

# THOMAS HARDY - BOCKHAMPTON AND BEYOND

Dr Andrew Norman

Not far from Dorsetshire's county town of Dorchester – in the hamlet of Higher Bockhampton – stands a thatched cottage situated on the edge of a wild heath. Here, in the year 1840, Thomas Hardy was born.

During his childhood and youth, Hardy immersed himself in the beautiful and evocative countryside which surrounded him. He learned the violin, his family being musicians and members of the nearby Stinsford church 'quire'. Even as a youth there were indications that Hardy had a gift for writing. Furthermore, the home and environment which Hardy enjoyed for much of the first thirty-four years of his life, including its folk and folklore, provided a backdrop and inspiration for many of the famous novels for which he is known today.

Doyen of Dorset historians, Andrew Norman, looks in detail at the home and environment which inspired Hardy to become the towering giant of English letters. Along the way he uncovers fascinating new information about the young Thomas Hardy, including the revelation of the identity of at least one of Hardy's illegitimate children.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

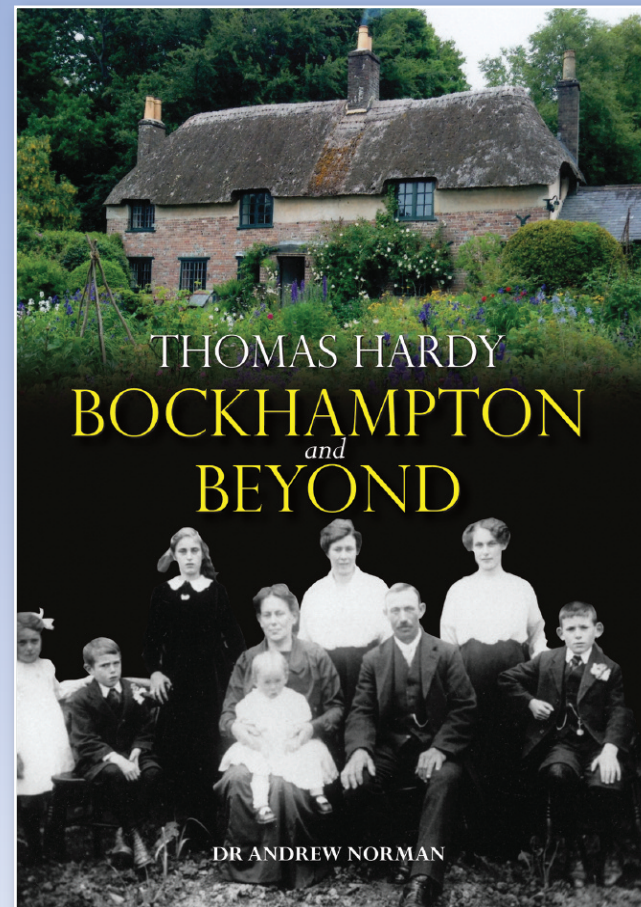
Andrew Norman was born in Newbury, Berkshire, UK in 1943. Having been educated at Thornhill High School, Gwelo, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Midsomer Norton Grammar School, and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he qualified in medicine at the Radcliffe Infirmary. He has two children Bridget and Thomas, by 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 Charles Darwin, Winston Churchill, Thomas Hardy, T.E. Lawrence, Adolf Hitler, Agatha Christie, Enid Blyton, Beatrix Potter, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Robert Mugabe. Andrew married his second wife Rachel, in 2005.

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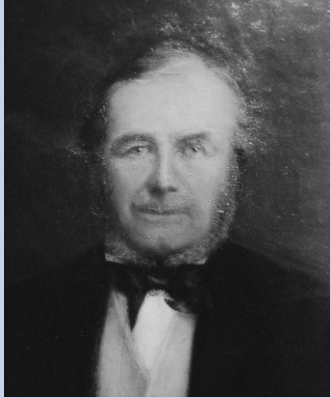
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Thomas Hardy Senior. Painting by Mary Hardy. Photo: Dorset County Museum



Jemima Hardy. Painting by Mary Hardy. Photo: Dorset County Museum



Augusta and Charles Willsher with their eight children. Top row: Ethel May, Gertrude Ellen, Hilda Kate ('Cissie'). Bottom row: Florence Mary, Harry John ('Jack'), Augusta holding Winifred Avis, husband Charles, Frank Harold, Percy Charles. Photo: Robert Carew



Above right: Statue of Thomas Hardy by Eric Henri Kennington, Dorchester. Photo: Rodney Poulsen

Below: Higher Bockhampton: the Cottage. Photo: Heather Cowper

Example of a double-page spread.


*One*  
**BIRTH: EARLY LIFE**

**T**homas Hardy (III), the subject of this volume and the third generation of his family to bear that name, was born on 2 June 1840 in a remote cottage (he himself preferred to use the word 'house') in the hamlet of Higher Bockhampton in rural Dorsetshire.


His entry into the world was an inauspicious one, and his life almost ended even before it had properly begun, for the newly-born Thomas was 'thrown aside as dead'. 'Dead! Stop a minute,' cried the monthly nurse (whose duty it was to attend the women of the district during their confinement). 'He's alive enough, sure!' and she managed to revive the seemingly lifeless infant.

Shortly afterwards, when he was sleeping in his cradle, his mother Jemima, discovered 'a large snake curled up upon his breast'. The snake was also asleep. Because of its size, it may be deduced that this was probably a harmless grass snake, rather than a poisonous adder, which would have been smaller!

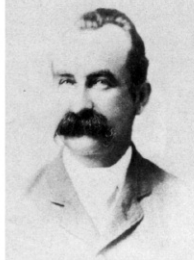
Thomas III was the firstborn of his family. The following year, 1841, his




*Jemima Hardy and infant Thomas.*  
Photo: Dorset County Museum




*Mary Hardy.*  
Photo: Dorset County Museum



*Henry Hardy.*  
Photo: Dorset County Museum



*Katherine Hardy - 'Kate'.*  
Photo: Dorset County Museum



*Higher Bockhampton: the Cottage.* Photo: The National Trust

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