

A DISTANT PROSPECT OF WESSEX:
ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE PAST IN THE
LIFE AND WORKS OF THOMAS HARDY

Martin J. P. Davies

Illustrated with photographs taken by the author

Archaeopress

Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

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Cover images

A view of Stonehenge from *English Pictures Drawn with Pen and Pencil* by S. Manning and S.G. Green
published by The Religious Tract Society, London c. 1880
Statue of Thomas Hardy by William Barnes, adjacent to the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester

Map of Wessex, page viii

After the Macmillan edition of 'Under the Greenwood Tree', London 1929,
courtesy of The Thomas Hardy Association

*For my parents,
and all those who have taught me, including those I have taught*

Deo Gratias

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Preface	vi
Chapter One	
Introduction: Perspectives on the Past	1
Chapter Two	
Ancient Inspiration from the Science of the Imagination: Hardy, Archaeology, and Wessex (a Name Revived)	10
Chapter Three	
Novelist and ‘Born Archaeologist’: Hardy’s Personal Writings	36
Chapter Four	
Hardy’s Roman Town: The Setting for <i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>	62
Chapter Five	
Ancient and Modern Collide: <i>Tess of the d’Urbervilles</i> and Stonehenge	90
Chapter Six	
Barrows and Beyond: Landscapes of the Past	126
Chapter Seven	
Personal Memories and Ancient Remains: The Poetry	157
Chapter Eight	
Beyond Wessex: Architecture and Ideas in Oxford and Cornwall	188
Bibliography	206
Index of People and Places	211

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M.J.P.D.

PREFACE

‘... some ruin bibber, randy for antique ...’ (Philip Larkin, ‘Church Going’) – and rather keen on a literary legend as well?

My interest in archaeology dates back to an almost accidental first visit to Greece in 1982, a revelatory experience that I recounted in a magazine article. I returned from Athens determined not only to visit Greece as often as possible, but also to learn as much as I could about archaeology and visit as many sites in Britain as opportunity would allow. Being an English teacher of thirty-five years’ experience, I suppose I should claim that an interest in Thomas Hardy’s work dates back to studying *The Mayor of Casterbridge* at ‘A’ Level, but, in common with my students of that book, I admit that the opposite is the case; in fact it was only on being offered the opportunity to teach the book in 1994 that I returned to ‘give Hardy a second chance’. That same year I began Dr (later Professor) Peter Abbs’s two-year MA course at the University of Sussex, ‘Language, the Arts, and Education’, which allowed me in the second year to write, with boundless enthusiasm and inevitable superficiality, a dissertation on the influence of archaeology on the arts. To pursue this theme further, there could be no better literary subject than Thomas Hardy.

Both of these disparate topics – Hardy and archaeology – enjoy a wide and enduring following of long standing. Among the sciences (though, as many archaeologists would argue, their chosen discipline is one of the humanities), perhaps only archaeology has the inherent ability to arouse popular, imaginative interest to match the technical specialisation necessary for its professional pursuit. In 2010, for example, no fewer than 500 books were published – in English – on ancient Egypt alone. Thomas Hardy seems to attract a comparable level of interest, again, among general readership as well as in the realms of academe: all his works remain in print, and all eight of Hardy’s most celebrated novels, plus the early *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and the complete poems, are available in one or more of the budget-priced series of paperbacks; one academic web-site, moreover, lists over seventy biographical and critical books about the author.

But why try to put these two topics together? In a television programme some years ago, I heard Lucinda Lambton give one of the best definitions of education that I have come across: the ability to make connections; and it is in a spirit of liberal, educational exploration that I bring together Thomas Hardy and archaeology.

When I re-read *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, with twelve years accumulated knowledge of archaeological sites, artefacts, and ideas behind me, the small collection of allusions in the book to actual Roman and prehistoric features in and around Dorchester automatically gained

resonance, giving an extra, unanticipated, dimension to a visit to the town while I was part-way through my re-reading of the novel.

Perhaps this was a purely subjective coincidence of interests; yet, here was a famous author who grew up in one of the world's most significant archaeological regions, whose eclectic interests included archaeology, whose life-span of almost eighty-eight years embraced the transformation of archaeology from the realm of the dilettante collector to that of a complex scientific discipline, and whose works made limited but frequent references to the subject. My interest was aroused. How much was Hardy concerned with archaeology *per se* amongst his plethora of interests? How much did he actually know about it? Did his Classical education, architectural training, and visit to Italy impinge on his perception of the mysterious traces of British prehistory and the Roman occupation with which he had grown up? How does reference to archaeology fit in with his overall narrative, aesthetic, and philosophical scheme? Such was the range of questions which arose in my mind once the conjunction of subjects had been made.

This study was never conceived as one of literary criticism only and the proportion of such material in particular chapters is dependent on the nature of the works dealt with. Two disparate topics, an author and a subject in which he was interested, will be unified in this examination. The two run along parallel lines, but the unifying factor in the dichotomy is always the man Thomas Hardy. My reading of Hardy is thus only one part of the discussion: often, I will digress, and Hardy will appear to be set aside, for part of the aim of the research is to discover, gather, and synthesise all the archaeological materials that are employed in his works. He is nonetheless implicitly present, since these are the very materials he selected to fashion into this significant and hitherto neglected aspect of his art. In this I am following, in a specialised way, in the footsteps of Herman Lea and his successors who identified and catalogued the settings in Hardy's works. Much of this knowledge is not otherwise readily available to Hardy's readers; conversely, archaeological texts usually make only the most fleeting reference – if any – to the appearance of archaeological sites and artefacts in fiction. The evident imbalance in the Bibliography between books on Hardy and related topics and those about archaeology is more apparent than real: most of those on the latter have provided only brief references.

In examining Hardy's novels, I have referred to the Penguin Classics edition as being reliable and readily available to both scholars and general readers. The editors are listed in the Bibliography along with details of the texts of the short stories and poems.

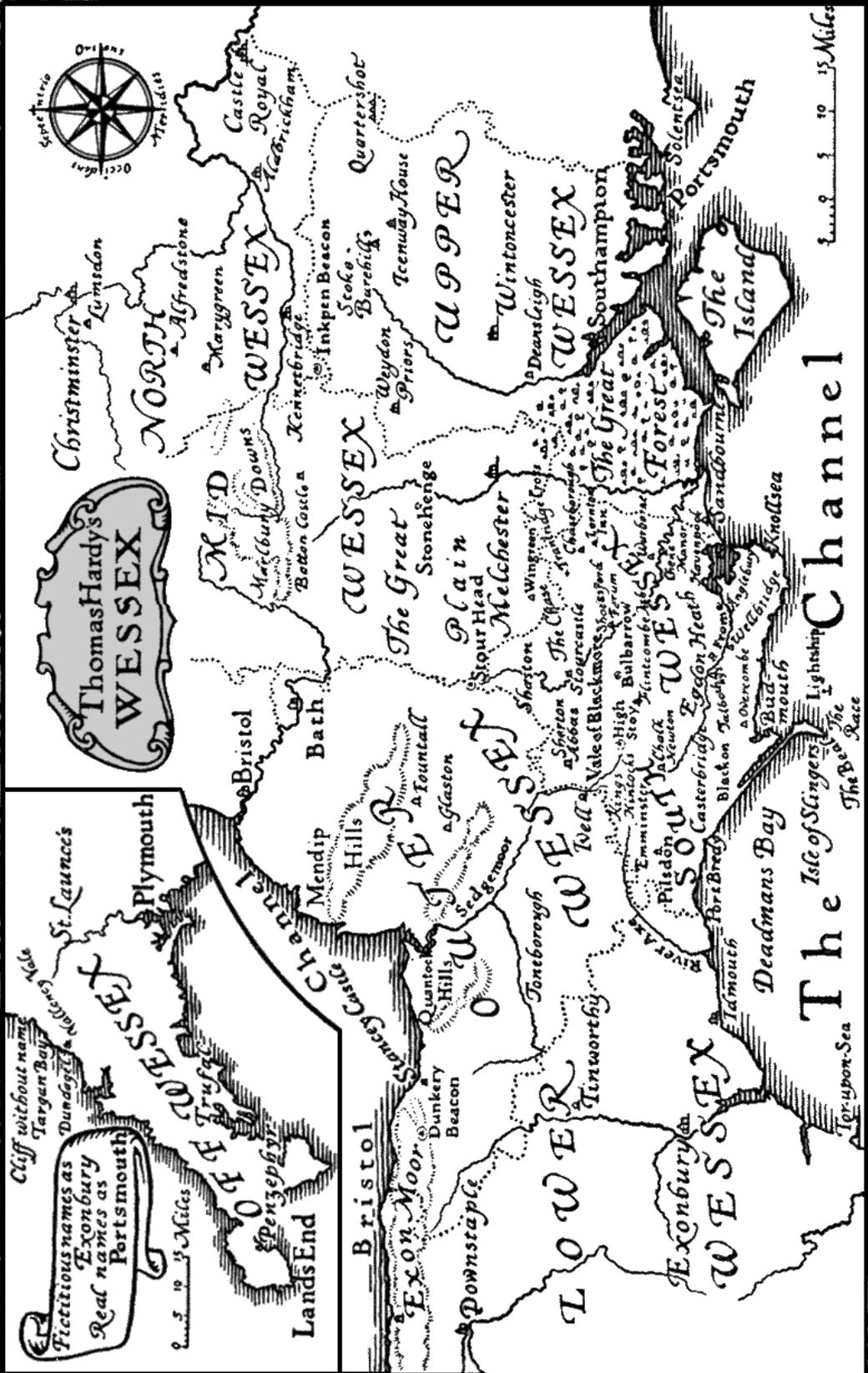
The presentation of footnotes and the Bibliography is in accordance with the MLA Handbook¹ throughout, with the exception that I have preferred to include initial 'p.' or 'pp.' for page numbers as being clearer in meaning, and book titles are italicised rather than underlined. To prevent confusion, in poems I have used line number(s) (l./ll.) for short poems or referred to stanzas (st.) or couplets (coup.) in longer works.

¹ Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 4th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995).



Thomas Hardy's
WESSEX

Cliff without name
Targaryn Bay
Dunoyne
Nafferyn
St. Laurence's
Plymouth
WESSEX
Fictional names as
Exonbury
Real names as
Portsmouth
2 3 4 5 Miles



0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

The Channel

The Isle of Slingers
The Race

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVES ON THE PAST

‘Time present and Time past
Are both perhaps present in Time future
And Time future contained in Time past.’

T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets – ‘Burnt Norton.’

Many would regard *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as Thomas Hardy’s greatest novel, and surely a prime candidate for its most memorable scene must be the climactic events at Stonehenge, one of the few universally recognisable archaeological sites in the world. Few readers of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* can fail to notice the constant references to archaeological remains, and another of the finest Wessex novels, *The Return of the Native*, uses an ancient barrow as an almost magnetic focus for its narrative. Less obvious is the occurrence of archaeological references in many other of Hardy’s writings, including poems and short stories; and even his attempt at a society novel, *The Hand of Ethelberta*, includes reference to the ubiquitous barrows of the Wessex landscape, and to the pursuits of an archaeological society (the ‘Imperial Archaeological Association’). Yet, as even a cursory reading of his widely allusive works will show, Hardy’s interests were catholic and his reading voracious, encouraged from young childhood by his mother’s aspirations for her frail son. The combination of the imaginative and the scientific were evident from this early stage: at the age of nine, he was reading scientific books and mathematics as well as the Classics. The mix of interests is significant in his first professional career, for before becoming an author, he qualified as an architect and won prizes for his work. Throughout his long life, he continued to enjoy all the arts, especially painting, as well as practising his own art of literature. He made himself expert in the history of the Napoleonic period, and was an authority on rural Dorset. As he grew older, he became acquainted with many of the leading contemporary minds with whom he corresponded about current affairs, and developed an enthusiasm for many other disciplines including astronomy and the developing sciences such as geology and biology.

Can archaeology be regarded as any more than just one example of all his many interests, and is Hardy’s use of matters archaeological more than simply local colouring, part of the distinctive scenery and old-world Wessexness which made the writer legendary in his own lifetime? Archaeology cannot be said to be the *subject* of more than isolated examples of Hardy’s

work: apart from a scattering of journalistic and non-fiction pieces, only the minor and relatively unsatisfactory story *A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork* is actually *about* archaeology; all the other references are apparently incidental to Hardy's main themes.

Few writers before Hardy used archaeological sites and material in fiction, though twentieth-century readers have become accustomed to a plethora of fiction which involves the discipline, an adjunct to the increasing popularity of archaeology among a non-specialist readership. J.B. Priestley's wife Jacquetta Hawkes was an archaeologist and writer, but her husband found no inspiration in the subject. Agatha Christie, however, whose second husband was the archaeologist Max Mallowan, set three novels in archaeological contexts: *Death on the Nile*, and two actually set at archaeological excavations, viz *Murder in Mesopotamia* and *Appointment with Death*. She is the only notable novelist apart from Hardy who actually engaged directly in archaeological excavation, and, to an extent like Hardy, she came to it by chance. On Mallowan's dig in Syria, his new wife became involved in cleaning and recording finds, and her experiences there are recorded in the delightful *Come, Tell Me How You Live – an archaeological memoir*, written under the name Agatha Christie-Mallowan. Mary Renault's fine series of novels covers the whole story of ancient Greece from the mythical age of Theseus to the dawn of the Hellenistic period after the death of Alexander and weaves much well-known extant archaeology in a quite seamless way into her fictional tapestry which recreates the ancient world. Rosemary Sutcliff's classic 1954 children's adventure *The Eagle of the Ninth*, subject of a 2010 film, similarly brings together an artefact and a historical event, the loss of the Ninth Legion in the land of the Picts – though lifelong fans of the book are inevitably disappointed to learn that the Eagle (now at Reading Museum) is definitely not from a legionary standard and the mysterious disappearance of the Legion did not occur in Britain! More recently, Penelope Lively's *Treasures of Time*, Peter Ackroyd's *First Light*, and Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* are each set at a prehistoric burial mound (Ackroyd's in Dorset), while Penelope Fitzgerald's *The Golden Child* is a comedy thriller in a fictionalised British Museum about the eponymous artefact from an invented African culture. In Iris Murdoch's most extraordinary novel, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, the fictional Ennistone Ring is restored, Seamus Heaney's poems include reference to the prehistoric past including 'bog bodies', and indeed through the twentieth century, a host of novels and poems show increasingly a fascination with archaeology as the discipline has become part of mainstream culture.

Any reader who might expect a similarity between the use of archaeological reference in Hardy's fiction and works such as Mary Renault's would, however, be disappointed; but Hardy's use of archaeology does have something in common with both *Treasures of Time* and *First Light* in that they deal with sites from British prehistory. Any work that uses a Biblical or Homeric setting is automatically constrained by centuries and millennia of cultural accretion. In contrast, the symbolic or aesthetic use of material from a pre-literate environment allows not only imaginative scope, but predisposes the artist to a more diffuse and philosophical approach, freed from the specifics of deeply ingrained myth or historical interpretation.

Aside from the frequent archaeological allusion in Hardy's works, we find strong evidence of his interest in archaeology from his contemporaries. Edmund Blunden noted that, in 1927, the year before Hardy's death: 'One of his lifelong enthusiasms found a new occasion ... when a beautiful Roman pavement was unearthed at the Dorchester Foundry. With Mrs Hardy

he paid more than one visit to the site. In old days this would have meant a fine page or two in a new Wessex tale.¹ (This mosaic floor was lifted and re-laid in the Dorchester County Museum just before Hardy's death.) A letter from the Reverend T. Perkins, dated 23/8/1906, requesting an article from Hardy on the archaeology of Dorset, includes: 'I am sure you know a lot more about archaeology than most people, and at any rate, anything you write would be sure to be most charming reading. I don't want dry-as-dust archaeology and extracts from old deeds or pedigrees ... I want something that will interest people at large, not deadly dull archives ... the growing popularity of Dorset is surely due to your novels.'² An interview with Hardy, about a proposed sale of Stonehenge, by the literary editor of *The Daily Chronicle*, James Milne, was published on 24th August 1899. It refers to the site as 'a national relic, and now a literary monument', and to the author of *Tess of the Durbervilles* as 'the one-time architect and born archaeologist'.³

In one of the earlier literary biographies, Evelyn Hardy notes, while writing of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, that 'Hardy was not merely interested in ancient remains as an archaeologist; he could penetrate the past imaginatively and clothe these hoary hulks of antiquity with vanished magnificence.'⁴ More recently, Claire Tomalin's best-selling biography fortuitously describes Hardy the poet as, 'like an archaeologist uncovering objects that have not been seen for many decades ... some curious bones and broken bits, and some shining treasures.'⁵ What is interesting in all these diverse sources – particularly his contemporaries who took it as a given – is not only that the authors know that Hardy was an enthusiast (and one with expertise in the subject), but that all recognise that archaeology provides imaginative material that the great writer had proved he was well qualified to exploit. It is notable that in regard to science and imagination, Hardy proved to be the very opposite of Heinrich Schliemann, the passionate Homerist whose methods and approach were the antithesis of the modern scientific methodology that Hardy so admired. William Borlase, in a damning critique of Schliemann in *Fraser's Review* in 1878, wrote: 'Imagination is a very important qualification for an archaeologist to possess ... but in proportion to the strength of this power, a counterpoise of judgement is necessary ... Dr Schliemann ... must be credited with a vast amount of this sort of unbalanced imagination ...'⁶ It is as if Schliemann muddled science and imagination, whereas Hardy – in both his interests and his practical activity – distinguished the two precisely.

More direct evidence of his precise knowledge is tantalisingly limited. Much of archival importance in all areas of Hardy studies was destroyed at Max Gate not long before the author's death, and the *Life* (defensively attributed to Florence, but largely dictated by Hardy himself) omits much that a researcher would like to know. A primary source is Hardy's eclectic notebooks, but William Greenslade notes that, although twelve notebooks were preserved, 'Many others ... from the 1870s ... would not survive the later Max Gate bonfires.'⁷ Hardy himself, his literary executor Sydney Cockerell, and Florence all had a hand in the depredations; indeed the true extent of these notebooks, and other material, can only be guessed at. What

¹ Edmund Blunden, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p.175.

² Dorset County Museum Hardy Archives. Manuscript letter no. 1162.

³ James Gibson, ed., *Thomas Hardy – Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1999), quoted p.58.

⁴ Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), p.196.

⁵ Tomalin, Claire, *Thomas Hardy- The Time-Torn Man* (London: Viking, 2006), p.xxiii.

⁶ Michael Wood, *In Search of the Trojan War* (London: BBC 1985), p.47, quoted.

⁷ William Greenslade, ed., *Thomas Hardy's Facts Notebooks: A Critical Edition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.xv.

we do know is that Hardy's reading, experience, acquaintance, and observations all added up to Andrew D. Radford's observation of 'Hardy's promiscuous discovery of time'.⁸

What *precisely*, I wonder, did Hardy learn from his friend and fellow-Dorsetman General Pitt-Rivers, the founder of modern archaeology and 'greatest of all archaeological excavators' according to Mortimer Wheeler,⁹ besides the lifestyle of the very rich? The influence on Hardy of such a signally important figure in the history of scientific archaeology cannot be underestimated. And what did Hardy talk about, apart from *Jude*, when on holiday with the great archaeologist Flinders Petrie or when visited by him at Max Gate in July 1915? Petrie, who, like Hardy, continued in his professional career into his eighties, was the first Edwards Professor of Archaeology at London University and one of his early important projects was to survey



Hardy's grave in Stinsford churchyard

Stonehenge in 1874–1877. It is difficult to imagine that the climactic scene at Stonehenge in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* did not figure in their conversations. Near the end of Hardy's life, one of a new circle of young friends was T.E. Lawrence, 'Lawrence of Arabia', by that time living in self-imposed obscurity under an alias; he paid weekly visits to the old author from his curious house Clouds Hill near Moreton and he must have found the company of the equally very private and celebrated Hardy very congenial. Lawrence's first contact with the Middle East was as an archaeologist. Having read History at Jesus College Oxford, and writing a thesis on the Crusader castles, he worked as a junior member of the British Museum expedition on the

⁸ Andrew D. Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.21.

⁹ Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth* (1954; London: Penguin Books, 1956), p.13.

Euphrates at Carchemish under the famous archaeologists D.G. Hogarth and his successor Leonard Woolley during 1911–1914. Immediately prior to the Great War, Lawrence surveyed Sinai for British intelligence under the guise of further archaeological work and visited sites such as Petra. It is surely unlikely that the two men's frequent conversations did not touch on a shared fascination with the past and with archaeology in particular. Another charismatic member of this circle of regular visitors was Siegfried Sassoon whose time at Clare College Cambridge inspired a comic poem, 'Early Chronology', about students' attentions drifting far away during a tutorial on history and archaeology. Again, it is entirely possible that he and Hardy talked about archaeology as well as poetry as they sat within sight of the ancient remains around Max Gate.

Hardy's reference to antiquities in his creative works is almost always couched in the terminology of the antiquarian, and he rarely uses the word archaeology in his limited writings on specifically archaeological subject matter; yet these display the precision and circumspection of the experts he knew, as well as the imaginative insights of the poet, including his reports on the excavations at Max Gate – for Hardy designed and built his home not merely in a true archaeological landscape, but on an archaeological site, and, as Blunden tells us, nearly named the house Conquer Barrow after one of the local features.¹⁰

Now, time is an inevitable function of narrative and most narrative, whether fiction or non-fiction, in verse or prose, is concerned with past time; even a good deal of lyric poetry has a chronological basis. It is a truism, therefore, to state that Thomas Hardy, unusual in being celebrated as poet, novelist, and short story writer, is concerned with the passage and effects of time. What is noteworthy, however, is Hardy's almost obsessive interest in the phenomenon of past time; Andrew D. Radford states that 'the essence of Hardy's art [is] to conjure up the relics of time.'¹¹ Michael Millgate writes: 'The stimulation of his deepest creative instincts – in fiction, poetry, and drama – seems to have been inseparable from a profound brooding upon the past and upon the practical and philosophical implications of time's passage. That consciousness of mortality ... also informs ... all of Hardy's best work ...'¹² Hardy's concern with archaeology is one facet of this preoccupation. Indeed, if Hardy's life and career may be said to be a series of enigmas and ambiguities, then his obsession with the past may be viewed as a large jigsaw puzzle of which a large 'archaeology-shaped' piece is missing: the size and outline are very evident, but the precise contents are uncertain and incomplete. The object of this study is to create a picture by giving colour and form to that significant missing piece.

As I have indicated in the Preface, this study will have two parallel focuses in exploring the whole gamut of Thomas Hardy's involvement with archaeology. Hardy's life saw the transformation of the dilettante pursuit of the antiquarian into the popular scientifically-based discipline of archaeology, and I shall examine how Hardy became interested in this developing subject in the context of his overall fascination with the past and with the sciences in general.

¹⁰ Blunden, p.51.

¹¹ Radford, p.29.

¹² Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy – His Career as a Novelist* (London, Macmillan, 1971), pp.247/248.

Equally, I shall discuss how he responded imaginatively to the physical remains of the ancient past, identifying the sites and objects as they appear in his fiction and poetry, and exploring what use he made of them in the context of each work.

Our human preoccupation with the past is clearly evidenced by the numerous ways in which we attempt to delineate it: autobiography, researching the family tree, history, archaeology, palaeontology, geology – all are attempts, in personal or academic spheres, to unravel the enigma of what has preceded the present.

The most remote perspective on the past that is possible must surely be that of the inconceivable distances suggested by astronomy; in terms of the Earth, however, geology seeks to reveal the earliest – and very lengthy – chapters in the story of the planet. Both of these disciplines are, *ipso facto*, devoid of humanity. Palaeontology ('the study of old existence') examines extinct and fossilised animals and plants, and, because this includes the remains of the earliest human beings, overlaps with archaeology. Anthropology is, literally, 'the study of man', especially of human society and customs. Chronologically, it is through archaeology that we gain our knowledge of, amongst others, the embryonic phases of civilisation. Archaeology, then, provided a fruitful source of material for Hardy the humane novelist, surrounded as he was from boyhood by the physical remains of the ancient past.

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify the relationship of archaeology with history. As cognate but discrete disciplines, archaeology ('the study of the ancient') is the study of the human past from objects alone: history is the study of the past primarily from written records alone. The two disciplines overlap in the sense that ancient written materials are often of intrinsic archaeological and artistic merit and are frequently the fruits of archaeological excavation. Protohistory ('primitive' or 'first' history) concerns periods where written accounts are at a rudimentary level of development (and by implication, where archaeology may provide more factual information). Glyn Daniel, writing in 1951, suggests a further nice distinction of a hierarchical kind:

Archaeology has at the present day two meanings: the study of the material remains of man's past, and the study of the material remains of man's prehistoric past. The first meaning, which for convenience we may refer to as general archaeology, comprises both prehistoric archaeology and historic archaeology ...

There is this very important difference between the prehistoric and the historic archaeologist. In the later periods of man's development *the archaeologist is the hand-maiden of history* [my italics] and supplements the story provided by written records. But in the earlier periods the archaeologist is not merely the handmaiden: he is the prime source for writing early history. Prehistory is written from many sources - the material remains of the past, deductions from language, physical anthropology, place names and comparative ethnology. All these are sources which in historical times are auxiliary to the written sources. But in prehistory they are the main sources and archaeology is by far the most important of them.¹³

¹³ Glyn Daniel, *A Hundred Years of Archaeology* (London: Duckworth, 1950), p.9.

Ancient History, one leg of the Classical Tripod, is more accurately the history of ancient Greece and Rome as drawn from their historians. Beyond such nice distinctions, 'history' in common parlance is the generic term for all study of the past, thus embracing archaeology for practical purposes.

In this study, archaeology will be used in its discrete sense, but also with the cluster of nuances that the term embraces. These need to be explained. Firstly, archaeology is the name of a scientific discipline, though practitioners are very much divided about the extent to which (if any) it is really part of the humanities (the link with history is both inevitable and complicating here). Secondly, the word may be used in a verbal sense to imply the activity involved, especially excavation. Thirdly, as a noun distinct from the embracing name of the discipline, the word is used in two rather different ways: either in the sense of the stratum or strata of archaeological remains found beneath the present-day ground level ('the excavators came upon a mass of archaeology three feet below the ground'); or in the more general sense of the archaeological remains (features and artefacts) of a particular area or country (such as the Archaeology of Wiltshire or the Archaeology of Greece) – in which case it becomes a proper noun. In this study, as I have already indicated, both of the principal uses of the word (academic discipline, and objects or places) will be engaged, for Hardy's knowledge and interest was in the subject generally (including its practical application); whereas in examining the topic in Hardy's works, I intend to discuss both the way he uses archaeological objects and places (the final nuance above), and the way his understanding of them is revealed (the academic discipline).

Why, even though I have given clues in the Preface, should archaeology be a legitimate focus at all in a study of Thomas Hardy's fascination with the past? His catholic interests and eclectic reading might surely make geology, astronomy, or history an equally apt choice. I shall certainly draw on these subjects in my study, but their use by the author is far more limited than archaeology, and Hardy's contact with them was either peripheral (geology was just one facet of the whole Victorian discovery of the age of the Earth) or learned for a purpose: astronomy, though a long-standing interest, he studied in depth specifically in preparation for *Two on a Tower*; his interest in the Napoleonic period was pursued in the British Museum and elsewhere like the Royal Hospital, Chelsea where he met veterans of Wellington's army. History was certainly a more substantial interest for Hardy, especially in his abiding enthusiasm for the Napoleonic period because of its family significance and its importance in the recent folk-memory of Dorset. The intention of writing a monumental work set in this period is mentioned in virtually every chapter of the *Life* and eventually came to fruition in *The Dynasts* and its precursors *The Trumpet-Major*, *A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four*, *The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion*, and various poems. However, this obsession is with a particular period rather than with history as a discipline, and the mass of other allusions to past events does not amount to an interest in the subject of history *per se*, but rather in the past generally.

With archaeology it is otherwise. The historian R.J. White opens his *Hardy and History* with: 'The climax of Hardy's lifelong fascination with history came with the publication of *The Dynasts* ...'¹⁴ Nonetheless, he continues shortly thereafter:

¹⁴ R. J. White, edited James Gibson, *Hardy and History* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p.1.

A DISTANT PROSPECT OF WESSEX

Hardy's archaeological endeavours are borne out at the Dorchester Museum and in a number of contributions to archaeological journals [an overstatement, but an allowable one] ... If he had not become a working novelist he could well have lived his life as a professional architect, just as he might have become a classical scholar or an archaeologist. ... The one art that may safely be declared outside his scope, however, is that of the historian.¹⁵

Archaeology, then, is pivotal to our understanding of Hardy as a man, and as an artist, both in illuminating his use of materials and in revealing his conception of the past.

Before he was able to read, let alone embark on researching his family history or the Napoleonic period, Hardy was growing up in a landscape dotted with prehistoric remains and replete with evidences of the Roman occupation; later he engaged in excavation and wrote and spoke about the subject; he knew archaeologists and admired them in contradiction to the outmoded pre-scientific dilettantism of the antiquarians. In a mass of Hardy's works, the archaeological past is as naturally occurring and inevitable as are the ancient remains pervasive and inescapable in the landscape of his native county: as such, archaeology demands to receive specialised attention.

Notwithstanding Hardy's lifelong interest in archaeology, Michael Millgate, in examining the author's perception of the past, confirms the importance of the Napoleonic period in Hardy's thinking. He notes that Elliott Felkin kept a record of some conversations with Hardy in 1919:

Talking about time, he said that he always saw it stretch away in a long blue line like a railway line on the left (the past) and disappearing just round the crossing on his right. 'It's like a railway line covered with a blue haze, and it goes uphill till 1900 and then goes over the hill and disappears to about the middle of the century, and then it rises again up to about 1800, and then it disappears altogether.

Hardy's historical imagination was apparently distinguished by elements of discontinuity and by a peculiar intensity of focus on the early years of the nineteenth century. Not only had the events of the Napoleonic era been of extraordinary magnitude, but the survival of witnesses of those events into Hardy's own lifetime had given him a special sense of the part played by history in shaping both his own region and the nation at large. Dorset / Wessex as he knew it was the product not only of its geography and its climate but of its past.¹⁶

How like a notable Victorian to envisage time as a railway line! But the seventy-nine-year-old Hardy was surely being more than a little selective in that exchange, for the churches and occasionally the castles of the Middle Ages are very much in view in the backward gaze of many works, and the Roman past seems a very significant hump in the further distance; the prehistoric past, however dim in the blue haze of the far distance, is deeply suggestive in its omnipresent solidity in the landscape. The Dorset / Wessex that Hardy created in his oeuvre is

¹⁵ White, pp.9/10.

¹⁶ Millgate, *Career*, pp.162/163.

indeed the product of its past. This observation also obscures the paradox that, though Hardy set most of his works in the past and one senses strongly a sense of loss for a simpler, if harder and more 'primitive', way of life, in his attitudes and interests he was very up-to-date and could be markedly forward-looking in his approach to social and moral issues. Claire Tomalin's title *Thomas Hardy – The Time-Torn Man*¹⁷ is no mere *jeu d'esprit*.

Another question needs to be answered: if archaeology was indeed of such interest to Hardy, and if it can justifiably provide a focus for this study, then why does he use the word only rarely, even in his 'scientific' or journalistic writings on the subject? One answer must be that even experts in a particular field only need to use the name of their specialism sparingly within their work on the discipline, and so it must be chance that Hardy did not need to use the word archaeology either. Archaeology was not a new subject that needed to be named specifically, but a modernised, systematised development of a pre-scientific interest that went back millennia and which we can see from a modern perspective as formerly a component of antiquarianism. Another point is that Hardy's works are largely set in the decades before and around his own birth, before the word archaeology came to be narrowly applied to a newly developed scientific discipline.

Finally, if the word archaeology was inapplicable in Hardy's works, if he rarely even needed to use the word in writing about the subject, and if it was not in common usage for at least the early part of the author's adult life, then why do I use it in the title? I use the word in two of the senses already explained: objectively to refer, from a modern standpoint, to material evidence of the human past that is significant in Hardy's works; and to a field of study that had existed in an inchoate, pre-scientific form for many centuries before its methodology and thinking transformed it into a true scientific discipline with a new name to match. Hardy the writer used archaeological places and objects in his works and Hardy the man of modern interests and sensibility was a supporter of the forward-looking scientific approach to studying the past: only the word archaeology with its wide semantic embrace could satisfy the titular demands of this study.

Thomas Hardy's life and personality embody a mass of contradiction and ambivalence: the nineteenth-century novelist who became a twentieth-century poet, the humble countryman who was lionised in London society, the man fascinated by the past who was in the vanguard of progressive thinking and ideas in everything from theology to animal welfare. The list could be extended almost indefinitely. In archaeology, Hardy found a sympathetically ambivalent endeavour: an up-to-the-minute, scientific discipline newly developing in the wake of Darwin which nonetheless revealed and examined humanity's early traces in an inevitably imaginative manner and with decidedly affective consequences. Such a discipline might, we may suppose, provide Hardy vicariously with an emotional and intellectual synthesis or resolution which was to elude him as a person throughout the whole of his long and complex life.

¹⁷ Tomalin.