. Her family has been connected with Aldeburgh and Suffolk for more than fifty years.

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