

Marnhull's Hardy Trail

Thomas Hardy re-imagined Marnhull as 'Marlott', home of the Durbeyfield family and birthplace of Tess. He visited the village on more than one occasion, particularly while living at nearby Sturminster Newton in 1876/7. Those whom Hardy refers to as 'hunters for the real' should bear in mind the author's words: 'no detail is guaranteed...the portraiture of fictitiously named towns and villages was only suggested by real places, and wantonly wanders from inventorial descriptions of them...'

1. Entrance to Marnhull

The Hardy Way enters Marnhull from Shaftesbury and Todber north east of Ashley Farm (GR 786196) and arrives at the Nash Lane junction with Sodom Lane at Pilwell (GR 781191). The route proceeds up Church Hill to The Crown public house on the B3092. There is an alternative route via the Crown estate.

2. 'The Pure Drop Inn'

The Crown was the inspiration for Hardy's The Pure Drop Inn (GR 782187). It is here that 'Jack' Durbeyfield went to celebrate the newly imparted knowledge of his family ancestry and noble connection to the d'Urbervilles following his encounter with Parson Tringham on the road from Shaston (Shaftesbury) before continuing his journey home to share the good news. The Crown is an ideal base from which to visit other locations. It has a good car park, tavern and B&B facilities. Its dedicated Hardy Room has a collection of books on Hardy's life and work, as well as photographs of the author.

*There's a very pretty brew in tap at
The Pure Drop, though, to be sure, not
so good as at Rolliver's.*

3. St Gregory's Churchyard

From The Crown it is convenient to visit the church and churchyard (GR 781187) just across Church Hill on the corner of New Street. Tess buried her infant son, Sorrow, 'in that shabby corner of God's allotment where He lets the nettles grow.' St Gregory's Church (Grade I listed) is open to the public and well worth a visit. There is an information point in the church with material on Hardy's connections to the Salisbury Diocese. Opposite the church is The Old Rectory (now known as Conyer's Place).

*Tess bravely made a little cross of two
laths and a piece of string, and having
bound it with flowers, she stuck it up at
the head of the grave...*

4. Marnhull Village School

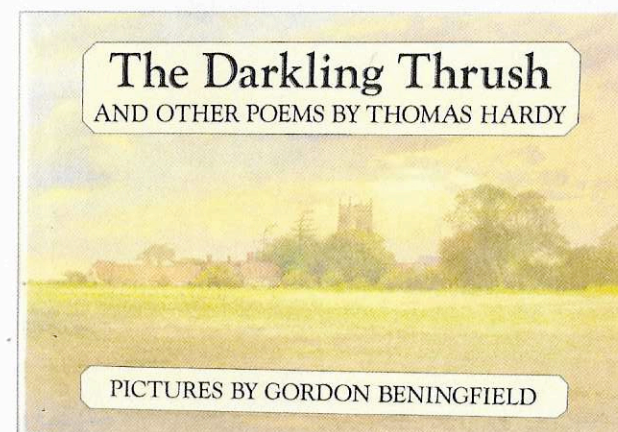
Hardy has Tess growing up in Marlott and attending the village school. We learn she has 'passed the Sixth Standard in the National School', taught by a London-trained school mistress. The present St Gregory's Church of England Primary School was founded in 1816 and moved to the current site in 1874. Hardy would have seen it in May 1877 when he walked to Marnhull from Sturminster Newton. The school (GR 780187) is 100 yards beyond the church and beside the Grade II* listed Senior's Farm in New Street.

5. Dancing on the Green

Tess takes part in 'club-walking', a procession of young women and girls around the village on May Day, after which 'there was to be dancing on the green'. It is here Tess first, and fatefully, encounters Angel Clare. It is likely that Hardy had in mind the field behind what was the Old Rectory (now Conyers Place - GR781186). This view is supported by the distinguished artist, Gordon Beningfield whose famous painting

of the field and church appeared in Hardy Country and on the cover of an illustrated collection of Hardy's poems (below). The location can be viewed from the Hardy Way (as the route rises towards Carraway Lane) or from the field entrance at the junction of the B3092 with Chippel Lane (GR 780184).

*In addition to the distinction of a white
frock, every woman and girl carried in
her right hand a peeled willow wand,
and in her left a bunch of white flowers.*



6. Tess Cottage

Hardy himself indicated on a visit to Marnhull that he'd imagined Tess and the Durbeyfield family in the house now known as Tess Cottage (formerly Barton Cottage). It is also suggested that a cottage in New St, now lost, may have been a model. Tess Cottage is a private residence located at the end of Barton Lane, just off the B3092 below Walton Elm House. It can be viewed on foot via the Hardy Way or from the lay-by close to the entrance to the lane. Please respect the privacy of the owners and take care when crossing the road.

The interior...struck upon the girl's senses with an unspeakable dreariness.

From the holiday gaieties of the field...to the yellow melancholy of this one-candled spectacle, what a step!

7. Rolliver's (Old Lamb House)

Rolliver's is the favoured alehouse of Tess's father, John Durbeyfield. There are divergent views as to which present building may have inspired Hardy's Rolliver's: one possibility is Old Lamb House (1770, formerly The Lamb Inn) at Walton Elm not far from 'Tess Cottage'. Please note Old Lamb House is a private residence.

Rolliver's Inn, the single alehouse at this end of the long and broken village, could only boast an off-licence; hence, as nobody could legally drink on the premises, the amount of overt accommodation for consumers was strictly limited...

8. Rolliver's (Blackmore Vale Inn)

The Blackmore Vale Inn in Burton Street features a mural of Tess above door. Is this astute marketing or a sign of a genuine connection with the novel? Like Old Lamb House it fits the description of being 'at the end of the long and broken village.' There is no conclusive evidence as to the inspiration for Rolliver's, and recent research shows that a third building in New Street (9) may also have a claim. As we know from Hardy himself, the writer's imagination might amalgamate various locations.

Marnhull's lion is Thomas Hardy. Not only did he choose this village as the birthplace and home of one of his heroines, but she was his greatest heroine: Tess of the d'Urbervilles.'

A.M.L. The Marn'll Book

Produced by Marnhull Heritage Initiative, a voluntary group which aims to promote and celebrate the history and culture of the parish. We are grateful to Marnhull Parish Council for financial and other support.



MARNHULL
HERITAGE INITIATIVE

For further information on the association between Thomas Hardy and Marnhull / Marlott visit our website marnhullheritage.org.uk or scan the QR code.

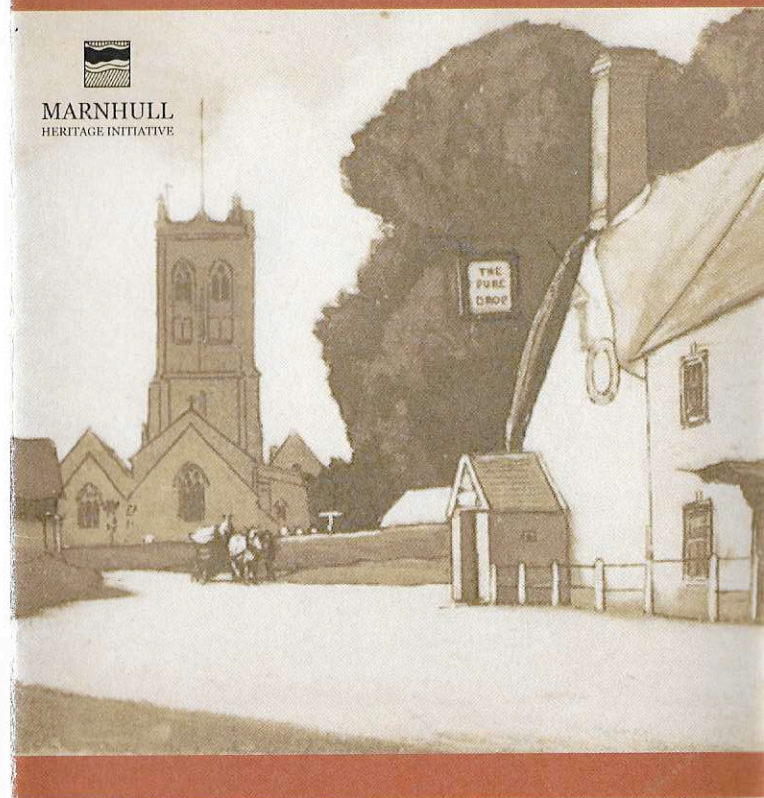
Image of *The Darkling Thrush* and other poems by Thomas Hardy with cover illustration by Gordon Beningfield reproduced by kind permission of Cameron Books. Cover image of the Pure Drop Inn by Dorset artist John Everett (1876-1949), one of a series of aquatints of Hardy scenes. Design and illustration by Madeleine Allcock. Printed by Blackmore Ltd, Shaftesbury (2026).



Scan me!

On the trail
of

THOMAS HARDY'S *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* IN MARNHULL



Explore the inspirational setting behind Thomas Hardy's best loved and famous novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Read about iconic locations, and follow the illustrated walking guide map based on the Hardy Way long-distance path.

Corresponds to Ordnance Survey explorer map 129 Yeovil and Sherborne. Some locations require a short detour from the route.