

The Hardy Society Journal

Summer 2008

EDITORS NOTES

The international character of the Society and the Journal is much in evidence in this Summer issue, with articles from contributors resident in Canada, America, France, India and Australia; these postings from overseas are complemented by more 'local' perspectives, with pieces exploring Hardy's landscape, ancestry and biography, written by those who live and work in the heart of 'Hardy-country'. Art and architecture take centre-stage. The relationship between Hardy's writing and the work of particular artists is explored in a reflective article by David Inshaw (whose 'The Darkling Thrush' graces the front cover), and in a review of a limited edition of Hardy's verse with specially commissioned illustrations by Mark Cazalet. In addition, Hardy's own artistic leanings and responses are reflected upon in a review of the recently republished 'Architectural Notebook', edited by the late Claudius Beatty. Hardy's interest in the 'after-life' is considered in two thoughtful pieces which offer fresh thoughts on some well-known poems; and, in a final 'pairing' of articles, some familiar fictional characters are reconsidered from unfamiliar perspectives.



As our Chairman reminds us above, the Conference and Festival are fast approaching; the reflections of Ms Beryl Mitchell, penned after her first visit to the Conference in 2004, are therefore a timely reminder of how much there is to learn, enjoy and share at the Society's biennial celebration of Hardy and his work:

Driving somewhat cautiously
I headed towards the west
Time to visit Dorchester
Summer conference as a guest.

I duly found the lecture hall
And settled in my seat
Wondering how the day would go
Wondering whom I'd meet.

The speakers took the centre stage
Their speeches all prepared
I sat and listened, entertained,
Their knowledge duly shared.

Applause rang out throughout the hall
The time just went so fast
Interest held, all so enthralled
Telling of Hardy's past.

A welcome lunch and time to chat
New friends to get to know
Check the programme, see what's next,
A coach trip now we go.

Along the August sun-drenched lanes
Our driver wound his way
Combines busy in the fields
Unlike scenes in Tess's day.

At Beaminster we found the spot
She swapped her muddy boots
Then onward found her cottage home
The village of her roots.

With poetry reading and anecdotes
Our guide brought scenes to life
Reliving Tess's difficult time
Her troubles and her strife.

Day one of Conference now complete
I homeward make my way
Recapturing all the day has brought
Memories for another day.



THS member, Fraser Pakes, recently sent me an interesting item: 'T.P.'s "Letter Box" column', published in *T.P.'s Weekly* on 25 December 1903 (p.986):

Thomas Hardy. – A Weymouth correspondent sends me the following, which he says is a true but hitherto unreported story of Thomas Hardy: An energetic curate of a Dorsetshire parish near the home of the famous author was wont to invite his parishioners, mostly farmers and their men, to an evening at home with him, where he would read to them and talk on the subject after. On one occasion his subject was the 'Works of Thomas Hardy', from which he read copious extracts. At the conclusion of one of these 'Hardy evenings' a farmer rose and moved a vote of thanks to the curate, and asked for a seconder, upon which another farmer present rose and said "I be very pleased to second the vote of thanks to our curate for his kindness in reading to us and tellin' us all about Muster Hardy, but we don't want to hear that, it's all about we; we knows all that." It is said that when Mr Hardy was told the incident, he remarked: "I have had many criticisms, adverse and otherwise, but if the people recognise their own portrait, that is good enough for me."

As Mr Pakes observes, if this is still the feeling among Dorset farmers, we should not expect to see many members of the local agricultural community at our forthcoming conference!



On the subject of Hardy's interest in matters agricultural, readers will recall Humphrey Pain's article, in the 2007 *Thomas Hardy Journal*, tracing the bibliographical history of Hardy's essay 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', which was published under his name as a magazine article in 1883. An archive piece from the *Manchester Guardian* (reprinted in the *Guardian*, 5 December 2007) reminded me that Hardy's position as an 'authority' on 'village life' was being asserted as early as January 1892:

In an 'interview' that is published in Saturday's Pall Mall Gazette, Mr Thomas Hardy, 'of Casterbridge', the novelist, says some interesting things about the rural labourer and parenthetically, about himself.

What he has to say of the labourer is important not for its novelty but for the great authority of the observer who says it. 'These village councils of which they talk' (he writes) 'will be grand engines in the way of restoring the centrality of the old English village life. The men already talk of them with interest.'

Lord Salisbury thought that the men were more likely to talk with interest of a village circus. Some of his friends have inclined to believe that the rural labourer, as a person capable of taking a lively interest in anything, does not exist, and that those who apparently sat down to breakfast in London the other day were a fiction of the 'wirepullers', who would do anything.

Mr Hardy, again, gives in one sentence the case against the existing poor-law, and we may almost say, the complete case for the substitution of an insurance system on a wellconsidered basis. 'It is complained,' he said, 'that they (the younger labourers) are improvident, but as a man once cynically remarked to me, "What is the good of our saving? We should never save as much as the parish would allow us."'

The parson, he thinks, is disliked, where he is disliked at all, chiefly 'on account of his friendship with the squire and the powers that be, and because he teaches a theology which they cannot square with the facts of life'.

Mr Hardy is of course very much in the right where he gives full credit to the parsons, 'educated, sympathetic, original-minded, as many of them are', for their value as centres of civilisation and of intelligent interests. But would dis-establishment 'banish' those men from the villages, as Mr Hardy, perhaps loosely reported, seems to believe?

That belief would indicate a rather low estimate of the strength of 'vocation' which calls a Gilbert White or an

Augustus Jessopp to the cure of a village. One does not hear of a falling off in education, sympathy, or originality among Irish Protestant clergymen since disestablishment.



One of the pleasures of being Editor of the journal is witnessing the various ways in which Hardy continues to intrigue, entertain, teach and inspire. Society members keep a watchful eye for Hardy-related events and material, and I receive many interesting communications concerning a wide range of subjects. I recently received a letter from M.W. West from Aston, Sheffield, in which was enclosed an essay from the February edition of the international science journal, *Nature*. The essay by Kevin Padian, 'Darwin's Enduring Legacy', shows not only the interest of a man of letters for advances in science, but also the deep interest men of science have always had in the world of letters – as the sender reflected, perhaps the latter is too seldom recognised these days:

Happily, in one non-scientific arena at least, an honest, almost organic understanding and appreciation of Darwin has flourished. This is in literature, where authors from George Eliot to John Fowles have consciously or unconsciously absorbed his precepts and insights, nourishing beautiful prose and poetry. None, perhaps, more so than Thomas Hardy, who intuitively understood Darwin's layers of deep time, historical contingency, hereditary predilections and weaknesses, environmental opportunities, the various scales of change that comprise evolution, the constant need to adjust – and especially the insignificance of individuals against the great flow of life and time.

As Hardy put it: 'Let me enjoy the earth no less/ Because the all-enacting Might/ That fashioned forth its loveliness/ Had other aims than my delight.' This child of the Enlightenment was well aware of more ancient world views, and humbled by what the new investigations of the cosmos revealed. Humans are animals, one species of many on the planet, bound by common ancestry to all other species, part of an ages-old dance of reproduction, accommodation, survival and alteration. (*Nature*, Vol.451/7 February 2008, p.634)



Editors, too, take but a brief place in the 'ages-old dance' of the 'survival and alteration' of 'their' journals. I now come to the end of my 'turn'; and I look back over the past four-and-a-half years, during which I have overseen 13 issues of the Society's journals, with great pleasure and fond memories. I have been delighted to witness the *Hardy Society Journal* taking on its own unique character, while the *Thomas Hardy Journal* has become established as a reputable, peer-reviewed academic publication. Together the journals represent the diversity of the Society's activities and interests, its integration of academic and lay members, of local interest and international scholarship. I thank all of you – THS members,

colleagues on the Council of Management, friends – who have offered such generous support and made my time as editor so stimulating and enjoyable. I pass over the baton to Phillip Mallett of St Andrew's University, knowing that the journal is in good health and its future in good hands.

CLAIRE SEYMOUR