

# HARDY COUNTRY

Gordon Beningfield







in Sturminster Newton in the north of Dorset—an idyll, Emma called it, and ‘our happiest time’. His second wife records ‘...the rich alluvial district of Sturminster Newton in which the author was now living was not used by him at this time as a setting for the story he was constructing there, but the heath country twenty miles off.’ The novel was *The Return of the Native* and the country Egdon Heath, the composite name for the moorland between Dorchester and Bournemouth or, in Hardy’s terms, between Casterbridge

Marnhull, which Hardy called Marlott, is the small village near Shaftesbury where the beginning of *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is set. I tried to think where Hardy would have imagined or seen the May Day dance taking place, with the village girls in their white dresses, and I think it might have been here.