

DORSET HISTORY IN 101 OBJECTS

Terry Hearing

THIS BOOK is an account of selected objects which illustrate the threads of the History of Dorset. Dorset is full of "objects", and each one is a piece of History. The definition of the word 'object' has been taken very widely, from the tiny Mesolithic microliths to the strip fields of Portland. Some of the objects are bizarre, such as the cannonball in the wall of a ladies' lavatory in Weymouth; some are very beautiful, like the Tabernacle in Milton Abbey; some are huge, such as the prehistoric hillforts; some are mundane utilities, like roadside signposts; some are merely names like the list of the parish priests who died serving their flocks when the Black Death swept in. All have their stories, and this book looks at just one hundred and one, out of countless millions.

Each short chapter gives the flavour of the object to show its importance in the continuing story of a county rich in the remains of the lives of our predecessors. All the objects can be seen in the museums, the towns and the countryside of Dorset. Anyone reading this book can visit them all and witness at first hand these tangible testaments to the sweep of the millennia across the county.

In this profusely illustrated large-format volume, Terry Hearing opens the lid of the immense treasure chest that is Dorset, revealing some of its brightest – and occasionally most unexpected – jewels that are almost bewildering in their variety.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

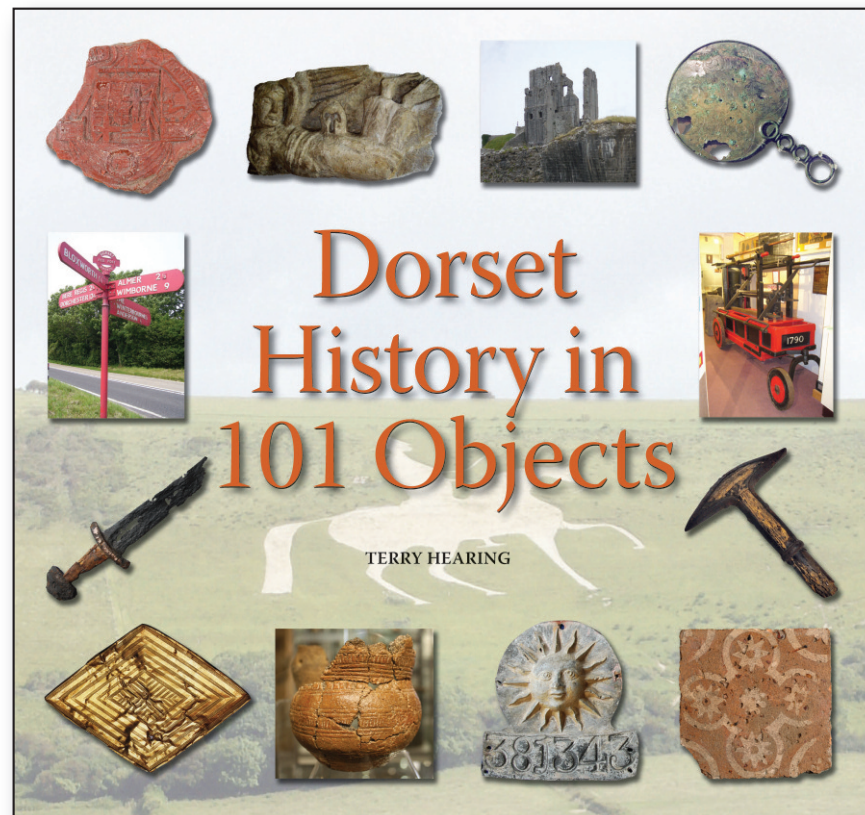
Terry Hearing was born and brought up in London. After service with the Royal Marines, an Honours degree in History at Queen Mary College, University of London, and a short acquaintance with commerce, he taught History at a London Grammar School. In 1966 he came to Dorset, becoming Principal Lecturer in History at the then Dorset Institute of Higher Education. Early retirement enabled him to concentrate on his two major interests: the Magistracy and Local History. These interests were combined in his book *Dorset Justice* (Magistrates' Association, 1999). Other works include: *Dorset Quarter Sessions 1625-1638* (Dorset Record Society, 2006); *The Dorset Horn* (Dorset Horn Sheepbreeders' Association 1990); *Dorchester Divided* (Dorchester Community Plays Association, 2002); and *History on your Doorstep* (Dorchester Rotary Club 2008).

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Bagley Road, Wellington,
Somerset TA21 9PZ
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Fax: 01823 216796
www.halsgrove.com
e-mail: sales@halsgrove.com

HALSGROVE TITLE INFORMATION



Format: Hardback, 144 pages, 238x258mm, profusely illustrated in colour throughout.
Price: £19.99
ISBN: 978 1 871164 96 1
Imprint: Dorset Books
Published: November 2012



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Above: A Mediaeval Decorated Floor Tile, Shaftesbury Abbey

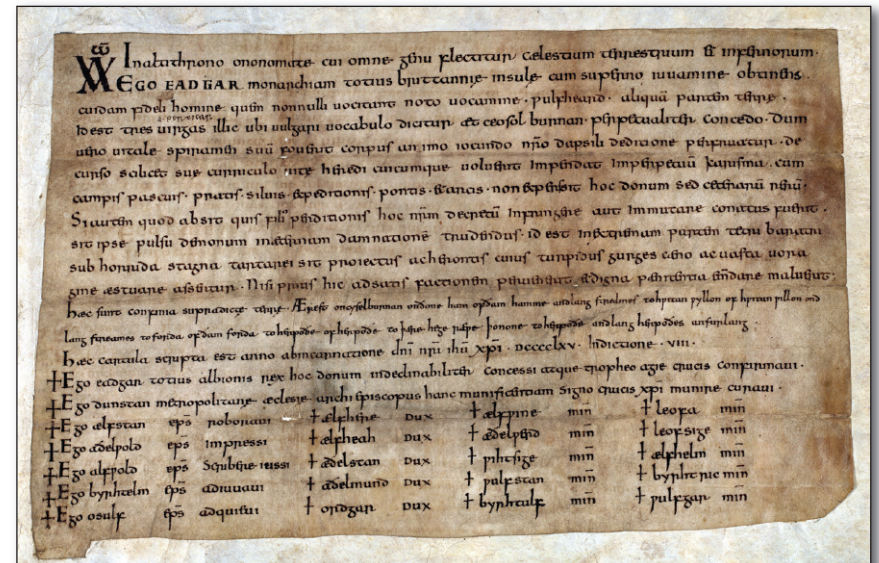
Left: A Wine Amphora, Red House Museum, Christchurch

Right: The Tarleton Helmet 1797, The Keep Military Museum, Dorchester



The White Horse, Osmington

An Anglo-Saxon Charter of 965 AD, Dorset History Centre



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An Old Stone Age Hand Axe
Poole Museum

AT A CASUAL GLANCE it might seem just an ordinary lump of flint, of the sort to be seen in fields all over Dorset and across Britain. In the ground, too, it is evidence of human culture: carefully shaped and finished to provide a vital tool - or a weapon. As such it is very significant, illustrating the lives of the first people of Dorset. Looking at this piece of flint, a huge leap of imagination is needed to picture those lives.

Travelling across the country (and attached to the European land-mass), small groups gathered fruits, nuts and roots, and hunted. They followed the herds of wild cattle, picking off weak animals. Shelter was made and temporary, unless convenient caves could be found. Fire must have accompanied their lives, with multiple hearths at every turn. Life must have been indeed 'nasty, brutish and short'.

But people survived in this way for unimaginable millennia - hundreds of thousands of years. The earliest stone tools ever discovered in Dorset are more than 300,000 years old, but in North Dorset (located to be 300,000 years) found a few years ago. Climate changes frequently altered the geography of the area we know as Dorset. The retreat of the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago led to the rise in sea level which created the Atlantic of Britain. As the cliffs along the Dorset coast crumble they reveal more and more fossilised evidence of fires far beyond the first human beings, of earth movements and land creations in a period known to geologists as the Ice-age. For our Stone Age ancestors the sea would have been a great barrier, but a valuable source of gatherable food.

For the everyday tasks of cutting wood, scraping animal skins, peeling open shellfish - some tools were essential. Specialist makers of tools and their skills to harness their products for food, such tools developed. Archaeologists find tools far from the sources of flint.

Ironvally tools were also weapons, and competition for resources would have led to fighting, but the evidence is scattered, and no one really knows. If you have the chance to handle a Stone Age hand axe, look and imagine its first owner.

Example of a double-page spread.