

DORSET – CURIOUS AND SURPRISING

Roger Guttridge

The country clergyman who eloped with a parishioner's wife... the stranded whale that became a tourist attraction on a Dorset beach... the spinster who kept her companion's body for almost three years without reporting her death. These are just three of more than thirty eyebrow-raising tales selected by Roger Guttridge for his latest book on his home county.

Some of the tales are well known but given a new treatment by the author – such as the stories of the 'fossil lady of Lyme' Mary Anning, Winston Churchill's near-fatal fall from a bridge near Poole and the mysterious skull that has sat in a west Dorset manor house for 200 years. Other stories will be less familiar – such as the hushed-up royal birth in a seaside town, the squire's son who used a coffin filled with stones to fake his own death and the county's link with the Russian Revolution, the 'Father of Chemistry' and 'the man who could have been Darwin'.

The book includes spooky mysteries like the Durweston poltergeist and the Beaminster ghost of John Daniel, murder cases such as the Sherborne poisoner and Captain Burdett of Wimborne and tales of great Dorset characters such as the lecherous squire of Woodlands and the reformed horse-thief and highwayman who became a poet, doctor and lawyer.

Forty-five years as a Dorset journalist, author and historian have given Roger Guttridge an unparalleled knowledge of the county's past and a rare ability to tell its tales.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



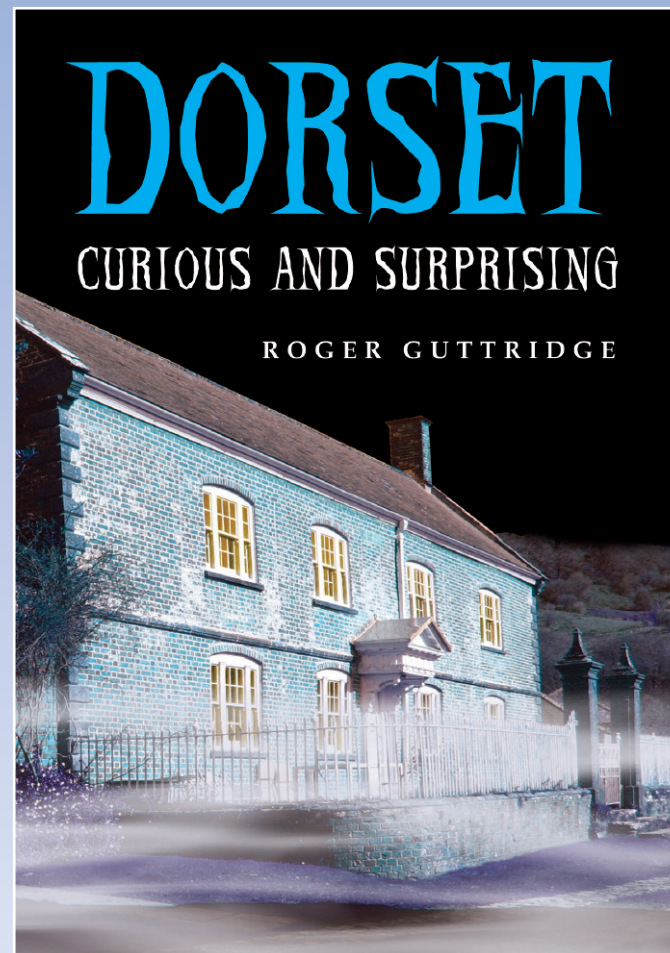
Roger Guttridge was brought up in the Sturminster Newton area of North Dorset and educated at Blandford Grammar School before beginning a career in local journalism. *Dorset - Curious and Surprising* is his nineteenth book as author or co-author. He has also edited several books by other authors.

Roger's other journalistic speciality is swimming. He is a former press officer with the Great Britain swim team and has written about the sport for many publications, including the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* and *Swimming Times* magazine.

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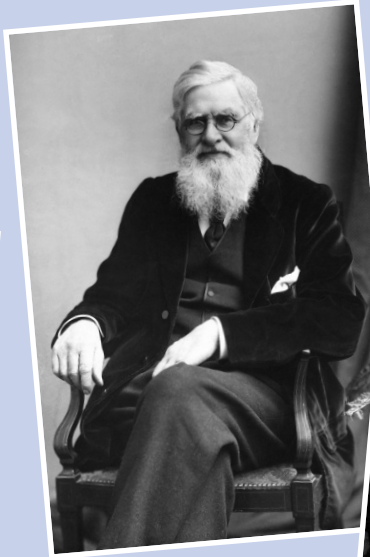


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Right: Alfred Russel Wallace

Below: Charlotte Bryant



Mary Anning, the 'fossil lady of Lyme Regis'



A rare, faded picture of Russian revolutionaries at Tuckton House

The whale on Boscombe beach



Example of a double-page spreads.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Reformed Highwayman

If Henry Hastings has a rival for the title of the most colourful character in Dorset's past, it is surely John Clavell, a man of many talents, who used them in an extraordinary variety of ways. He packed a great deal into his forty-two years and is probably best known for his career as a burglar, horse thief and highwayman. But although his 'ill-led life', as he called it, earned him a death sentence, he was later reprieved and turned over a new leaf to make his way as a poet, dramatist, doctor and lawyer.

Clavell – born at Glanvilles Wootton, near Sherborne, in 1601 – has long been known as a 'gentleman highwayman'. He is mentioned in passing by the eighteenth-century Dorset historian John Hutchins and by the authors of many books on highwaymen. But until relatively recent times, knowledge of him remained hazy. Most of what we know about him today is down to John Pafford, former Librarian at the University of London, who lived at Bricport from his retirement in 1971 until his death at Dorchester in 1996 aged ninety-six. Fragments of information gathered over a sixty-year period enabled Dr Pafford to piece together Clavell's story.

For John Pafford, the picture began to emerge in 1932, when a seventeenth-century manuscript arrived at the British Museum for identification. 'It was a play called *The Soddie'd Citizen*, which had long been known by name but which no-one had seen,' said Dr Pafford told me in 1993 following publication of his book on Clavell's life and works. 'I was asked to edit it and was able to show that it was pretty certainly the work of John Clavell.'

The five-act play, based on Clavell's life as a highwayman reformed, was published in 1936 and gradually other material began to come to light. Whenever any information came his way, Dr

Roundchinneys, John Clavell's home at Glanville's Wootton

Pafford made a note of it. Over the years, he developed a 'certain admiration' for his subject. 'He was constantly active and he pulled himself together and made good,' he said. 'I have a lot of respect for him, although he was boastful and cocky and in some ways never grew up.'

Clavell, the fourth of five children and the only surviving boy, was born into a good family described by Hutchins as boasting an 'antiquity not to be equalled in this county and very rarely in any other'. He was the nephew and heir apparent of Sir William Clavell, owner of Smedmore House near Kimmeridge in the Isle of Purbeck, who seems to have shared some of John's energy and eccentricities. Sir William was a scholar and poet and a gentleman soldier knighted for his part in dealing with an Irish rebellion. He was also a less-than-successful entrepreneur whose various schemes – the extraction of alum from Kimmeridge cliffs, the production of salt by boiling sea water and the use of Kimmeridge shale to fuel a glassworks – brought him to the brink of ruin.

John Clavell's home was the Manor House at Glanville's Wootton, later called Golden Grove and now known as Roundchinneys. It stands a mile north-east of the parish church. His early home life was not as stable as it might have been. There were financial problems and a document dated 1617 states that his father, also John, 'hath for many years past lived from his wife and with a woman whom he keepeth in his house, for which he hath been publicly reproved by the Justices of Assizes'. Such was the seriousness of

John Clavell aged twenty-five

Bettiscombe Manor

