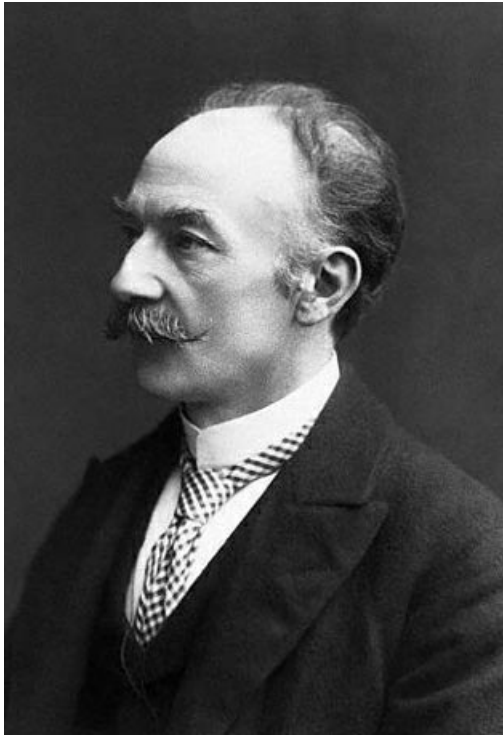


Thomas Hardy

The author and his work



Corbis/Bettmann

Thomas Hardy, the English novelist and poet, was born on 2nd June 1840, in the small village of Higher Bockhampton. The village is in the county of Dorset, in the southwest of England. The Hardy family was poor, but Thomas's parents were interesting and intelligent people. Thomas's father was a builder and stonemason – he cut and shaped pieces of stone for building. And he was a good musician. Jemima Hands, Thomas's mother, had been a servant before her marriage, but she loved reading and she owned many books. Thomas was the first child, but later he had a brother and two sisters. The Hardy and Hands families had lived in the Higher Bockhampton area for a very long time, so Thomas grew up with many close relatives nearby, and he knew them all well.

Although Thomas's parents were ordinary working people and they didn't have much money, they wanted their children to be well educated. Thomas's father taught his son to play the violin and his mother told Thomas many strange stories about the people of Dorset. Thomas's first school was in Higher Bockhampton, but in 1849 he was sent to school in Dorchester, the nearest town. This school was a good one and Thomas learnt about many

subjects, including Latin and Mathematics. He read as many books as he could, and he became very interested in History.

When he was sixteen, Thomas left school and started to work for an architect – a man who designed new buildings and planned ways to repair old ones. Thomas loved drawing and he did it well. In 1862, Thomas moved to London. He got a job in the office of a famous architect called Arthur Blomfield. Blomfield's office was full of interesting and well-educated young men, and Hardy enjoyed the time that he spent there. He often went to the theatre and to art exhibitions, and he went on reading as much as he could. Soon he began to write poetry, although none of it was published at this time.

In 1867, Thomas decided to return to Dorchester. He still worked as an architect's assistant, but by now he knew that he wanted to be a writer. He wrote a novel, but he could not get it published. This did not stop Thomas writing, and soon he was working on a second novel.

In 1870, Thomas was sent to the village of St Juliot in north Cornwall, in the far west of England. The old church in the village was in very bad condition. Thomas's job was to make drawings of it and find out if the church could be repaired or rebuilt. This visit to Cornwall changed Thomas's life completely, because he fell in love there. The lady he fell in love with was the sister-in-law of the clergyman at the church. Her name was Emma Lavinia Gifford, and she had fair hair and blue eyes. Thomas had often been in love with pretty women, though never for very long. But Emma was different from anybody he had known before. She, too, loved poetry and novels, and she also wanted to be a writer.

Hardy the novelist

Emma encouraged Thomas to go on writing novels, and in 1871 one of them was published. It was called *Desperate Remedies*. It was not very popular and Thomas didn't earn much money from it. But his next book, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was more successful. It is a story about working people in Dorset at the time of Thomas's own father and grandfather. It is unusual

amongst Hardy's novels because it ends happily. People loved the book because the characters in it were a very believable.

In 1874, Thomas Hardy published his first great novel – *Far From the Madding Crowd*. This was very successful, and as a result of this success, Thomas and Emma were able to get married. In the twenty years that followed, Thomas wrote more very successful novels set in the area which he called Wessex. This area includes the counties of Dorset, Oxfordshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Hampshire. The best known of these novels are: *The Trumpet-Major*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *The Major of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. He also wrote some short stories at this time.

poems were published during this period, and some of the poems that he had written as a young man were included in these books. Thomas also wrote two plays in verse. One of these – *The Dynasts* – is about the long war between France and Britain which took place in the time of the Emperor Napoleon.

The later years of Thomas and Emma's marriage were not happy. Thomas no longer spoke to Emma and he did not care when she was ill. But when she died in 1912, Thomas felt guilty and unhappy. Suddenly he wrote many poems about Emma and about the early days of their relationship. Hardy married again in 1914. His new wife, Florence Dugdale, was very much younger than Thomas. But Thomas couldn't forget his first wife. He made Florence very



After 1895, Thomas Hardy wrote no more novels. In that year, *Jude the Obscure* was published. It is a very unhappy story about death, peoples' loss of belief in religion, quarrels between working people and well-educated people, and sexual relationships between people who aren't married. At the time, the novel shocked many readers and suddenly, Hardy was no longer a popular novelist. For the last thirty years of his life, he wrote only poetry. Many books of his

unhappy because he thought about Emma all the time, and wrote so many poems about her.

Thomas Hardy died on 11th January 1928. He was nearly 88 years old. His body was buried in Westminster Abbey, the famous church in London, but his heart was buried with Emma, beside a church in Dorset. After his death, a biography of Thomas Hardy was published. The publisher said that it was written by Florence

Dugdale, Thomas's second wife, but we now know that Thomas wrote this book himself. In the book he did not tell all the truth about his life. There have been many more biographies about Hardy since then.

Hardy today

Movies and TV films have been made from many of Hardy's novels. The most famous film versions of the novels are: *Far From the Madding Crowd* (UK, 1967, Directed by John Schlesinger. Starring Julie Christie, Terence Stamp, Peter Finch, Alan Bates);

Tess (France/UK 1979, directed by Roman Polanski, starring Natasha Kinski, Leigh Lawson, Peter Firth); *The Woodlanders* (UK, 1997. Directed by Phil Agland. Starring Rufus Sewell, Jodhi May, Polly Walker, Tony Haygarth, Emily Woof).



Thomas Hardy's home at Higher Brockhampton, near Dorchester.

Corbis

A selection of works by Thomas Hardy

Novels and Short Stories

- 1871 *Desperate Remedies*
- 1872 *Under the Greenwood Tree*
- 1873 *A Pair of Blue Eyes*
- 1874 *Far From the Madding Crowd*
- 1876 *The Hand of Ethelberta*
- 1878 *The Return of the Native*
- 1880 *The Trumpet-Major*
- 1881 *A Laodicean*
- 1882 *Two on a Tower*
- 1886 *The Mayor of Casterbridge*
- 1887 *The Woodlanders*
- 1888 *Wessex Tales*
- 1891 *A Group of Noble Dames*
- 1891 *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*
- 1894 *Life's Little Ironies*
- 1896 [1895] *Jude the Obscure*
- 1897 *The Well-Beloved*
- 1913 *A Changed Man and Other Tales*
- 1952 *Our Exploits at West Poley*

Plays

- 1903 *The Dynasts, part 1*
- 1906 *The Dynasts, part 2*
- 1908 *The Dynasts, part 3*
- 1923 *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*

Poems

- 1898 *Wessex Poems*
- 1902 *Poems of the Past and the Present*
- 1909 *Time's Laughingstocks*
- 1914 *Satires of Circumstance*
- 1917 *Moments of Vision*
- 1922 *Late Lyrics and Earlier*
- 1925 *Human Shows*
- 1928 *Winter Words*

(For a list of Thomas Hardy's stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Guided Readers Series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)