

Wessex
Museums

HARDY'S WESSEX

The landscapes that inspired a writer

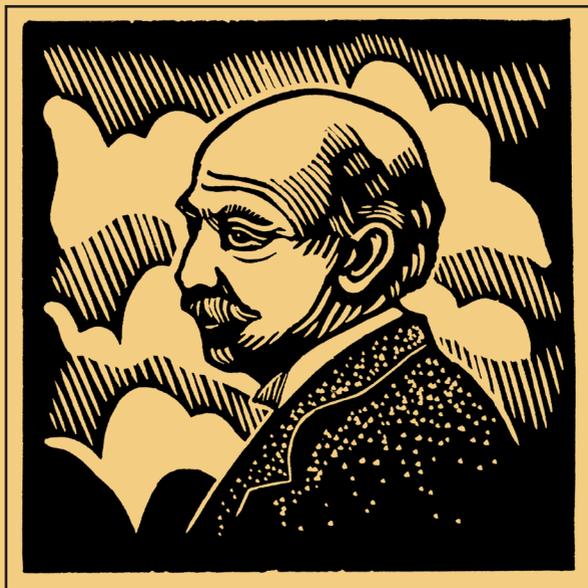


WESSEX WORDS

Hardy Reading Challenge

Discover Thomas Hardy's Wessex this summer, through
Wessex Museums' *Hardy's Wessex* exhibition
28 May - 30 October 2022.

Discover Thomas Hardy's Wessex



***Hardy's Wessex* is a multi-venue, interactive exhibition running across Dorset Museum, Poole Museum, The Salisbury Museum and Wiltshire Museum, as well as other participating venues, from 28 May - 30 October 2022.**

The exhibition explores the life and works of the writer Thomas Hardy (1840-1928).

Use these personal reviews and recommendations to explore Hardy's work, the literature that he has influenced and find out more about the man himself.

Compiled in partnership with BCP, Dorset and Wiltshire Libraries with thanks to Victoria Bevan, John Pennington and Chloe Taylor for their reviews and recommendations.

Coastal Wessex

Poole Museum

For Hardy, the sea was associated with love and conflict. His granny raised him on stories of the fear that the French would invade at any minute, during the Napoleonic Wars. It was also this stretch of south west coast that he met and courted his first wife Emma.

Novels

The Trumpet-Major

Two brothers – a soldier and a sailor – both fall in love with the same woman, while the fear of invasion by Napoleon and his troops mounts along the Dorset coast. A light-hearted story which explores how the great European drama of the Napoleonic Wars affected the everyday lives of the people of Wessex. It was the only novel Hardy ever wrote about this period and, despite the themes of war, is surprisingly funny and chirpy!

- See *The Trumpet-Major* notebook on display at Poole Museum

A Pair of Blue Eyes

Strikingly similar to Hardy's own romance with his first wife Emma, the novel tells the story of a young architect Stephen who travels down to Cornwall, where he falls in love with the daughter of the vicar, Elfride Swancourt. One particularly tense scene features the first 'cliffhanger' known in English literature, where Hardy literally leaves a character hanging from the edge of a cliff at the end of a chapter.

- Step into the famous cliff hanger scene at Poole Museum

Short stories

The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion

from *Wessex Tales*

This is a great introduction to Thomas Hardy. A tender love story between a Dorset girl and a handsome, homesick Hussar. It is set on the downland above Weymouth during the Napoleonic Wars, when the town was in its heyday. Its themes encompass selfishness, commitment, freedom, social opinion, love and loss.

A Tradition of 1804

Hardy picked up this legend that Napoleon Bonaparte was once spotted coming ashore at Lulworth Cove by a shepherd, as he planned his invasion of England. He turned it into this short story, preserving an element of Dorset folk memory forever.



A Mere Interlude

from *A Changed Man and Other Tales*

A young woman from the Isles of Scilly, now a teacher in Torquay, has an offer of marriage from a rich older man in the Isles. She leaves her job to travel to the Isles to marry him. On her way home, in Penzance, she meets an old sweetheart. They decide to get married and travel to the Isles to tell her parents that the marriage to the rich neighbour is off. Before departing, the young man goes for a swim, but is lost at sea. She travels to the Isles and marries the rich man. On honeymoon in Penzance, she gets a big surprise.

The Waiting Supper

This is a tale of the different forms of love and relationship that develop between two people over time. When a wealthy young woman falls in love with a poor farmer, her family forbid the match. She is encouraged to reject him and instead marries a wealthy man. The new husband spends much of his time abroad and, whilst staying loyal to him, a deep friendship develops between the woman and her first lover. A thought-provoking tale, with an unexpected twist.

To Please His Wife

from *Life's Little Ironies*

This is the tale of two girls in Poole, good friends, who are in love with the same young seaman. Home from the sea, he marries one of them and they open a small business and have two sons. The other girl marries a wealthy man. The sailor however, longs for the sea and the money it brings. To please his wife, he goes off with his sons to Newfoundland and is away for many years, believed lost. His wife becomes very poor but is befriended by her wealthy friend. Eventually he returns, or so she thinks.



Poems

- Great Things
- When I Set Out for Lyonesse
- Drummer Hodge
- The Going of the Battery*
- The Man He Killed*
- Beeny Cliff
- The Voice
- In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'



Modern novels influenced by Hardy

One Day by David Nicholls

This love story, spread over two decades, was based on the concept in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* that our lives can be defined by a single moment.

Winter by Christopher Nicholson

November, 1926: The elderly Thomas Hardy and his devoted middle-aged wife Florence await the visit of an actress leading an amateur production of *Tess*. The arrival of this beautiful ambitious young woman quickly threatens their idyllic life in the countryside. *Winter* is a profound examination of love and desire, and their attendant hopes and disappointments.

* Find this in the exhibition!

Rural Wessex

Dorset Museum

Hardy once wrote that his novels were written to speak for the oppressed and voiceless. His countryside upbringing gave him a strong awareness of the social inequalities of the time, and also a desire to fight for the rights of animals (wild and domestic). These stories give a sense of the characters who peopled Wessex and the animals their lives were entwined with.

Novels

Far from the Madding Crowd

Published in 1874, this novel made Hardy into an English treasure. Set in fictional Wessex, it follows the life and loves of headstrong, powerful, refreshingly independent farm owner Bathsheba Everdene. With three suitors, Bathsheba's life becomes entwined with each of their troubles, and rural life is muddled with hardships, will Bathsheba be blessed with a happy ending?



- See the original manuscript and step into a scene from the novel at Dorset Museum

The Mayor of Casterbridge

Hardy based this novel on two real-life stories - a man who sold his wife and another who took a vow of temperance. We meet the tragic figure of Michael Henchard, the mayor of Casterbridge and follow his rise and fall. In spite of his faults, you can't help feeling a huge amount of sympathy for him. Set in the ancient town of Casterbridge (Dorchester), and the landscape is haunted by the ghosts of Roman Durnovaria.

- See the original manuscript on display at Dorset Museum

Short stories

A Few Crusted Characters

from *Life's Little Ironies*

Amusing observations of rural life in the Piddle Valley. Hilarious escapades and all related by passengers on a carrier van returning home from a shopping trip to Dorchester. These tales see Thomas Hardy's lighter side but also give insight into the social history of a rapidly changing world.

Fiddler of the Reels

from *Life's Little Ironies*

Set in London and Dorset around 1851, the time of the advent of the railways and the Great Exhibition. Wat Ollamore is a musician - attractive, enigmatic and a womaniser with the power to charm. Car'line Aspent is a pretty, unsophisticated country girl.

Mesmerised by Wat she rejects her betrothed Ned Hipcroft. But when she finds she is pregnant, she seeks Ned in London and he supports her and her child. When the Ned and Carl'line return to Dorset, history repeats itself with an intriguing and unexpected end to the tale.

Poems

- The Puzzled Game Birds*
- Compassion: An Ode*
- A Popular Personage at Home
- We Field-Women
- Domicilium
- Old Furniture



Modern novels influenced by Hardy

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

Collins' strong female lead character Katniss Everdene was named after Hardy's independent female farmer Bathsheba Everdene and drew on her spirit of self-sufficiency and independence.

Tamara Drewe by Posy Simmons

A graphic novel reimagining of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, set in a modern Dorset village with perceptive insights into modern village life. It has also been made into a film starring Gemma Arterton and Tamsin Grieg, if you fancy a quick fix of modern Wessex.

Ancient Wessex

Wiltshire Museums, Devizes

Wessex is full of ancient sites – henges, burial mounds, standing stones. Hardy loved these remnants of past people and the way they lived. In his stories, these ancient sites appear again and again – Stonehenge, Devil’s Den, Maiden Castle. Alongside them, he includes the stories and superstition that have been passed down through the generations.

Novels

Tess of the d’Urbervilles

Hardy’s Tess looks at the life of a woman who experiences something terrible at the start of her life and the way that her character and determination live through and beyond this. Throughout the book, Tess reflects on how much power we have over our own lives and how we deal with the hand that is dealt us. It was revolutionary at the time for the way it wrote about a working class woman.



- See the original manuscript and step inside the famous Stonehenge scene at Wiltshire Museum

The Return of the Native

Set on the wild heathlands of South Dorset, Clym Yeobright grew up in this desolate landscape but left to become a diamond merchant in Paris. He returns and becomes torn between the expectations of the woman he loves and the landscape to which he feels that he belongs. Based on the heath surrounding Hardy's Birthplace the descriptions paint a detailed picture of the wildlife and plants of this place he called his 'playground'.

The Woodlanders

Immersing the reader in the wooded landscape of North Dorset. It is peopled by characters like Marty South and Giles Winterbourne, who are seen to be able to speak the same language as the trees around them. When Grace Melbury returns from finishing school to Little Hintock, she has to decide whether to reconnect with her sylvan roots or pursue a life distanced from the natural world.

Short Stories

The Withered Arm

from *Wessex Tales*

A tale of jealousy, vanity, obsession and superstition among rural folks in the countryside between Dorchester and Wareham in the 1800s. Society is in transition but not for the folks here, superstitious and still immersed in the old ways. Rhoda, a poor downtrodden milkmaid and single parent, and Mrs Lodge a new bride, pretty and vain married to a prosperous farmer. A gripping tale with a surprising end.

The Three Strangers

from *Wessex Tales*

A 'rattling randy' (a Dorset dialect term for a good party used by Hardy) was in full swing on a wild wet night in an isolated cottage near Dorchester. At intervals into this cosy convivial scene of dancing and drinking to celebrate a christening come three strangers seeking shelter. It transpires that all three are interconnected in a very dramatic way, fate seems to have intervened, and the story ends with an exciting and unexpected conclusion.

What the Shepherd Saw

Described as a Christmas ghost story, this grisly tale of murder and deception is set at the ancient monument of Devil's Den, near Avebury in Wiltshire.



Poems

- The Clasped Skeletons*
- The Roman Road
- The Roman Gravemounds
- The Moth-Signal
- Weathers

** Find this in the exhibition!*

Urban Wessex

The Salisbury Museum

When Hardy was 11, the urban population officially outnumbered the rural for the first time on record. These large centres were the centre of administration, religion, education and law, but also where new ideas were circulating. Hardy's novels reflect the tensions around religion and women's equality that were everywhere in this period, and how he used his writing to bring about change.

Novels

Under the Greenwood Tree

One of the earliest (and chirpiest) novels. The Mellstock church band hear the news that change is afoot, when a new vicar arrives wanting to make his mark and modernise. The story of their trials and tribulations plays out against the romance between a band member and the new schoolmistress.

Light-hearted and playful, while giving a nostalgic view of the old bands before they were lost to the mechanisation of church music.



- See the original manuscript on display at The Salisbury Museum

Jude the Obscure

Hardy's last novel tells the heavily symbolic tragedy of Jude Fawley, a member of the rural working-class. Jude's dreams of becoming a scholar drift out of reach as he navigates life and becomes entangled with a complex woman. Scandalous when published in 1895, it is a rich and heart-wrenching piece of literature that tackles themes that are still highly relevant.



- See the original manuscript on display and step into Jude's shoes in our immersive scene at The Salisbury Museum

Short Stories

Absent-mindedness in a Parish Choir

from *Life's Little Ironies*

The church band have been out the previous night playing for a party. The next morning, they all feel a little worse for wear, and decide to warm themselves up with a drop of brandy. Chaos ensues.

The Distracted Preacher

from *Wessex Tales*

An exciting heart-warming tale of love, religion and smuggling during the 1830s among the inhabitants of a village near the coast in Dorset. Mr Stockdale is a new Methodist preacher, described by villagers as an attractive and lovable youth. He is "distracted" by Lizzie, his landlady, a lovely, young adventurous widow. As the story unfolds much excitement ensues as the smugglers take on the "Preventy Men", leaving the preacher with a moral dilemma!



Poems

- The Impercipient
- The Oxen
- The Darkling Thrush
- One We Knew



Biographies

***The Time-torn Man* by Claire Tomalin**

One of the most comprehensive but easy-to-read biographies on Hardy. A good introduction for anyone interested in learning more.

***The Dorsetshire Labourer* by Thomas Hardy**

This article by Hardy, from the 1880s, gives a real insight into what life was like in Victorian Dorset. A must-read for anyone keen on local history or wanting a glimpse of the fact behind the fiction.

***The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy* by Thomas and Florence Hardy**

Reputedly written by Hardy's second wife Florence Hardy, this collection of anecdotes, diary extracts and biography is now widely regarded to be a joint effort. It gives a very personal view of Hardy, with some nice little tidbits giving a real sense of a man behind the novel.

***Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* by Michael Millgate**

The ultimate biography of Hardy – if you want the detail, it will be here!

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