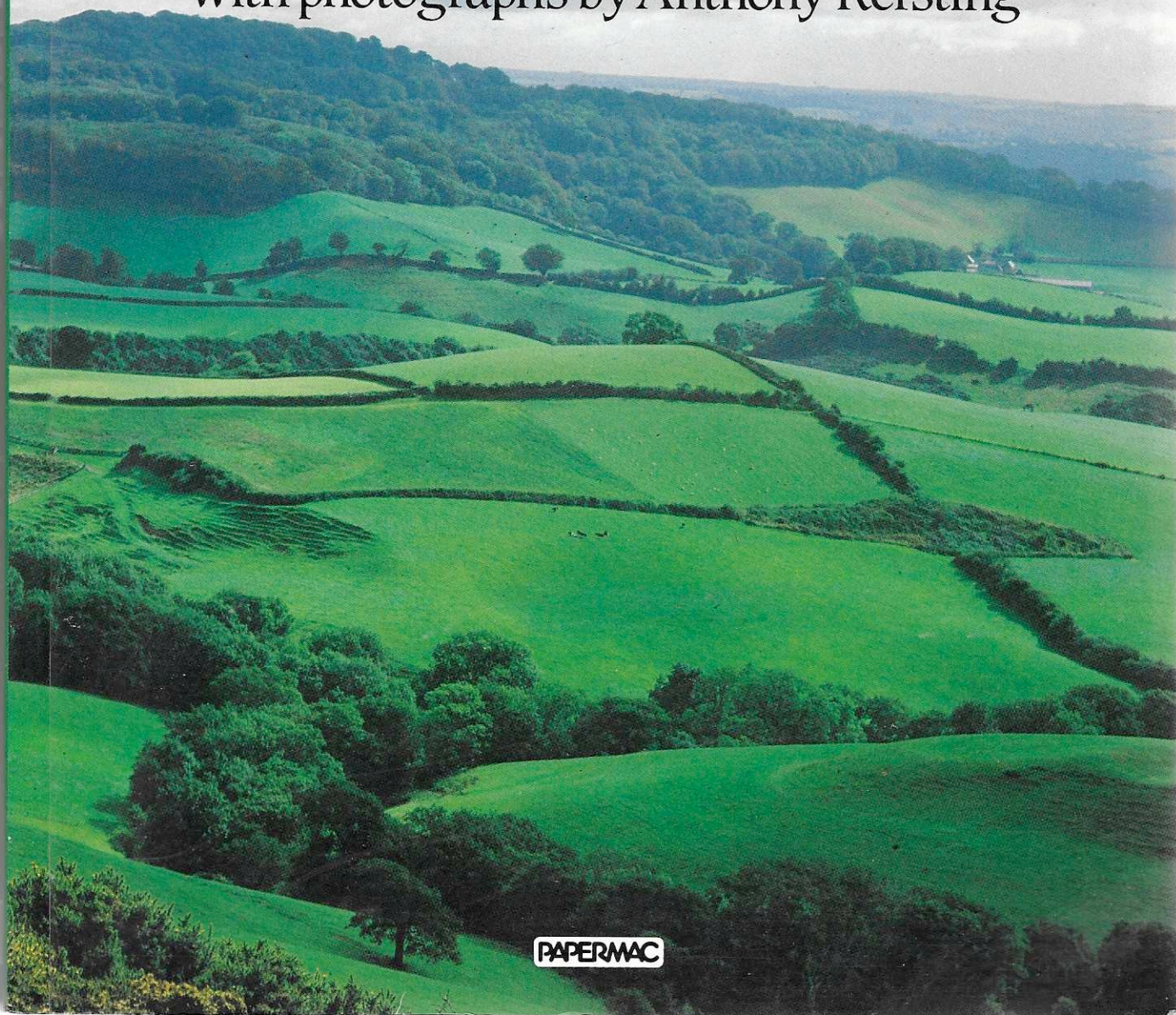


# HARDY'S WESSEX

Desmond Hawkins  
with photographs by Anthony Kersting



PAPERMAC

Bumps of froth float down like swans in front of our house. At the arches of the large stone bridge the froth has accumulated and lies like hillocks of salt against the bridge; then the arch chokes, and after a silence coughs out the air and froth, and gurgles on.


In the record of his years at Sturminster Newton Hardy has left another sketch of life there which is worth quoting for its description of girls dancing – much as they dance in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* after the club walk:

June 28. Being Coronation Day there are games and dancing on the green at Sturminster Newton. The stewards with white rosettes. One is very anxious, fearing that while he is attending to the runners the leg-of-mutton on the pole will go wrong; hence he walks hither and thither with a compressed countenance and eyes far ahead.

The pretty girls, just before a dance, stand in inviting positions on the grass. As the couples in each figure pass near where their immediate friends loiter, each girl-partner gives a laughing glance at such friends, and whirls on.

While he was living at Sturminster Newton Hardy walked to Marnhull, which he later named as 'Marlott', the village in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* where the Durbeyfields lived. It is a rather surprising choice since it is so untypical of the villages in this part of Dorset. For one thing it is remarkably large – the largest village in the county and surely one of the largest in all Wessex. It is also difficult to bring into focus: it is nearer to being a federation of detached wards than an organic entity. The church and the Crown Inn form one unit, with the Crown signalling its connection with the road through the sign of its 'Pure Drop' bar. Another and quite separate section comprises several shops and even a couple of banks; and patient exploration reveals other facets of what Hardy described as a 'long and broken' and 'dispersed' village. Just how, over the centuries, it came to take its present shape is not easy to comprehend.

Opinions of Marnhull differ sharply. After confessing 'I always get lost here and never know which is quite the centre of Marnhull', Monica Hutchings in *Inside Dorset* described it in 1965 as 'a most beautiful village with many good Ham stone houses'. For Sir



*The weir and mill  
at Sturminster  
Newton*