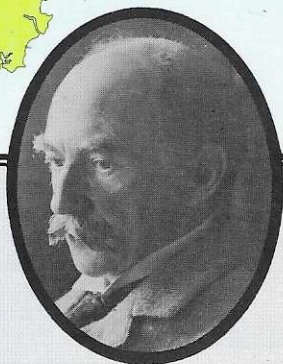
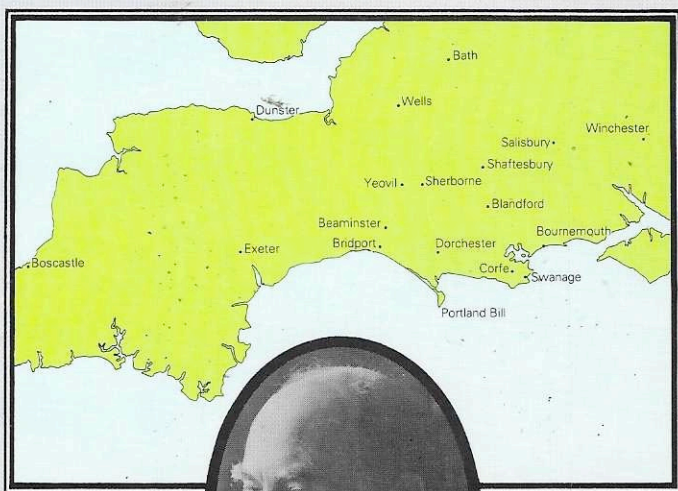


THE HARDY GUIDES

HERMANN LEA

Touring companion of Thomas Hardy



VOLUME ONE

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

JUDE THE OBSCURE

THE WOODLANDERS

A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

and other works

The original guide to the West Country
approved by Thomas Hardy



Stinsford. It should be remembered that Hardy drew the map of the country, and the people still alive, or only recently dead, were therefore, he would blur the lines, to frustrate literary detectives seeking the real places. Perhaps the most obvious example is the village of Melbury Bubb in *The Woodlanders*, a novel set in the Melbury Bubb district of Dorset. It was the village from which the Ilchester family originally came and close to the ancestral home of Lord Ilchester. As Hardy was a friend of the Ilchester family and had no wish to upset any of its members, he accordingly made topographical corrections in succeeding editions of *The Woodlanders* and distanced Hintock House from the Melbury Bubb district. Finally, in the case of two or three of his localities, even Hardy was uncertain about the original place that he once had in mind when he came to identify the invented names for Lea. [The Hardy-Lea correspondence displays such an uncertainty over *A Group of Noble Dames*.]

Of Lea's identifications some ninety-nine per cent have always been accepted as canonical. Of the remaining one per cent it has sometimes been contended that Lea was in error. In my opinion this is a misunderstanding of the nature of Lea's *opus*. *Thomas Hardy's Wessex* is the identification as wished by Hardy himself. As regards the contested identifications we are dealing either with a fictional building whose features are drawn from two or more real buildings, or a protected location as stated above. Naturally it is possible to try to clarify Hardy's obfuscation, which entails a close comparison of Hardy's original manuscript with several serial versions and early book editions of the novels and short stories. The bibliography below gives details of some of these textual studies. It should be noted that Hardy did not originally conceive a complete and consistent topography for his fictional Wessex, letting it evolve as he created the works. Subsequently a certain amount of standardisation was imposed by him in the definitive *Wessex Edition* (Macmillan, 1912).

Thomas Hardy's Wessex is the product of a literary friendship and a singularly happy set of coincidences: Lea loved Hardy's works; he was an enthusiastic photographer and lived in Dorset; he had the time and opportunity to travel through Wessex from end to end, and he received the active help of Hardy himself. Though there are critics who disparage Hardy because his fictional plots sometimes revolve on coincidence, such critics are usually blind to the myriad coincidences, both malign and benign, which frequently attend human endeavours.

I have one concluding thought. We are living in a period

of rapid and violent change. Perhaps the best tribute that we can actively pay to Thomas Hardy today is to take *Thomas Hardy's Wessex* as one of our textbooks of what should be protected and conserved in the West of England. The landscape should not be further scarred. The buildings mentioned in Lea's book should be designated and scheduled as protected, if not already so listed, and while this may incur the wrath of the developers it will at least elicit the gratitude of our children.

G.S.C.