

## THE THOMAS HARDY CONNECTION

On the 22nd December 1839 a Thomas Hardy, of Bockhampton, and Jemina Hand, of Melbury, both of "full age" (i.e. ages unknown) were married in our Church. Miss Hand was the daughter of George Hand, of Barton Hill Cottage, and she was born in about 1813 in Barton Hill Cottage in the room nearest to The Street and the bus shelter. Her maternal grandparents, the Swetmans, lived in Monmouth Cottage which, it is said, had been in the Swetman family "since the Conquest". From the marriage of Thomas and Jemina came a son who eventually became one of England's and Dorset's celebrated poets and authors: Thomas Hardy, OM, LLD.

Thomas Hardy was known to have visited Melbury House from time-to-time at the invitation of Lord Ilchester and he visited his mothers' village but "not often". He certainly based some of his stories on Melbury; in his "The Life" he even noted the detail of Monmouth Cottage loosing its stone chimneys and oak staircase but it was "The Woodlanders" that created the biggest stir in the Village.

In 1973 a film script writer, Derek Woodward, came to the Village to finish a film script based on "The Woodlanders" and to make the film in Melbury (Little Hintock). There was great excitement because we were all going to become 'Hollywood' extras at a fabulous wage; we were going to be paid to take our television aerials down; and many electricity and telephone cables were to be buried. A large part of Melbury was going to be 'translated' back into the 19th century. By 1974 a short film starring, amongst others, Bill Larcombe of Barton Hill Cottages, had been made to be shown to potential backers of the film. Alas, Woodward could not raise the money, he quietly left the Village and Melbury's moment of cinematic glory had passed.

In 1972 Denys Kay-Robinson wrote in his "Hardy's Wessex Re-Appraised" about Melbury and its neighbouring villages and, in particular, he referred to Hardy's custom of re-naming places that he used in his stories. Hardy, himself, in his preface to "The Woodlanders" refers to Melbury as "Little Hintock"; and later to Melbury Samford as "Great Hintock" and Melbury House as "Hintock House". The Yeovil road was "Long Ash Lane".

Probably the last Hardy link with the Village was severed when Charles Hand a cousin of Thomas Hardy, died in the 1920s. He lived in a "shed" on Barton Hill and was described as an eccentric who lived like a vagrant.

(An extract from "Melbury Osmond The Parish and its People" by Charles H S Barter) with acknowledgements