

## The Hardy Society Journal Spring 2008

**‘A Life of Three Strands’ at Athelhampton House:** On the evening of Friday, 11 January, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the death of Thomas Hardy on that date in 1928, about 100 people met at Athelhampton. There were members of the Hardy Society, the New Hardy Players and friends. After a convivial meal at the Topiary Restaurant in the old Coach House, they dodged through the rain to enter the door in the beautiful floodlit lichened stone front of Athelhampton House.

In the fifteenth-century Great Hall, with its minstrels’ gallery, the stage was set in front of a huge glowing log fire. In the audience were Julian Fellowes



*Mayor and Mayoress of Dorchester, David and Lynda Barrett,  
with Julian and Emma Fellowes*

(President elect of the Hardy Society) and his wife Emma, the Mayor and Mayoress of Dorchester, David and Lynda Barrett, and Professor Michael and Stella Irwin. Then began the main focus of the evening, the play *A Life of Three Strands*, written by Devina Symes and Norrie Woodhall, as a tribute to the writer they both admire. It dramatised episodes from Hardy’s life, showing his childhood, adulthood and old age, in a series of short scenes, interspersed with poetry, lively folk music, singing and dancing, which told the story with energy and humour. Towards the end of the performance disbelief was further suspended in a question and answer session between audience members and ‘Thomas Hardy in later life’ (admirably played by Jack Elwin).

The most notable member of the cast was Norrie Woodhall who, aged 102, is the sole surviving member of the original Hardy Players and met Thomas Hardy many times. During the play she recited ‘The Ruined Maid’ and, having written the last scene from her own memories, was able to say: ‘I know how it was – I was there!’ It was a wonderful achievement for the writers, the actors, singers and musicians and presented the audience with 90 minutes of excellent entertainment. It was a magical evening that will long be remembered.

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*Norrie Woodhall with Ferne Pritchard (Millie Whittle) and Jack Masters (Hardy as a boy)*



*The whole cast of A Life of Three Strands  
[Photographs taken by Stuart Broom, reproduced by kind permission of  
View from Dorchester.]*