



A Literary Walk around Sutton Poyntz - The 'Overcombe' of Thomas Hardy

The Novel

The Trumpet Major written by Thomas Hardy in 1880 was his only historical novel. Researched in 1879, it is a mix of fact and fiction based upon extensive library research and family reminiscences and takes place in the period 1806-1808 during the Napoleonic Wars, at a time when the threat of invasion was imminent and King George III visited Weymouth each year for his summer holiday.

The fictional plot of the novel focuses on Anne Garland, a country girl, who lives with her impoverished widowed mother in part of Overcombe Millhouse and who has three suitors; the millers two sons (John and Bob Loveday) and the nephew of a local squire (Festus Derriman). It is centred on the mill in the village of Overcombe (Sutton Poyntz), the seaside resort of Budmouth (Weymouth) and surrounding villages such as Oxwell (Poxwell).

The Locations

As with all of his novels Hardy used real places, vaguely disguised, as the setting for his stories and the Trumpet Major is no exception. During his research in 1879 he adopted a mix of actual places (many re-located to suit the story line; such as the Mill) together with inventions of his literary mind.

These have been studied by numerous writers and our interpretation is based upon this research combined with local knowledge.

Useful References

The Landscape of Thomas Hardy by Denys Kay-Robinson, published Webb and Bower, Exeter 1984.

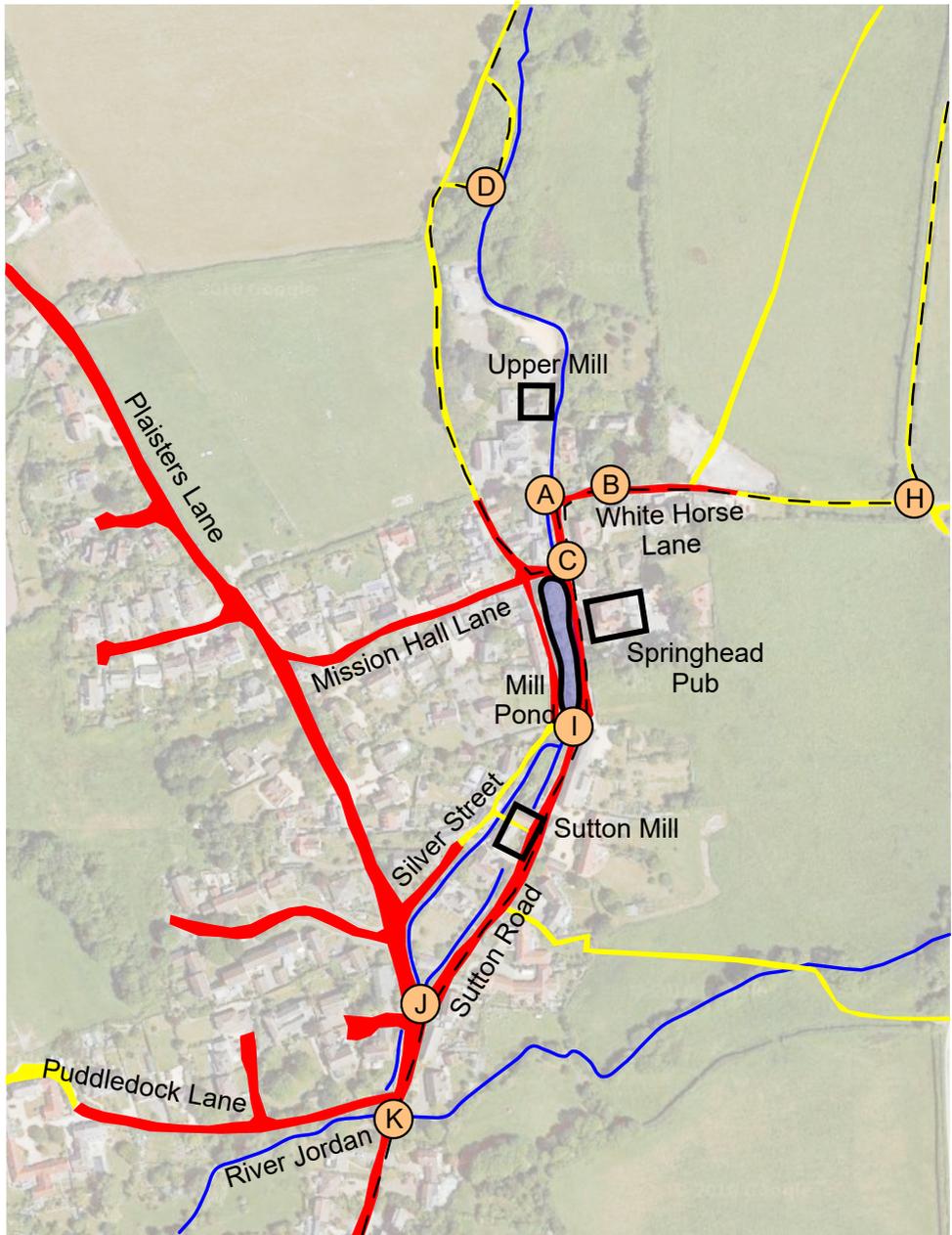
Hardy Wessex Locations by F.P. Pitfield, published Dorset Publishing Company, Wincanton 1992.

The Hardy Guides - Volume Two by Hermann Lea, edited by Gregory Stevens Cox. Penguin Books, 1986.

Hardy's Landscape Revisited by Tony Fincham, published Robert Hale, London 2010.

NOTE: When undertaking the walk please adhere to the marked route along public footpaths, respect private property, keep clear of livestock and close all gates behind you. Thank you.

Map of the route - Village section (map A)



The walk described below starts at the top end of the village, point A on the map, just to the north of the Springhead pub.

At the start point, you will face the former **Waterworks Inspectors House (A)** which can be viewed safely from the public road at the gated entrance.



[This is the site of the Upper Mill to which Hardy was referring, although he used a combination of this, the Lower Mill and that at Upwey in his description. At the time of writing this is the view he would have seen (the Waterworks having been built in 1855 following demolition of the old mill, although there is strong evidence that this house was the mill house of the Loveday and Garland families.)]

Immediately to your right is a **Public Footpath (B)**.

[This is the East Road to Osmington and onwards to Poxwell that Ann Garland would have used to walk to Oxwell Hall and the wedding at Springham (Warmwell). It is also the road that the press gang would have used when returning from other villages in search of Bob and that which Anne and John later followed in order to visit the carving out of the White Horse (actually completed in 1808).]

Now walk south a short distance and view the **Millpond from point (C)** as Hardy would have done.

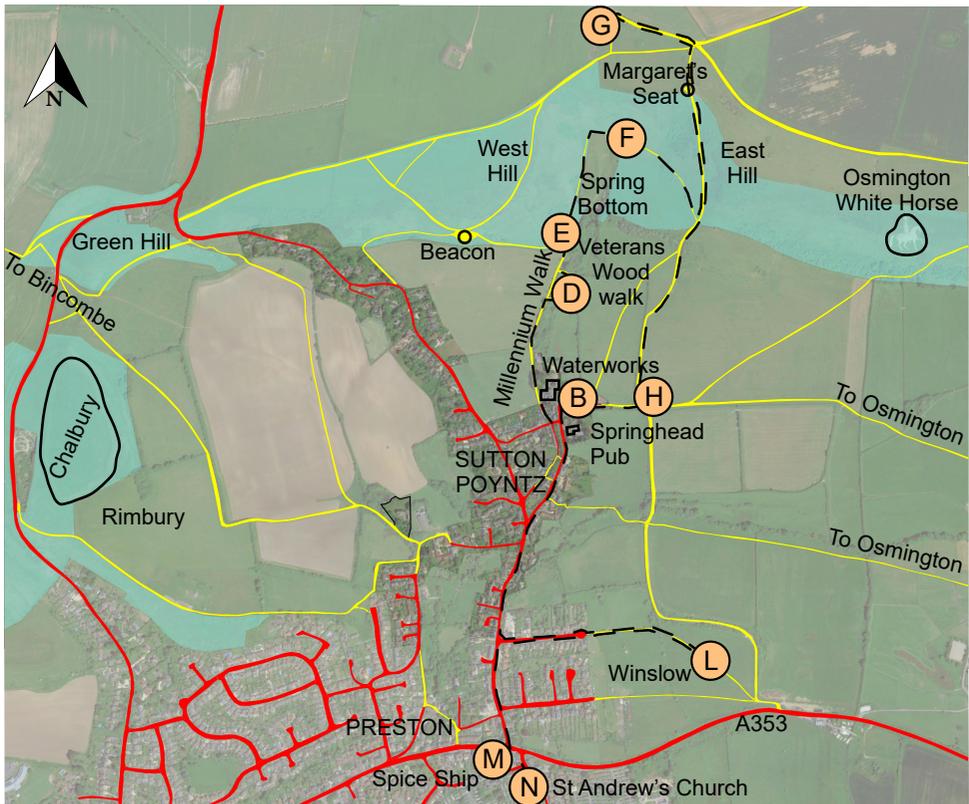
[This pond was not created until 1815 when the Lower Mill was built although he almost certainly used it for the novel - the Upper Mill pond was located at the top of the car park to the rear of the Waterworks House and was by then filled in. It is this pond that Hardy imagined lapping onto the road and where the soldiers horses were brought down from the hill to be watered.

Note that Bob set lines to catch eels in the mill pond, Eels can still be seen, although in much lower numbers than many current residents recall.]

You are standing at the 'Cross' where the villagers socialised.

From here walk north along the public footpath between the cottages, through the field gate and continue straight ahead through a second gate. Stop here and walk down the steps into Veterans wood where you will note on your right the remains of the **Sluice to the former Upper Mill Pond (D)**.

Map of the route - Ridgeway section (map B)



For the next section of the walk which will take you to the top of the Ridgeway over some quite steep and uneven terrain (it is worthwhile for the magnificent views alone) refer to Map B above.

Go back to the track and continue your journey, passing through the next gate to point **(E)**.

[The track along which you have walked and that to the left is that along which the troops would have ascended/descended from the encampment on the hills above. The wood on your right was probably where Miller Loveday collected faggots for the fire.]

Walk straight ahead along the permissive path up the incline and stop briefly at point **(F)**.

[Observe the concreted area in the centre bottom of the basin where the spring rises (covered over in recent years) and which Bob noted when in pursuit of Anne.]

Continue along the path until you reach a gate, stay this side of the gate and turn back upon yourself, walk up the slope passing through another gate until you reach the very top of the hill and turn left along the path until you reach the **Northdown Barn ruins (G)**.

[This building was ‘appropriated by the troops as a hospital’ and was the spot John visited with the party of villagers. Troops would have been stationed along this ridge and in the fields on either side when the king visited Weymouth. The flat area around you was most likely to be the ‘marketplace’ to which Hardy referred where villagers sold provisions to the troops.]

You are standing on East Hill where the beacon was sited and which was lit by Simon Burden and Corporal Tullidge in response to the signal from Abbotsea Beach (Abbotsbury) when raising the alarm (false) of Napoleons Invasion.]

Retrace your steps and descend the hill along the chalk path you ascended earlier.

[This is a route along which the dragoons would have taken their horses to drink at the mill pond and was part of a circular route of travel. It is also most likely the path which Bob ascended to reach the high road in his pursuit of Matilda.]

You will pass through three gates to reach point **(H)**. If you turn left and follow the footpath along the southern edge of the large field you can get a good view of the White Horse before re-tracing your steps.

[These are the fields across which John and Anne would have walked and saw the children playing before ascending the hill and where her shoes became covered in chalk.]

Otherwise turn right and go straight ahead to again reach point **(B)** before turning left and walking along the road past the millpond, stopping at **bridge (I)**.

[This is where Festus Derriman would have halted to “meditate” on his way to the Mill.]



Continue along Sutton Road until you reach the “forking roads” **(J)**.
[The road is that which the press gang walked to/from the Mill and the fork is where sailor Cornick encountered Festus Derriman. Plaisters Lane which forms the other fork must have been the ‘dusty road’ along which Bob travelled by cart after collecting Matilda from Casterbridge (Dorchester) and ‘returning over the ridge’.]



Continuing straight ahead you will quickly come to the road **bridge (K)**
[This is the bridge under which Anne and Matilda concealed Bob from the press gang. Look to your right along the stream to see where the women entered the water ‘at an opening where cattle descended to drink’. Note: Puddledock Lane did not exist in its present form until around 1850.]



The main walk ends here. We hope that you have enjoyed it.

FURTHER EXPLORATION

For those wishing to explore a little further continue along Sutton Road up the hill.

[This area is the rising ground beyond the paddock to which Anne looked while waiting to attend church.]

Continuing straight ahead, on your left you will find Winslow Road. If you walk to the end of here and join the public footpath straight ahead you will pass through a small gate and can ascend to the summit of Winslow Hill which gives wide ranging views.

[This is probably 'the top of the neighbouring hillock where Bob found Anne'.]

Back at the junction with Sutton Road (along which Anne Garland would have walked) continue to the T-junction with the main road (A353).

[This is the turnpike road to Budmouth (Weymouth) along which both Festus and the volunteers travelled when the alarm of an invasion was raised and along which Bob and John returned to Overcombe in the dark.

Note: Older villagers recall this as a well travelled dusty chalk road around the time of World War II.]

Directly opposite is the Spice Ship.

[This is the Ship Inn where many of the volunteers chose to go and spend their shilling rather than enter the church following the Sunday morning drill.]



Around the corner to the left of the Spice Ship you will find Preston Church.

[This is the church to which the Loveday and Garland families walked on Sunday and where the 'pikes' were stored in the aisle and subsequently the corner of the church tower.]



To the left of the church wall and gateway you see the rectangular area of car park.

[This area would have formed the 'green' where the drill of volunteers was conducted.]

The church wall is that below which Mrs Loveday was buried.]

Poxwell Manor (Oxwell) can still be seen, set just back from the road in the village of Poxwell some 3 miles east along the A353 whilst in the opposite direction many sites in Weymouth are still to be found including

Gloucester Lodge (now the Gloucester House hotel) where King George III actually stayed.

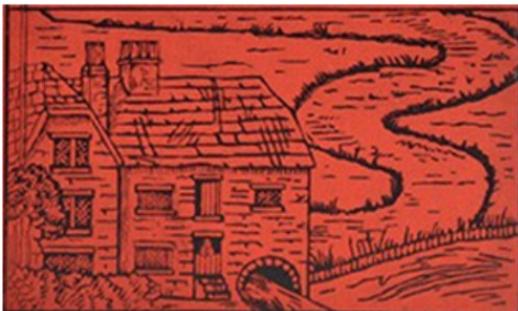


Illustration on front cover of 1st Edition of "The Trumpet Major" 1880

Copyright © Colin Marsh, John Newbould, & Sutton Poyntz Society 2019
Maps layered on Google Earth images
Edited by Bill Egerton