

PURBECK PERSONALITIES

Andrew Norman

The Isle of Purbeck is an area of about 60 square miles, situated in South Dorset in southern England. Although bounded by sea to the south and east, and by Poole Harbour and the River Frome to the north, it is not strictly speaking an island at all. Nevertheless, to both local people and to the tourists, who come in droves each year to visit, it may safely be said that Purbeck resembles an island paradise.

For those who wish simply to enjoy the scenery, Purbeck can offer spectacular cliffs, a large variety of sea birds, sandy beaches, rolling hills, heathlands and forests, ancient churches, and the mighty if ruined monument of Corfe Castle as its 'jewel in the crown'. For those who wish to delve deeper; however, there are other treats in store.

Every region has its association with eminent, flamboyant, or notorious characters, and Purbeck is no exception. In this volume are to be found pirates; a smuggler – who was also a churchwarden; a spirited lady who, during the English Civil War, mounted a heroic defence of Corfe Castle; a farmer, who became famous in medical circles, and a clay merchant, who was an associate of Josiah Wedgwood, and many others.

Each of the personalities highlighted helped to create, in his or her unique way, the threads, of which the colourful tapestry of Purbeck is woven. In recounting their varied lives, Dorset author Andrew Norman conjours up a fascinating galaxy of personalities to illuminate the history of this most characterful corner of England.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Norman was born in Newbury, Berkshire, UK in 1943. Having been educated at Thornhill High School, Gwelo, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he qualified in medicine at the Radcliffe Infirmary. He has two children Bridget and Thomas, by his first wife.

From 1972-83, Andrew worked as a general practitioner in Poole, Dorset, before a spinal injury cut short his medical career. He is now an established writer whose published works include biographies of Thomas Hardy, TE Lawrence, Sir Francis Drake, Adolf Hitler, Agatha Christie, Jane Austen and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Andrew was remarried to Rachel in 2005.

Andrew Norman's books are displayed on his website andrew-norman.com

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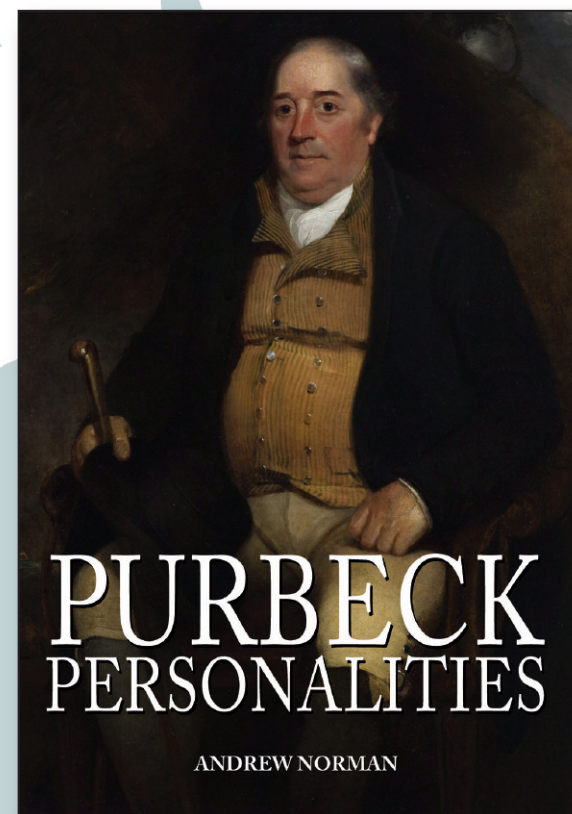
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Format: 210x148mm, hardback, 112 pages, laminated four colour cover, with over 40 mono illustrations
Price: £12.99
ISBN: 978 1 84114 900 4
Imprint: Halsgrove
Published: November 2009



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Corfe Castle's Norman keep, which has stood for over 750 years and is visible from as far away as Poole, 7 miles distant as the crow flies.



Chief Justice Sir John Banks, by Gilbert Jackson. Photo: The National Trust



The 'Great Globe', circa 1890. Photo: David Haysom Collection



Arabella Banks, Mrs Gilly, by Sir Peter Lely. Photo: The National Trust

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promptly moved his family – Lady Banks and their six sons and four daughters to Corfe Castle, taking care to stock up with a plentiful supply of food and ammunition. Their other two daughters, Mary and Alice, were married and lived in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire respectively. In that year, the Banks's youngest daughter Arabella was born at Corfe Castle.

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, Sir John was summoned to York, to join King Charles's Privy Council. By failing to oppose the Militia Bill, and thereby offending his sovereign, he demonstrated what his descendant Viola Banks described as, 'independent judgment, which amounted to stubbornness.' This Bill, which was put forward in December 1641, proposed that the King surrender both his control of the armed forces, and his right to nominate their commanders, and that Parliament should be granted these rights instead. The King refused to give this Bill his assent.

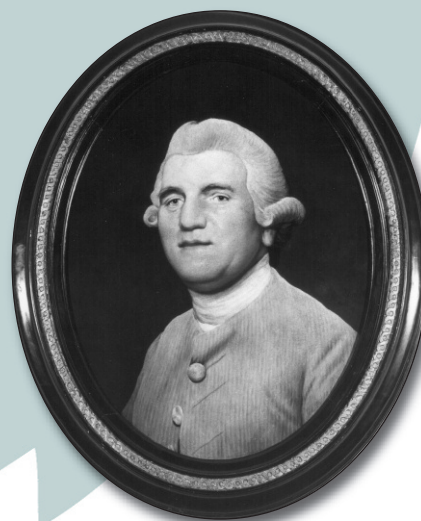
Sir John had good reasons for acting as he did, as a letter, which he wrote to Mr Green, Member of Parliament for Corfe, on the current dispute between Charles and Parliament demonstrates:

I have studied all means which way matters may be brought to a good conclusion between the king and the houses [of Parliament], all high ways of force will be destructive; and if we should have civil wars, it would make us a miserable people, and might introduce foreign powers; therefore, there is no other way left but the way of accommodatin...'

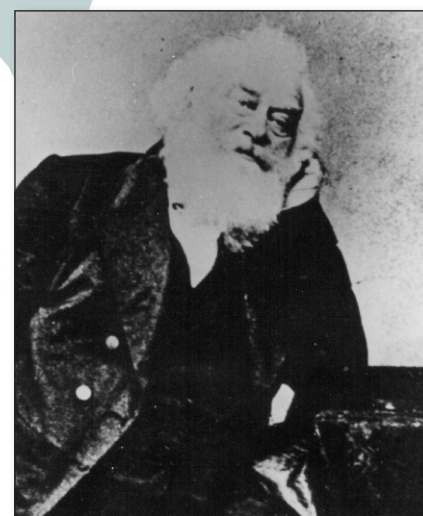
In other words, Sir John was clearly no warmonger.

In 1643, the rebel forces made their first attempt to take Corfe Castle; choosing a time when Sir John was away in Oxford, having responded to a summons from the King to muster there. The rebel commanders Sir Walter Erie and Sir Thomas Trenchard, had already achieved great success by capturing all the important towns between Poole and Lyme Regis. They chose May Day on which to attack, when they knew that every able-bodied

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Josiah Wedgwood. Photo: The Wedgwood Museum Trust, Barlaston, Staffordshire



John Mowlem. Photo: David Haysom Collection

Example of a double-page spread.