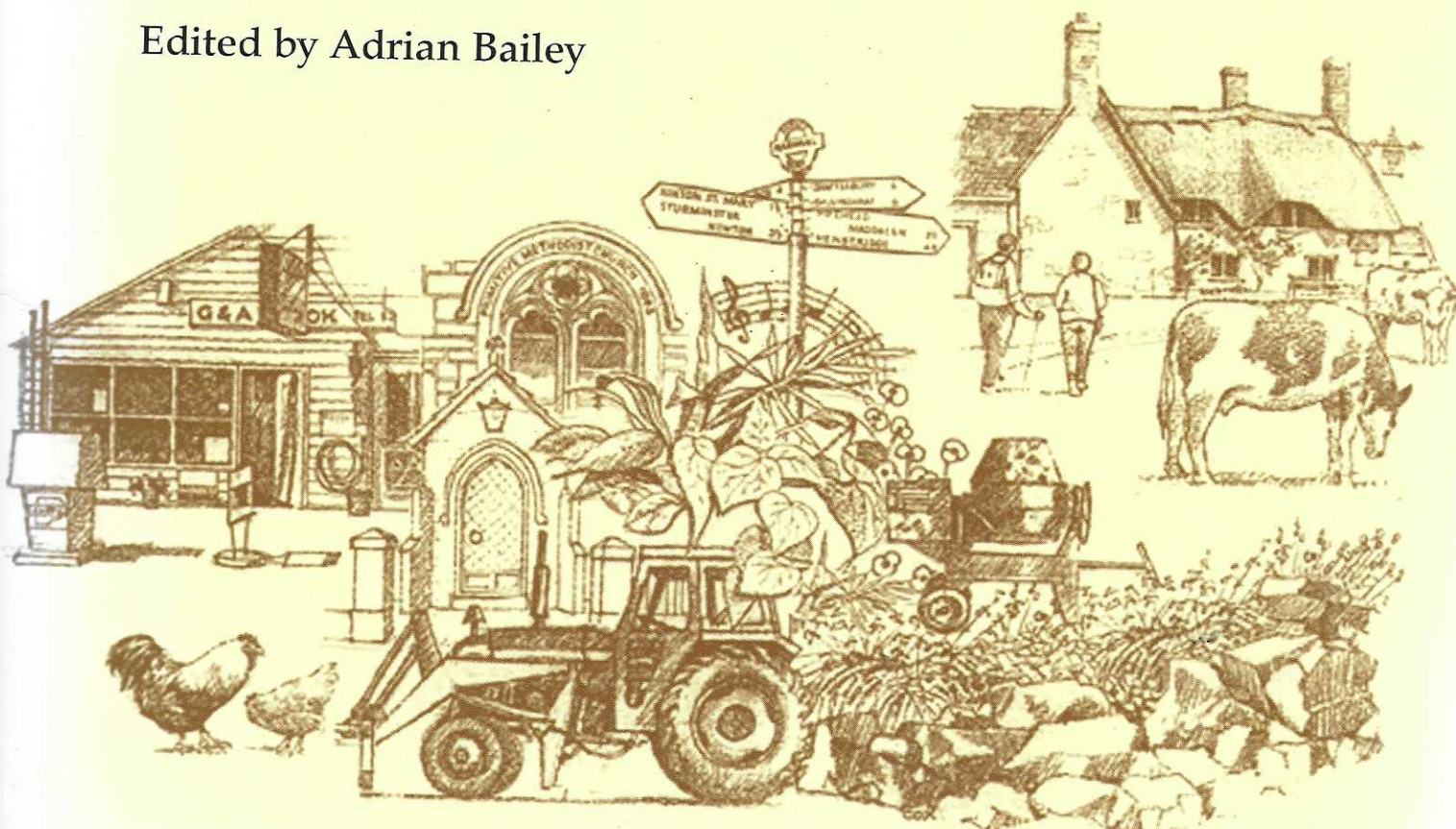


MARNHULL

A Dorset Village at the Millennium

Edited by Adrian Bailey



Limited Edition 2001

Tess's Cottage

Tess's Cottage, at Walton Elm, on the southern fringe of the village, was probably built around 1500 as a single-storied, three roomed 'long house' - the upper floor and chimney stacks are thought to have been added about a hundred years later. The original floor plan consisted of a service room (a small dairy), the family room, and a byre where a few cattle were kept. The building is constructed of local stone - a butter-soft corallian limestone bedded with Marnhull clay. The present owners learned the hard way that great care has to be taken during any external building work to ensure that rain does not reconstitute any exposed or discarded mortar back into a sticky goo, which gets everywhere!



A Victorian Family Group at Tess's Cottage

In the last century the house, then known as Barton Cottage, was owned by the proprietors of one of the village's larger breweries in Carraway Lane, and housed some of their employees; by that time the building had been divided into two dwellings. The charming Victorian group photograph shown above was taken at the back of the house in the 1890s and shows the Wilds family. The patriarch, Hubert, (centre left) worked as a labourer at the brewery and was illiterate; his eldest son, Percival, (back right) worked as a carpenter and is said to have made a frame for this picture for each member of the family.

However, the house's main claim to fame comes from the reported visit of the novelist Thomas Hardy in the mid-1920s. Hardy is believed to have told the owner at the time, a Major Ian Campbell-Johnson, that he had used the cottage as his inspiration for the home of his tragic heroine, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, published in 1891 - the house was renamed Tess's Cottage immediately thereafter. Thomas Hardy had lived in Sturminster Newton for two years in the 1870s. The late Lord Cheshire (Leonard Cheshire VC) also lived here when his parents rented the house for their summer holidays in the years immediately after the end of the First World War. More recently, Field Marshal Sir Richard Vincent, former chief of the Defence Staff, lived here for a number of years in the 1950s.