

REVISED AND UPDATED EDITION

THE HARDY WAY

A 19TH-CENTURY PILGRIMAGE



MARGARET MARANDE

Copyright © 2015 Margaret Marande

The right of Margaret Marande to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 1995 by Dorset Publishing Company

This second edition published in 2015 by Blue Birch, Dorset

Maps courtesy of ©OpenStreetMap (www.openstreetmap.org/copyright) adapted by Ben Pyrke to show Thomas Hardy locations. Original maps based upon Ordnance Survey first editions, reprinted with some additions from 1811, now out of copyright. Illustrations collected by the late Rodney Legg. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, computerised, recorded, photocopied or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Cataloguing in Publication Data is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-9931628-0-0

Designed by Fiona Pike, Pike Design

Printed by Printondemand-worldwide

Published by Blue Birch, Dorset
37 South Street,
Fontmell Magna,
Shaftesbury,
Dorset SP7 0PD

FROM SHAFTESBURY TO STURMINSTER NEWTON

Leave Shaftesbury via Bimport. Just before the Ambulance station, opposite Magdalene Lane, turn right on a path to Castle Hill. Turn left along hill with a wonderful panorama over the Blackmore Vale, Wiltshire and Somerset and ahead Duncliffe Hill, a rounded wooded hummock. Left is a green with picnic facilities, while under the hill nestles the village of **Enmore Green**. Before a kissing gate turn left back to the road where cross the entrance to Castle Gardens to footpath straight ahead which soon descends with beeches on the left. Follow this steeply down to field. The earthworks of a fortress probably founded by King Alfred are on the right. Join lane. Ignore Breach Lane but continue ahead for a short way to footpath to the right across Breach Common. Follow this straight on until it joins a road, Foyle Hill where turn right. If very muddy avoid the footpath and come to the same point by following the narrow lane downhill until it joins Foyle Hill.

The first mile or so from here is on a pleasant minor road, a descent into the **Blackmore Vale**, through which the route passes for nearly twenty miles. Centuries ago this was forest but it is now farming country, a patchwork of fields on heavy soil that makes walking hard work after rain as it can be muddy and flooded from the many meandering streams. Twisting lanes are hemmed in by high hedges, wondrously luxuriant in late spring and early summer when small white umbrellas of cow parsley thicken the grass. There are few hills, but southwards, in the distance, is the ridge of the North Dorset Downs, the sentinels of Okeford Hill, Bulbarrow and Nettlecombe Tout, while to the west Little Minterne Hill and High Stoy mark the end of the Blackmore Vale section of the walk.

Continue down **Foyle Hill** past triangle in lane and on for a good half mile to opposite Thomas's Farm. Take farm track to the right to gate onto hillside meadow. Follow on left diagonal to top corner of field where you enter a nature reserve managed by the Woodland Trust. **Duncliffe Hill** consists of two mounds of greensand covered with mainly deciduous woodland resplendent at bluebell time. Unfortunately it is often very muddy.

BLACKMORE VALE/BLACKMOOR VALE/VALE OF THE LITTLE DAIRIES/FOREST OF THE WHITE HART

A variety of names, but this is above all Tess country, where she spent her childhood and which was *terribly beautiful* to her when she returned from Trantridge. It was the age before motor transport and *The Vale of Blackmoor* was to her the world, and its inhabitants the races thereof. Hardy describes it from the North Dorset Downs:

This fertile and sheltered tract of country, in which the fields are never brown and the springs never dry ... Here, in the valley, the world seems to be constructed upon a smaller and more delicate scale; the fields are mere paddocks, so reduced that from this height their hedgerows appear a network of dark green threads overspreading the paler green of the grass. The atmosphere beneath is languorous, and is so tinged with azure that what artists call the middle distance partakes also of that hue, while the horizon beyond is of the deepest ultramarine.

Hardy recalls that in former times the Vale was known as **The Forest of the White Hart**, from a legend that in the thirteenth century a beautiful white hart was killed against Henry III's wishes and a heavy fine imposed on the offender.

Tess trod the road from Shaston to Marlott (Marnhull) when she returned from the d'Urberville mansion – such distances being the norm for pedestrians in those days.

DUNCLIFFE HILL

In *Jude the Obscure* Richard Phillotson walks from Shaston to **Leddenton (Gillingham)**. As he descends into *the low alluvial beds* between the towns, he sees **Duncliffe Hill** on the left. Hardy quotes William Barnes:

*Where Duncliffe is the travellers mark
And cloty Stour's a-rolling dark.*

The walk soon joins the valley of the River Stour.

MARNHULL/MARLOTT

Marlott features largely in *Tess* as her childhood home and the place to which she returns from time to time in the course of her vicissitudes. The leasehold of the Durbeyfield cottage expires on the death of Tess's father, John, leaving the family

Follow good track ahead and then soon another to left; follow this to a T junction where turn left on undulating track to the south-west tip of wood. Go through gate to follow hedge to gate in top corner of field. To get to this you might have to circumvent farm machinery and nettles! Continue straight ahead to join track to houses and lane.

Continue straight ahead for a few yards on lane to Woodville then take footpath over stile to left over a couple of small fields following a fairly clear path ahead to bridge over ditch into a large field. The path follows a right diagonal but it might be easier to follow border to the right then left until towards the end of field at junction of paths cross double stile through hedge to right. Continue on slight right diagonal down dip, to cross brook and pass right hand end of barns then back towards hunting gate. Through here turn immediately right through big gate with footpath sign. Follow across field to double stile through hedge to left then through field gate straight ahead to next hedge where turn left alongside it. This path exits onto lane at Goods Farm. Cross lane to go straight ahead through farm. Follow concrete track past yurts on left after which the route becomes a grassy track. Follow this into fields to soon curve right with hedge on right and continue along side of several fields until reaching small wooden footbridge in hedge ahead through to lakes. These are part of Todber Manor Fishing Lakes. Pass between the two lakes, through car park to slight uphill track. Follow this to junction of tracks where go straight across to footpath between trees. This emerges to Church Close, **Todber**. Turn right past church and a T junction to take lane to left signposted Fifehead Magdalen to the B3092.

Across the road join a footpath straight ahead alongside hedge. Along the next stretch be careful not to miss stiles partly concealed in hedges! At the end of a small wood on the left continue straight on to a stile. Over this another stile will soon be seen in the hedge on left, cross into field. The right of way continues on a slight left diagonal to reach another rather hidden stile in the hedge ahead. You may have to skirt the field to the right to reach this. Continue straight across the next field to further stile then towards Ashley farm buildings. Keep these on your left to go straight on to end of farm and further gate. With **Marnhull Church** ahead go straight across field, through gate and up side of field to a stile in left-hand hedge where bear right up narrow path to Nash Lane, Pillwell. Soon turn left into the large scattered village of **Marnhull**.



Salisbury Street, Shaftesbury in the winter of 1886. Over 700 feet above sea level, the town experiences severe winters with more than its share of snow. Photograph: Reverend Thomas Perkins



The Crown, Marnhull has a 'pure drop' bar which links it with *Tess*. Marnhull is the largest village in Dorset, described by Hardy as *long and broken*. Drawing: Douglas Snowdon

The village has some very attractive seventeenth and eighteenth century houses and farms. The oldest house **Senior's Farm**, west of the churchyard, which dates from the early sixteenth century with tiny latticed windows and a very large chimney. The fifteenth century tower of the **Church of St Gregory** stands out as a solid landmark across flat, surrounding farmland. The church has several interesting features, including impressive nave and wagon roofs. (Key obtainable at the new rectory opposite Senior's Farm).

Marnhull was once called **Marhill** because of the white clay or marl found around here which, exposed to air, hardens into the creamy limestone of which many of the buildings are constructed.

In Hardy's time there were two breweries and a malthouse. He visited here in May 1877 for the fortieth anniversary celebrations for Queen Victoria's reign. He also walked from Sturminster Newton and noted the birdsong along the way, the thrushes and blackbirds and the *bullfinch sings from a tree with a metallic sweetness piercing as a fife*.

Leave Marnhull from the **Crown Hotel**. Walk a few yards towards Todber where, opposite a house called The Barn, a footpath enters the farmyard opposite. This passes straight ahead through the farmyard but as gates here are often closed the farmer prefers walkers to bear left round the farm buildings with a slurry pit on left to reach a farm road straight ahead. Follow this down slope and where the road goes left bear right through a gate to follow a generous grass verge straight on and then left to the first stile in hedge to cross a further field in the direction of houses — the next stile is in the left-hand corner of the field and leads to a side lane. Go left for a few yards on the main road before turning left through a small gate into a sloping field. Cross on a left diagonal to the road via a stile in the hedge. Turn left then soon right into Carraway Lane, past impressively clipped yews in a cottage garden, where take path into field on the left. Cross diagonally to the right towards thatched **Tess Cottage** where through gate turn left to cross lane over stile into field where bend back on garden side with good view of cottage. At the end of hedge keep on to cross stiles in hedge ahead then turn left with houses on right. Go through gate into field to cross more or less straight towards telegraph poles and barns clearly visible on rising ground ahead over the next field. Cross a rather concealed stile in the hedge ahead accessed by a huge lump

homeless. Hardy had strong views about such leases and used *Tess* and other novels to project these. The cottage in question, now called Tess Cottage, can be found to the right of the Marnhull to Sturminster Newton road just north of Walton Elm crossroads and is on the route. It is very well maintained, unlike one imagines the home of the feckless Durbeyfield parents to have been.

The **Pure Drop Inn** which John Durbeyfield tells Pa'son Tringham serves a *very pretty brew in tap – though, to be sure, not so good as at Rolliver's* is the **Crown Hotel**, near the church, which today serves an excellent menu. **Rolliver's**, that disreputable ale-house/off-licence that sold drink on the premises in a *large bedroom upstairs, the window of which was thickly curtained with a great woollen shawl lately discarded by the landlady Mrs Rolliver* is arguably **Old Lamb House**, a solid detached house that stands on the west side of Walton Elm crossroads. For many years its masonry was rendered but it has recently been stripped to the stone beneath – a decided improvement.

The old rectory opposite the church is where Tess pleads with the parson to give her dead child a Christian burial in spite of its unorthodox baptism. The burial takes place in a *shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow*, in the churchyard of **St Gregory's Church**. Nearby is **Marnhull School**, built in 1874, where Tess *passed the Sixth Standard ... under a London-trained mistress*.

The route now leads to Sturminster on paths not far from the river. This was the *back lane* by which Tess returned sadly home from the Vale of Great Dairies after her parting from Angel Clare. She walked towards Marlott via **Cutt Mill** and **Yardgrove Farm**, having left her luggage with the turnpike keeper on the Stourcastle (Sturminster) road.

STURMINSTER NEWTON/STOURCASTLE

The **River Stour** at **Sturminster** was a source of great pleasure to the Hardys:

Rowed on the Stour in the evening, the sun setting up the river ... A fishy smell from the numerous eels and other fish beneath. Mowers salute us. Rowed among the water-lilies to gather them. Their long ropy stems. Passing the island drove out a flock of swallows from the bushes and sedge, which had gone there to roost. Gathered meadow-sweet. Rowed with difficulty through the weeds, the rushes on the border standing like palisades against the bright sky ... A cloud in the sky like a huge quill-pen.

of flat Marnhull stone. The path leads uphill across field towards very large tree. If field is planted follow hedge to the right and then turn left up to the same point. Cross the lane to pass to the left of farm buildings joining the Stour Valley Way. Continue with hedge on left towards clump of trees with good views ahead over the Blackmore Vale to Bulbarrow Hill. Go through two gates by trees, passing pond on right. Follow fence across large field to two gates. In next field turn right down hedge to bottom corner of field then through hedge to turn left along side of field to lane. Turn right.

The ruin of **Cutt Mill** can be seen on the river bank at the bottom of lane. This was once a popular picnic and swimming spot. Back up the lane take the bridleway southwards signposted Wood Lane $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. At the end of a pleasant deciduous plantation where the track bears left carry straight on through small wood to emerge to a wide bridleway along the side of field. Turn right and follow straight ahead to cross an all weather gallop. Bear right then twice left to pass Wood Lane Stables, Olympic eventer William Fox Pitt's state of the art training establishment. Turn left on the lane then soon right to take a footpath signposted Sturminster Newton. Follow a farm track to wood where bear right and then straight ahead down side of field. Enter thin strip of wood at corner of field, over a tiny brook, to pass through a new kissing gate to open country above the River Stour. An old, half-demolished railway bridge over the river can be seen ahead. The path soon rejoins the Stour Valley way from the right to lead straight ahead into **Sturminster Newton**. This stretch of the route often floods so you may have to branch off left to join the B3092 into the town. In dry conditions you can veer towards the river to view **Colber Bridge**, a white footbridge built in 1841. Hardy enjoyed walking here when he lived with Emma in Riverside Villa from 1876-78. This large Victorian semi-detached stone house is to the left of the path on the edge of the recreation ground in a superb situation high on a cliff overlooking the river. A blue plaque marks the Hardys' occupancy. *The Return of the Native* was written in a first floor room overlooking the river. Hardy later wrote that the years in Sturminster were the happiest of their marriage. They enjoyed the rural atmosphere of the place as a contrast to life in London. In 1916 and again in 1922 Hardy returned to visit Riverside Villa to recall his time here with Emma over forty years before.

