

Parchment to Pixels

Newsletter of the Dorset Archives Trust 2025



CG FRY & SON
BUILDERS
DEVELOPMENT & CONTRACTING



Accredited Contractor
CHAS.co.uk





DORSET ARCHIVES TRUST

2025 NEWSLETTER AND ANNUAL REPORT CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

Dorset Archives Trust supports the work of Dorset History Centre in three key areas: advocacy, encouraging donations of new material, and fund-raising. Working in close partnership, we endeavour to make the best possible use of our combined resources.

This annual report and newsletter is a further step in raising awareness of the importance of archives; and our strapline, 'Saving Dorset's disappearing history', reflects our commitment to safeguarding valuable documents, images and digital collections for future generations. Trustees work with individuals and organisations who hold historical materials, informing them of the Dorset History Centre's facilities and expertise. Collections may be donated outright or placed on permanent loan, and can range from a single item to thousands of documents.

Another important way collections are secured is through auctions.



*Chris Fowler
Chair, Dorset Archives Trust*

The typeface used on the front cover was designed by Reynolds Stone CBE (1909-1979) whose archive is held in the Dorset History Centre (D-RYS).

The photograph on the opposite page comes from the Bournemouth Transport (Yellow Buses) archive (D-BTL), whose 80 boxes of material have recently been catalogued with a grant from the Business Archives Council and money from the Dorset Archives Trust.



The 2025 Summer Gala was held at the Larmer Tree Grounds. In her talk at the Gala, the Hardy Project Archivist, Ruth Burton, recalled Thomas Hardy's poem 'Concerning Agnes', written after dancing with Agnes Grove 'when the wide-faced moon looked through / The boughs at the faery lamps of the Larmer Avenue.'

Dorset Archives Trust can respond quickly to provide essential funding so that Dorset History Centre can bid for important items. We also work in partnership with the Friends of the Nations' Libraries to maximise these opportunities.

Once acquired, collections are carefully preserved and catalogued. Dorset History Centre's specialist staff play a vital role in documenting, digitising and making material accessible to the public. Dorset Archives Trust grants support cataloguing and contribute to vital equipment that cannot be covered by Dorset History Centre's core budget. Without effective online cataloguing, accessing these resources would be like searching for a needle in a haystack.

Fundraising is central to our work. We work closely with DHC to offer an engaging programme for members and non-members alike, with the ability to donate through Gift Aid. Income from memberships, talks, workshops and our annual Summer Gala supports these efforts. Our events not only raise funds but also inspire interest in Dorset's rich heritage and encourage people to explore their own history. We hope that you will enjoy our Newsletter and we are grateful to our major sponsor C.G.Fry & Son for helping us to bring this to you.

CHRIS FOWLER



DOCUMENT PURCHASES

Dorset History Centre has strengthened its collections this year thanks to acquisitions generously funded by Dorset Archives Trust and the Friends of the Nations' Libraries.

DORSET ARCHIVES TRUST FUNDED

Major Cuthbert J. Bell Diaries (1952–1962): Personal diaries, correspondence, and photographs of Major Bell, water bailiff for the Avon & Dorset River Board, chronicling river management and community life (D-3494) (illustrated above).

Copy of Court Roll & Bond (1706–1797): Records from the Manor of Beaminster Secunda, including Mary Hodge's admission to customary holdings and an earlier bond between two physicians. These documents illuminate property rights, local governance, and notable Dorset families (D-3511).

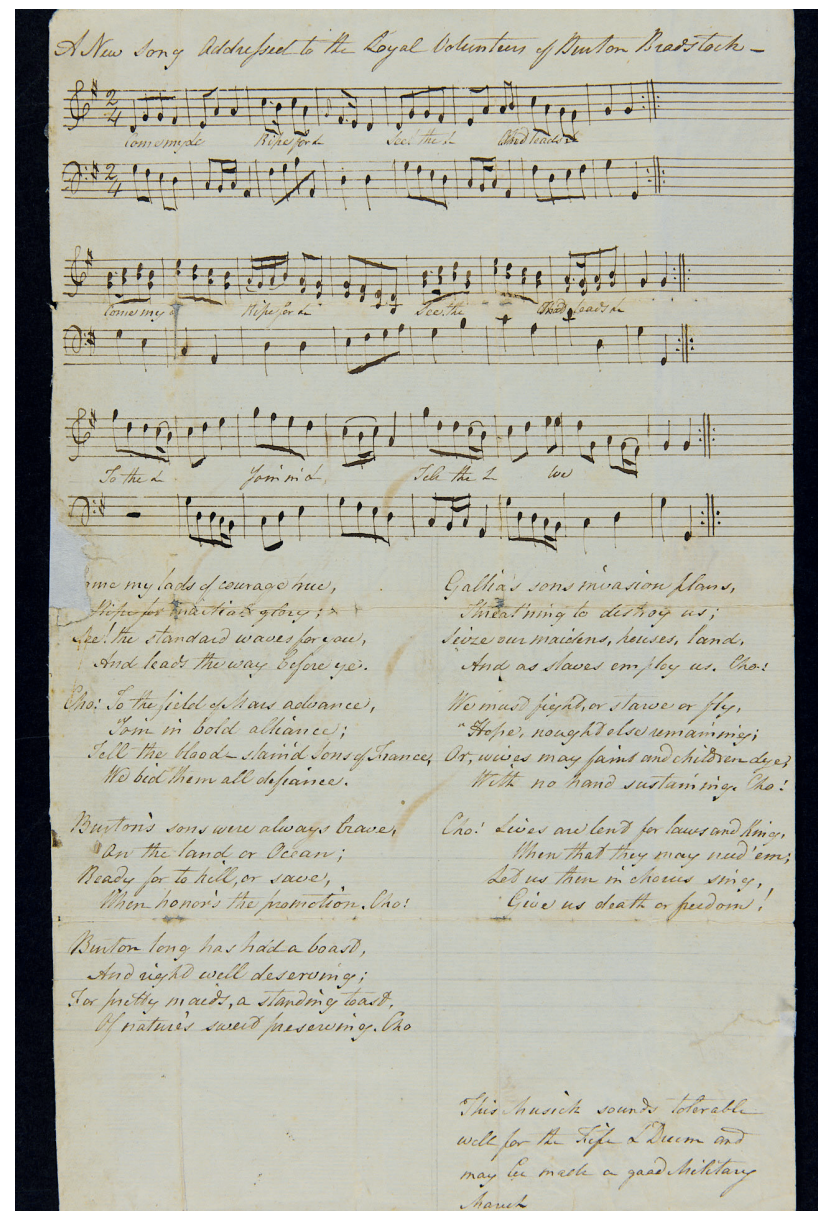


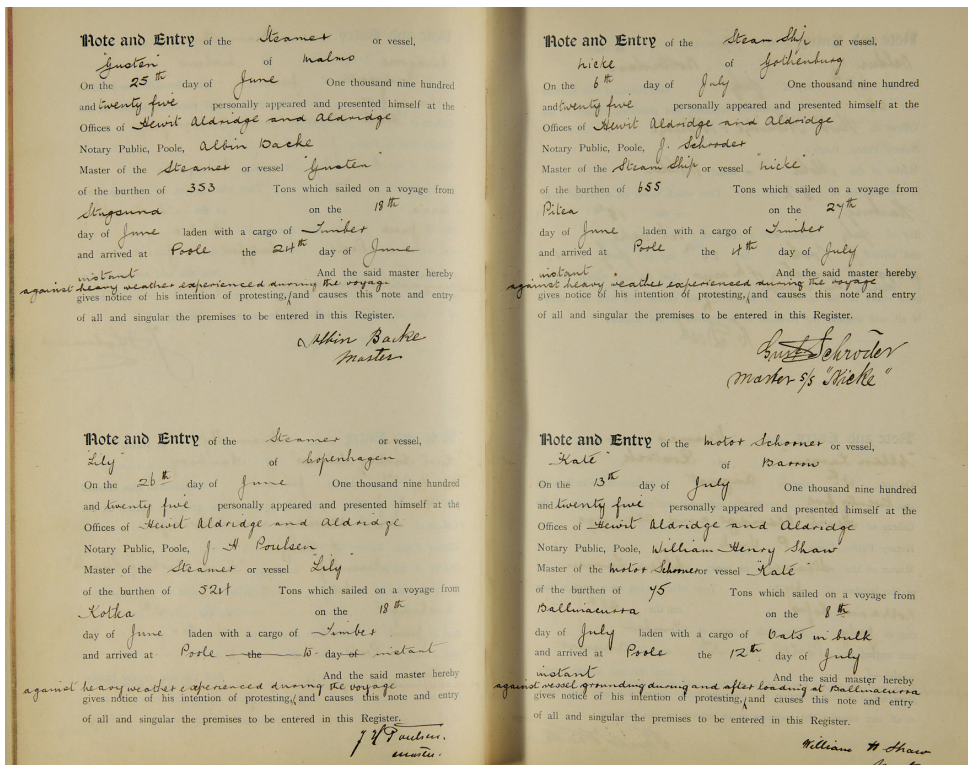
Monkwood Farm Map (1811): A detailed printed map of Monkwood Farm at Marshwood & Stoke Abbott, offering insights into early 19th-century agriculture and land use (D-3480) (a detail illustrated above).

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONS' LIBRARIES FUNDED

John Symonds Udal Correspondence (1876–1915): Three volumes of letters, watercolours, and cards from Dorset antiquarians, including William Barnes, offering insights into folklore and cultural life (D-3480).

'A New Song' for the Burton Bradstock Loyal Volunteers (1804): A Napoleonic-era patriotic song manuscript reflecting local volunteer traditions during the threat of French invasion (D-3499).





Ship's Protest Book (1924-1963): A rare record of maritime declarations at Poole Harbour, documenting legal practices and the hazards of coastal trade (D-3504) (*illustrated above*).

Autobiography of Dr Giles Roberts (1799): A self-written account by the Bridport physician and inventor of 'Poor Man's Friend', revealing his scientific curiosity and religious convictions (D-3510).

These acquisitions deepen our understanding of Dorset's social, cultural, and economic history — from manorial customs and maritime law to rural landscapes and local governance. We are immensely grateful to Dorset Archives Trust and the Friends of the Nations' Libraries for their support in preserving these treasures for future generations.

OWEN SIMONS

TALKS, WORKSHOPS AND EVENTS 2025

Events have several purposes – to promote the work of Dorset Archives Trust and raise funds for our charity; to raise awareness of archives and the work of Dorset History Centre; and to entertain, educate and enrich the lives of those attending.

This year has been successful in achieving all of these goals, with a wide variety of topics and types of event, attracting over 300 people and raising almost £3,000 for the charity.

There have been several talks on aspects of Dorset's history, including business history (Cosens of Weymouth); family history (education records; the Bankes and Drax families); and local history (Portland's lighthouses) which have been both educational and entertaining. Two events were sold out in advance – Paul Lashmar's talk on *Drax of Drax Hall* and our Railway 200 conference in July. The latter was

The Cosens paddle-steamers Victoria and Majestic in Lulworth Cove. The Victoria (left) was launched in 1884, requisitioned for service in both world wars and finally scrapped in 1953. The Majestic was launched in 1901 and was lost whilst minesweeping early in the First World War.





Wyvern performing 'Words Take Wing' in the Dorset History Centre.

accompanied by an exhibition on railway history in Dorset kindly curated by Public Services Archivist Luke Dady.

Alongside talks and exhibitions we also held two workshops to help share skills in Reading Old Handwriting, which both proved popular, delivered by Claire Skinner.

We experimented with a very different kind of event in May: a combination of music and drama called 'Words Take Wing', by Wessex-based performers Wyvern. This combined the words of Thomas Hardy with music he would have been familiar with, and the feedback from the large audience was overwhelmingly positive — 'more please!' was just one of many comments.

Last but not least we were grateful to return to the Larmer Tree Gardens thanks to the kindness of the Rushmore Estate, for our ever-popular Summer Gala in July. Despite some threatening grey clouds at the start of the evening, it stayed dry and conditions were perfect for a picnic on the lawn, accompanied by the sound of peacocks! Archivist Dr Ruth Burton gave a fascinating insight into the Thomas Hardy archives which she has had the privilege of cataloguing over the last year and a half.



Trustee Kate Terkanian with Paul Lashmar at his talk on the Drax family.

DATES FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Our events in 2026 will be advertised on the Dorset Archives Trust website (www.dorsetarchivetrust.org/events.php) in due course.

26 February, 7 pm. Talk by Mark Chutter on Sylvia Townsend-Warner as part of an LGBTQ+ history month.

5 March, 7 pm. Talk by Luke Mouland on Nursing in the First World War, for Women's History Month.

12 March, 7 pm. Talk by Colin Divall to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the Somerset and Dorset Railway.

30 April 2026 – 7 pm – talk by Mike Randall, 'Transported for the Rest of Your Natural Life'

2 July 2026 – our annual Summer Gala will be held at Mapperton House, Beaminster, hosted by one of our Trustees, Julie Montagu, Countess of Sandwich. Julie will share her insights into the extraordinary life of Alberta Sturges, 9th Countess of Sandwich, gleaned from an award-winning archive project.

There will be lots more to come but this is just a sneak peek of the first half of 2026.

CLAIRE SKINNER

DORSET HISTORY CENTRE PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Dorset History Centre (DHC) has for some time identified as a key priority the creation of additional archive accommodation. The service has been filling up its repositories since the building was opened in 1991 and there is now less than 4% of available space left. Whilst digital archives are becoming more and more the norm, we are still operating in a mixed economy with much paper and parchment still requiring a safe preservation environment.

This need, combined with a strong interest in increasing the profile of DHC's collections and functions, has resulted in the planning of a major project entitled *Past Lives, Future Proofed*. Whilst Dorset Council is able to invest in maintaining DHC, the only way that any project of this scale can proceed is if we are successful in our recently submitted application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The NLHF's decision will be known in March 2026.

If we progress through to the next stage (there are two) the project will take around five years to deliver. We are very aware that competition for funding is intense, so make no assumptions about March's decision. However, if successful, the service will embark on a transformational project that will ensure DHC's ability to continue to collect physical archives from across Dorset with the provision of around 22,000 new box spaces.

In addition, the project is scheduled to deliver improvements to the DHC public spaces, including a new entrance. As significant as anything else will be the programme of public engagement activities that forms a key plank of the project. There are four strands including an arts focus, one aimed at filling identified gaps in the collection, a drive to increase our digital preservation capacity and a project focussed on Dorset's rich Quarter Session court records dating from 1709.

We look forward to updating everyone once the Lottery decision is known.

SAM JOHNSTON

NEW ACCESSIONS 2025

This year Dorset History Centre has received a wide range of new accessions. Amongst the most notable are the following:

1. D-3497 Joan Brocklebank Collection. Scrapbooks, photographs and personal papers of Joan Brocklebank, founder of the Dorset Rural Music School, the Dorset Guild of Singers, and the Dorset County Orchestra.
2. D-3484 Julie Storer Collection. Photographs of archaeologists on-site at the excavation of the Dorchester Roman Baths in the 1970s, with oral history interviews just completed at DHC to accompany the collection.
3. D-BMU/R/2 Oral history project from Bournemouth University. Coastal Communities: Bournemouth. Places that are gone but not forgotten, interviews with locals done by students.
4. D-2683 Oral histories by Cranborne Chase National Landscape. The Memories Captured project aimed to capture the voices and stories of local people who have lived and worked in the Cranborne Chase and Chalke Valley area.
5. D-3493 Photographs taken by Patrick Sheehan of Dorset landscapes, some taken to illustrate the Dorset Walks for *Dorset Life* magazine (uncatalogued).
6. D-FRK. Digital probate records for Lin Jammet and the Frink Estate (closed records for now), added to the Frink collection.
7. FJ-1 and FJ-2 – Bournemouth Hebrew and Reform Congregations

EMMA BLOWERS

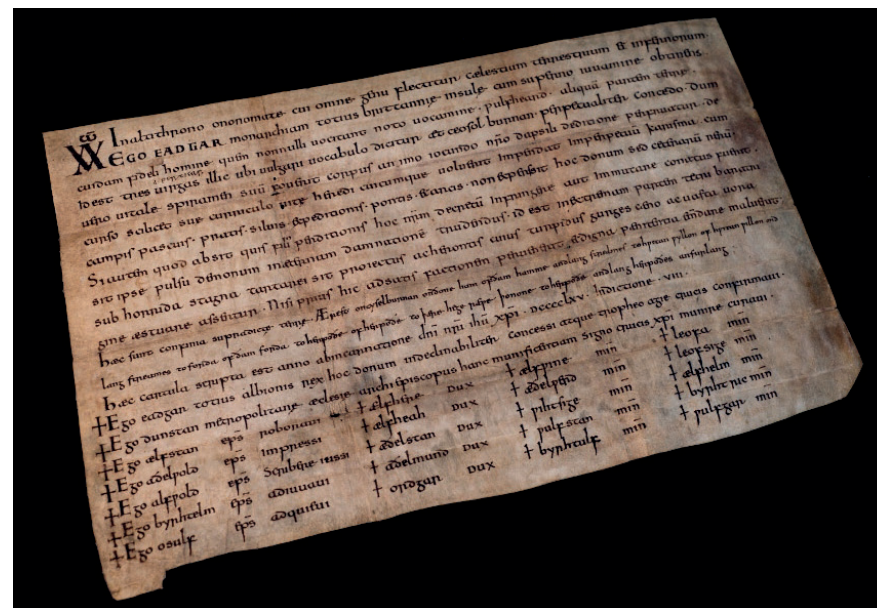
A RARE GLIMPSE OF ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Since time out of mind in England all land originally derives from the King or Queen. It is therefore not surprising that some of the earliest surviving records in this country are charters recording grants of land by Anglo-Saxon monarchs. Only about 200 original, authentic Anglo-Saxon charters are believed to survive, although about 1,000 are recorded, mostly as later transcripts or summaries.

Most of the surviving charters are held in the British Library in collections formed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Sir Robert Cotton, and others. The Bodleian Library, Oxford, holds an eighteenth century collection, and there are also significant quantities in the archives of Canterbury Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and Exeter Cathedral. A few others are to be found in local record offices or remain in private hands.

For Dorset the earliest surviving reference to a charter is to one of Cenwalh, King of the West Saxons, granting land to the church of Sherborne, around 643-672 AD, although the charter itself is lost (according to Finberg's *Early Charters of Wessex*, 1965). We know less about Dorset's charters than those of other neighbouring counties because several monastic cartularies (or collections of charters) have sadly not survived.

Dorset History Centre is therefore extremely fortunate in holding several Anglo-Saxon documents, including our earliest record, dating from 965 AD. This charter, reference D-FSI/ASC/1, forms part of the Fox-Strangways Estate of Ilchester collection. With the growth of Christianity in the Anglo-Saxon period charters often record grants to the church but also to individuals whom the monarch wished to reward. This is the case with the charter in question – it records a gift of land to a man named Wulfheard, presumably as a reward for some act of loyalty, now unknown, to King Edgar. Edgar lived from 943-975 AD, and his reign was one of comparative peace and prosperity. Edgar was only sixteen when he became King of the West-Saxons, Mercians and Northumbrians in 959 AD but by the end of his reign he was King of the whole of England, including the Danelaw.



The charter is written mostly in Latin, with a small section relating to property boundaries in Anglo-Saxon.

This is a translation:

In the name of Him who is enthroned on high, to whom every knee bows in heaven, on the earth and in hell.

I EADGAR, obtaining through heavenly aid the monarchy of all the island of Britain, do grant to a certain faithfull man whom some call by the name of Wulfheard a certain piece of land, i.e. three virgates yardlands in a place called in the vulgar tongue "at Ceasol Burnan" (*at the gravelly stream*) in perpetuity. Whilst he lives he shall enjoy our bountiful gift with a blithe heart. But at the termination of his life the gift shall fall to whichever heir he has chosen for ever, with fields, pastures, meadows, woods, ways, bridges and weirs. But this gift shall not be without other things. If (which may heaven avert) any son of perdition shall try to infringe or change our decree, may he be dragged by the blows of demons into eternal damnation, that is to say, into the furthest part of the foul abyss. May he be hurled under the horrible waters of tartarean Acheron, whose revolting stream is said to seethe with filth and a great whirlpool.

Unless he shall have made satisfaction here and chosen to amend with worthy repentance.

These are the bounds of the aforesaid land: first to Cyselburnan [Cheselbourne] to the enclosure, from the enclosure along stream to White Spring, from White Spring along stream to the ford, from the ford to the highway, from the highway, to the row of trees, then to the highway, along the highway for one furlong.

This charter was written in the year from the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ DCCCCLXV (965) [and in the] VIII (8th) year of the Indiction.

+ I Eadgar King of all England, have unchangeably granted this gift and confirmed [it] with the sign of the Holy Cross

+ I Dunstan, Archbishop of the Metropolitan Church, have taken care to strengthen this bountiful gift with the sign of the Cross of Christ.

Endorsed: This is the charter of the three virgates at Ceosol burnan [Cheselbourne] which King Eadgar has granted to Wulfheard in perpetuity.

Several things really stand out about this document. First, the relatively small amount of land involved. Three virgates is about ninety acres: a virgate was the amount a team of two oxen could plough in a season, nominally thirty acres. The charter contains a huge number of prestigious witnesses for such a small acreage, including the King and Archbishop of Canterbury. I've omitted from the translation four other bishops, five earldormen (noblemen in charge of a district such as a shire), and ten ministers (church leaders). But it is important to understand the context. The King would be presented with a series of charters to confirm at a royal assembly. The list of witnesses are in effect a list of those present, and the grant to Wulfheard would have been just one piece of business dealt with at the assembly.

Secondly, the site of the grant. This is shrouded in mystery because of the generic description of the land. The *Proceedings of Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society* Vol 66 pp129-130 (1934) states 'as in the case of many such small grants, its actual site can be no more than a matter of conjecture.' The 'only definite indication of the site of the grant is that it is on the Cheselbourne, the stream which flows through Cheselbourne and enters the Devil's Brook near the south end of Dewlish park.' According to the Domesday book, written over a century later, Cheselbourne's population included 21 villagers,

10 smallholders and 5 slaves. The chief landowner was Shaftesbury Abbey, although it was still in the hands of the monarch at the time of the Conquest.

Last but not least, there are the ornate references to heaven and hell and curses to anyone disobeying the charter's conditions. Curses were common in Anglo-Saxon charters: research by Petra Hoffman has shown that the use of Classical references to hell such as 'Tartarean Acheron' (in Greek mythology a river running through an abyss) was at its peak at the time the charter was written. Dorset's charter, in effect, was also a way for the scribe to show off their Classical education!

This document is a brief glimpse into a lost world – very close in time to the world of TV's *The Last Kingdom*. Wulfheard of Cheselbourne was once a living, breathing person, perhaps with a family, friends, and certainly with a loyal relationship to King Edgar. We may never know much more about his world but it might make Wulfheard's heart 'blithe' indeed to think he lives on in this precious and unique document. The original is not normally produced to protect it from deterioration, except in exceptional circumstances. However, a high quality facsimile can be seen on the wall of our searchroom.

CLAIRE SKINNER

The Dorset History Centre in Numbers

- Dorset History Centre holds over 53,000 boxes of archives dating back to AD 965
- DHC has over 6,000 maps of Dorset of all shapes and sizes
- We produced 14,628 documents to visitors this year
- We received 3,348 enquiries in 2025, and processed 233 reprographics orders
- Our records on Ancestry had 2,341,014 views in the last 12 months!
- Our catalogue was viewed 710,567 times in 2025
- The Bankes archive has over 30,000 separate items

OUTREACH, LEARNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Music, writing, tours, and clay beach huts all played their part in an exciting year of activities. Through active partnerships and a refreshed events programme, we enjoyed a whole range of activities and reached many new groups and individuals. There were ten off-site talks (largely thanks to our wonderful volunteer speaker), and two exhibitions – one for Railway 200 and one for Heritage Open Days and received great feedback on both. There was a plethora of evening, online and afternoon talks hosted by both DHC and DAT; several women's history and Reading Old Handwriting workshops, and 500 school children from Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole learnt about Maiden Castle. West Moors Council shared this feedback:

We are so grateful to you for preparing and delivering such a fascinating presentation. We received many compliments on your talk, with lots of residents expressing how interesting it was. Many are now planning a visit to the Dorset History Centre, which is fantastic.

Our volunteer base has continued to grow, with faithful friends

Building clay beach huts at a Heritage Open Day in the Dorset History Centre.



Stability 4U at the Square and Compass, Worth Matravers.

continuing work on long-standing projects and new roles such as event and hospitality support. In the summer our volunteers visited Max Gate, Hardy's self-designed Dorchester home. One of our volunteers commented;

We felt quite privileged to have a private tour and talk at Max Gate before going round the house itself. We have never been round, although we've walked past many times. For a long time it wasn't open to the public, and once they opened up the house and garden, we somehow never got round to it. It was fascinating to see where he (Hardy) lived and wrote. Having worked on the Hardy collection, I could relate closely to him and his wives (and pets).

Our Hardy volunteer team also won the Volunteer Team of the Year Award from the Volunteer Centre, Dorset – so huge congratulations to them for helping to complete such an important catalogue.

Dorset History Centre is also part of *Sounds of the South-West*, a project digitising at-risk sound formats. It was a highlight of the year to work with learning disabled adults to explore recorded sound from the Square and Compass pub at Worth Matravers in the 1950's. We had such fun making music together, culminating in a visit to sing those old songs in the place they were first recorded.

MARIA GAYTON

COOKING FOR ROYALTY

We recently discovered this letter of reference (REF:D-1745/1), praising the cook at Crag Head, Bournemouth. It was written by the chamberlain for the Queen of Sweden and Norway, who rented the house in 1881. The letter reads:

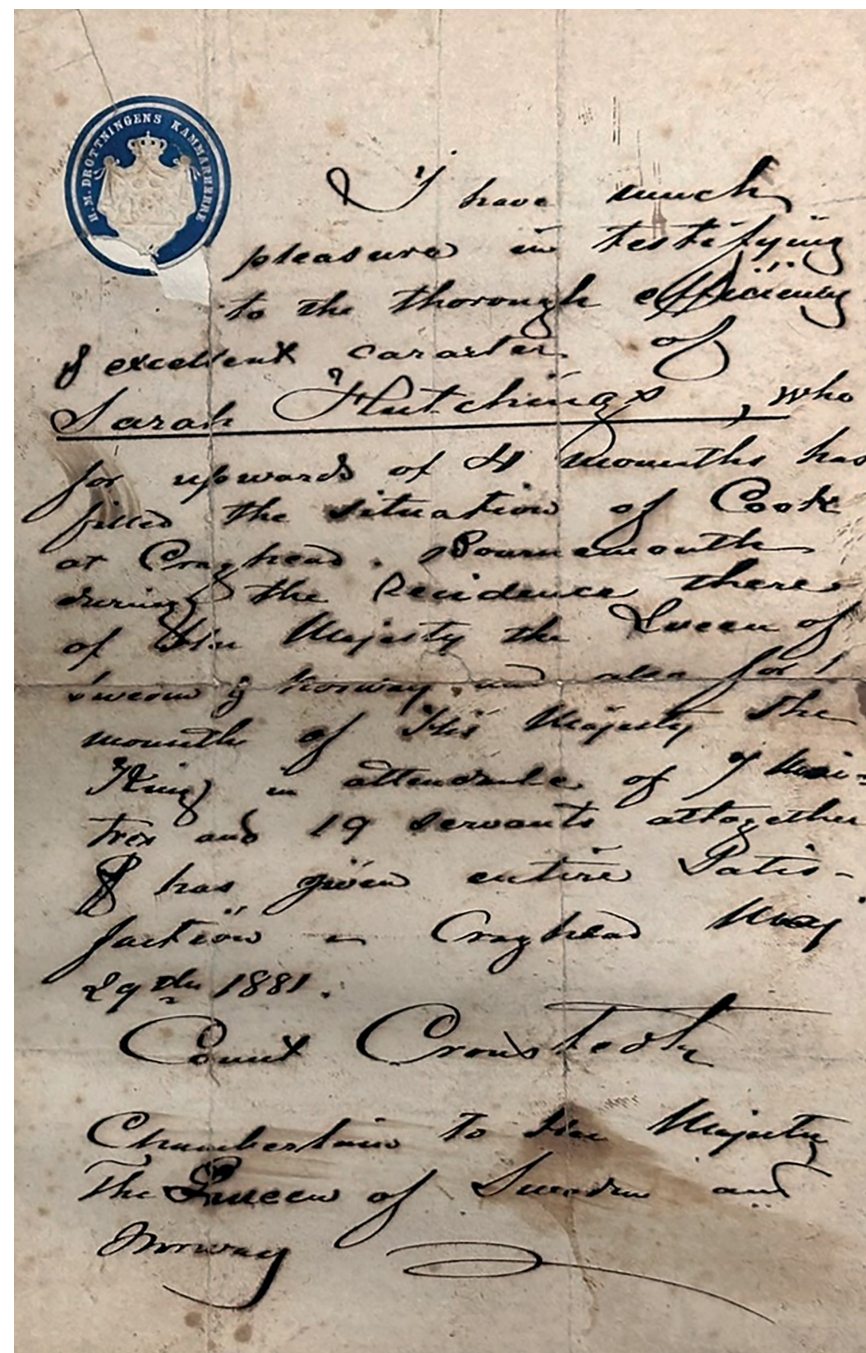
I have much pleasure in testifying to the thorough efficiency & excellent character [sic] of Sarah Hutchings, who for upwards of 4 months has filled the situation of Cook at Craghead, Bournemouth serving the Residence [sic] there of Her Majesty the Queen of Sweden and Norway and also for 1 month of His Majesty the King in attendance of 7 [waiters?] and 19 servants altogether & has given entire satisfaction ~ Craghead May 29th 1881

Count [Cranstedk?]

Chamberlain to Her Majesty The Queen of Sweden and Norway

Crag Head sat on Manor Road in Bournemouth, overlooking the stretch of beach between Bournemouth and Boscombe Pier. It was rented by the King and Queen of Sweden and Norway, Oscar II and Sophia of Nassau. It is unclear why the royal family decided to come to Bournemouth, but the town's reputation as a spa

Crag Head, Bournemouth. Residential apartments now stand on the site.



is the likely reason as Queen Sophia often suffered with poor health.

Sophia was a democratic and liberal queen, who supported her second son Prince Oscar when he fell in love with a lady-in-waiting, Ebba Henrietta Munck. Scandal followed, his father insisting that he delay the marriage for two years and surrender any right to the Swedish throne should the marriage go ahead. Love overcame tradition. Oscar refused to give up Ebba and they were finally married in St Stephen's Church in Bournemouth on the 15th March 1888, and continued to live at Crag Head for some time after.

Crag Head later became a boarding school for girls, a convalescent home for the Red Cross, and a hotel. It was demolished in 1972 and residential apartments have been built on the site.

WHO WAS SARAH HUTCHINGS?

As 1881 was a census year, Sarah is recorded at Crag Head. She was 25 and listed as the cook, with a kitchen maid, Fanny Hatcher, and a scullery maid, Rose Carter, working under her.

She married Alfred Wrenn, a butcher, at St Peter's Church in Bournemouth on the 22nd April 1889 when still living and working at Crag Head.

According to her marriage register her father was William Hutchings, a postillion (someone who rides a harnessed horse pulling a coach). In both the 1881 and 1901 census Sarah gives her birthplace as Southampton, but despite having so much information we unfortunately haven't been able to track down her baptism or birth records.

The 1901 census lists Sarah as living at 5 Palace Colonnade, Christchurch Road, Boscombe, with her husband and their five children, and Maud Harris, their 14-year-old servant. Palace Colonnade was known for its iron veranda, but was demolished in about 1990 during road widening works in Boscombe town centre. The veranda was dismantled and used to build a pergola in the Upper Gardens in Bournemouth, where it still remains.

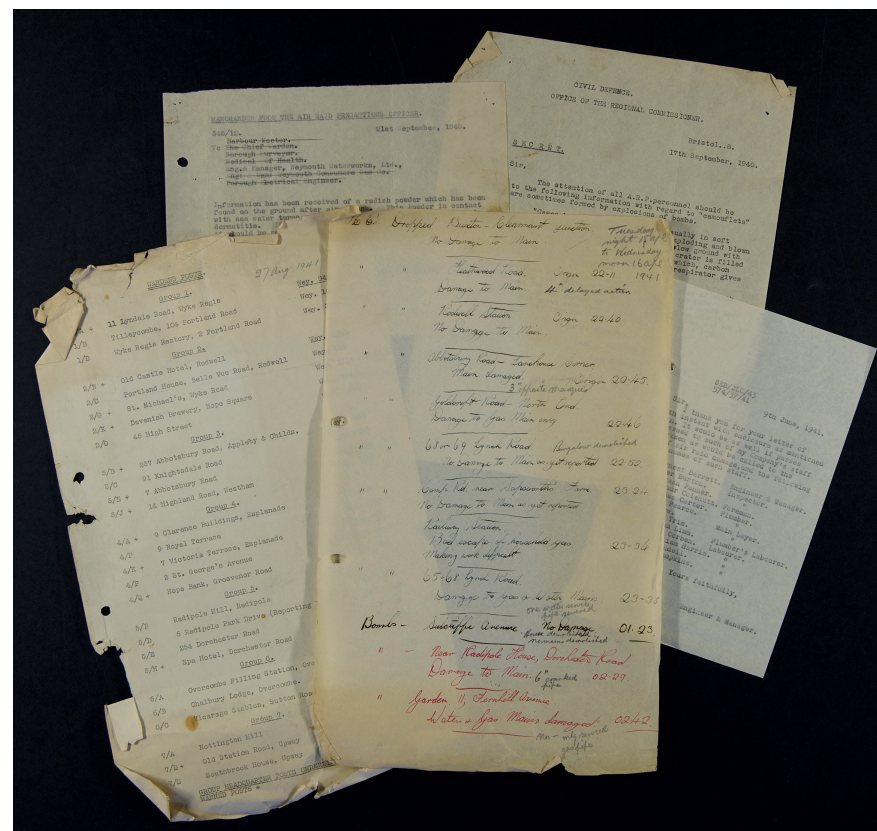
LUKE DADY

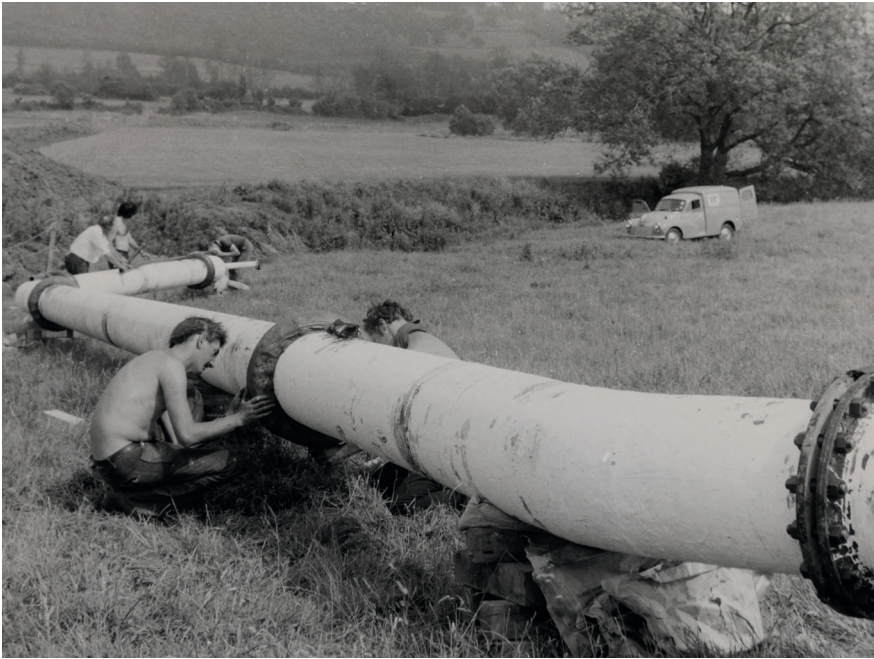
THE WESSEX WATER ARCHIVE

The archive collection comprises hundreds of boxes of material, including its predecessor companies, dating back to the early 19th century. Thanks to funding from Wessex Water, this collection is currently being catalogued and conserved. The records will eventually be made available to the public, with the project due to end in 2027. The collection includes a range of material including plans, maps, photographs, trade books, and correspondence.

The largest collection is that of the Weymouth Waterworks Company, whose oldest document is the Weymouth Water Act of 1797. The

Weymouth Waterworks Company papers detailing Air Raid Precautions during the Second World War.





Wessex Water laying pipes for an emergency water supply during the 1976 drought.

archive ranges from documents concerning the construction of Wyke and Northdown reservoirs in the 1930s to petitions from residents in Chickerell and Wyke Regis requesting a water supply in the 1880s, as well as to new housing estates being built in the 1950s. It covers a period of over 150 years' worth of change to the landscape within Weymouth and the surrounding villages.

Correspondence during the Second World War will be a great asset for researching and understanding the local area in the 1940s. Letters include demand notices for fees, unoccupied housing due to evacuations, bomb damage to properties, and housing being occupied by the military. Letters regarding air raid precautions have lists of on-call staff and engineers to fix any pipes or mains damaged by air raids.

EMMA BLOWERS

SHERBORNE ALMSHOUSE THE TRIPTYCH AND THE ARCHIVE

As many will be aware, the sale of the artwork known as the 'Sherborne Triptych' took place in December 2025. The painting by an unknown Belgian artist had resided at Sherborne almshouse for around 500 years but was sold at Sotheby's (for an eye-watering £5.7 million) in order to raise funds for the charity's core purpose – that of providing affordable accommodation for the people of Sherborne.

What is probably less known is that the archive of the Sherborne almshouse, originally deposited at Dorset History Centre in 1965 (D-SHA), pre-dates the creation of the triptych by at least 50 years with the earliest records reaching back to 1425. The almshouse was initially established in 1406 but formally so by Letters Patent in 1437 for the purpose of caring for '12 poor feeble and impotent men and 4 poor, feeble and impotent women'. The almshouse, administered by trustees or 'brethren' owned lands and property across Dorset and Somerset from which rental income was derived – the earliest of these dates to 1318 for a tenement, 'Three Acres' in Shaftesbury. Also included is the deed for

Sherborne Almhouse in 1939.





The illuminated charter of 1437. For a closer view see the Newsletter front cover.

a ‘mansion house’ adjacent to St. Paul’s in London which suggests wealthy patronage.

Perhaps the most visually impressive document from within the collection is the 1437 illuminated charter granted by Robert Nevyle, Bishop of Salisbury. Particularly significant in terms of extent are the almshouse’s accounts which span 1425-1951, giving a wealth of information on the day-to-day expenses of running the charitable institution.

The final element of the archive, the ‘miscellaneous’ section is where references to the Triptych emerge. There is no extant record of how the artwork came to reside in Sherborne. However, what is clear is that its quality and value were understood. The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1923 and correspondence from the 1930s references conservation and insurance costs. The triptych may now have left Sherborne after 500 years. However, the almshouse and its rich archive remain very much parts of Dorset’s heritage.

SAM JOHNSTON

CONSERVATION CORNER

We have been busy working on *Past Lives, Future Proofed*, our Capital Bid project. Alongside plans for a much-needed extension to the store room, we are developing four community engagement initiatives. One of these, ‘Life and Crimes’, will bring to light the stories hidden within the Quarter Session Rolls — court records dating back to 1709. These rolls form the most complete record of civil administration and criminal justice in Dorset, offering a remarkable insight into the county’s social, administrative, judicial, and family history. To make these stories accessible to today’s audiences, both cataloguing and conservation are essential.

A recent conservation survey assessed more than 570 rolls. Although the collection spans 1709–1971, the later material is generally in good condition, so the survey focused on the years 1709–1852.

The Quarter Session Rolls consist mainly of tightly bound bundles of

A typical bundle of 18th century Quarter Session Rolls.





Jessica Pollard at work in the Conservation Studio.

parchment and paper documents, secured with leather ties and wrapped in surplus parchment sheets. Many were once stored near open fires, leaving them coated in soot, and some show historic mould and insect damage. The earliest bundles are especially fragile: parchment has fused together in places, and documents are fragmented. The greatest challenge, however, lies in the distortion caused by centuries of being rolled so tightly. Parchment in particular becomes stiff and resistant, making safe handling — and therefore cataloguing — impossible without risking further damage.

Despite these obstacles, our aim is clear: to conserve, stabilise, and ultimately unlock this extraordinary collection so that Dorset's hidden histories can be brought vividly to life.

To learn more about our archive conservation services, or to schedule a free consultation, please contact us at: archives@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.

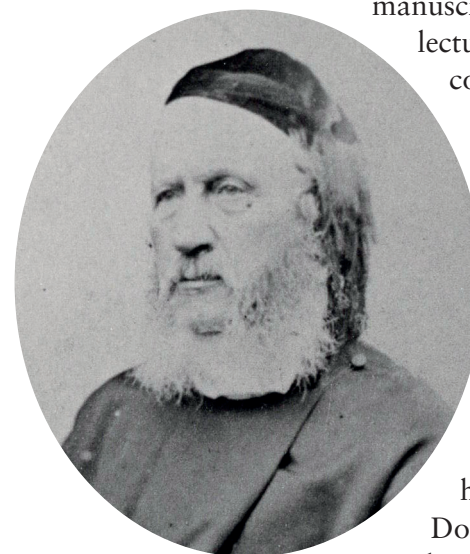
JESSICA POLLARD

TWO DORSET WRITERS

One major cataloguing project currently running is that of William Barnes (1801-1886), a poet, schoolmaster, linguist, and a prolific lecturer who gave over 200 talks to institutions such as the Dorchester Working Men's Mutual Improvement Society. From 1862 he was the rector at Winterborne Came, although his association with the parish began much earlier, in the 1840s.

The archive provides evidence of the breadth of Barnes' extraordinary talents, knowledge and legacy. The 66 boxes include poetry and prose

manuscripts, research notes, scrapbooks, lecture posters, photographs and correspondence. They speak to the diversity of Barnes' interests (works that he published included poetry, history and mathematics) and invite a wide range of approaches from researchers. Barnes is not now as well-known as other Dorset-based writers, but his lecture posters alone show how familiar he would have been to many people across Dorset and in neighbouring counties during his lifetime.



Barnes is perhaps best known for his poems in Dorset dialect. In addition to manuscripts of Barnes' dialect poetry the archive includes Dorset word lists, with glossaries by Barnes. In Barnes' writing we become reacquainted with wonderful words like 'ballywrag' and 'dumbledore' and 'stunpoll'. Hardy insisted that this did not make Barnes one of 'the old unpremeditating singers of dialect.' Instead, he wrote, Barnes 'really belonged to the literary school of Tennyson, Gray and Collins'.



Sylvia Townsend Warner in her cottage at Frome Vauchurch.

Other fascinating items in the archive have been created by Barnes' children and grandchildren. These include early photographs taken by William Miles Barnes (one of Barnes' sons) and collections of short stories, poems, news and illustrations made by his lively and talented grandchildren who lived in Florence.

The cataloguing project will run until August 2026 and will make this significant archive accessible and fully searchable via an online catalogue, facilitating the next generation of research into William Barnes. The cataloguing project has been made possible through grants, donations and a collaborative fundraising effort led by the William Barnes Society and Dorset Archives Trust. The William Barnes Archive is held on deposit at Dorset History Centre and is owned by Dorset Museum and Art Gallery, which Barnes co-founded.

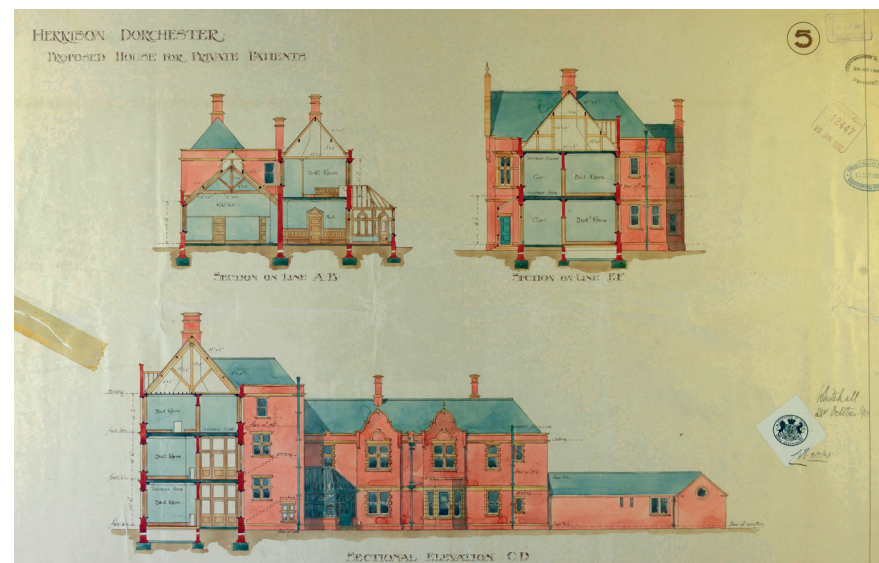
Dorset History Centre, working closely with Dorset Archives Trust and a range of other stakeholders has launched a fundraising campaign to bring about the cataloguing of archive of writer and activist Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978). This, along with Hardy and Barnes is the third of the major literary collections held by the service and a priority for cataloguing given its fascinating content and the rising profile of Townsend Warner as a writer of note.

DR RUTH BURTON

VOLUNTEER VOICE

I started volunteering at the Dorset History Centre when I retired. With my new found free time I wanted to work in an environment that was different to my previous job, that would support my interest in social history and that would allow me to give something back to the community. I found such an opportunity on the DHC website seeking volunteers for a project to catalogue the archive of Herrison Hospital, later known as the Dorset County Asylum (NG-HH/CMR). Following a brief chat and tour of the History Centre, I joined a new team of volunteers and we set about cataloguing and repackaging admission documents of pauper patients at the asylum. There was a lot to learn with challenges including deciphering spider-like handwriting, handling deteriorating documents and developing my limited knowledge of IT. By the end of the project over 10,000 documents had been catalogued and repackaged and it is now available as a historical resource for the wider community. It is a fascinating archive and I am proud of the small part I played in preserving it for the future.

Plans for Herrison Hospital, which opened in 1863.

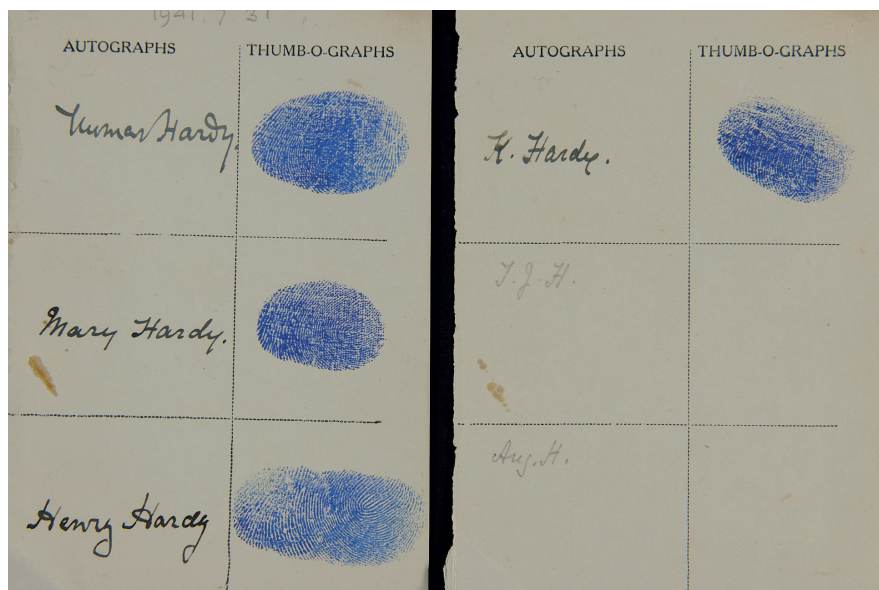


I have continued to volunteer at the archive and have worked on a wide variety of projects, building up my knowledge of how to sort and record a vast array of archive materials. These have included photographs, letters, deeds, plans, maps, financial accounts and minutes. I have particularly enjoyed the variety of archives I have handled, including charities, businesses, engravings, churches, theatrical societies and burial grounds. In every archive there is always something of interest and my knowledge and understanding of local history has also improved.

I can honestly say that I learn something every day I volunteer – not only from the incredibly patient and supportive archivists, but also from fellow, more knowledgeable volunteers who are always willing to give advice and lend a hand. The Dorset History Centre is a friendly and relaxed place and I hope to continue to support its work for many years to come.

JANE ASHENDEN

One of the more unexpected items to turn up in the Hardy archive was this page of thumbprints of the family,



THE HARDY ARCHIVE NOW AVAILABLE TO ALL!

It cannot have escaped the attention of anyone familiar with DHC's work in recent times that Thomas Hardy's archive has been the focus of much of our attention. The collection was transferred here from Dorset Museum and Art Gallery in 2019 whereupon DHC took on the task of cataloguing the collection – the largest gathering of primary source material relating to Hardy in the world. The archive (reference D-HAR) is made up principally of the writer's own material built up over time at Max Gate.

Dorset Archives Trust was instrumental in raising funds for the project. We required £70,000 to fully catalogue this outstanding collection. Thanks to the Trust and the support of public donations and grants, from amongst others the National Archives, we were able to reach our total in late 2023. Project archivist Ruth Burton started the task in March 2024. We have made the final touches to the online catalogue where over 6,700 entries can now be viewed. Each element of the archive is described allowing fully searchable discovery of the collection. It is already noticeable how much more web traffic there has been since the catalogue went live.

The catalogue contains a rich and eclectic mix of material ranging from the archival jewels, the three manuscript novels, including *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, along with Hardy's notebooks, poetry, musical scores, architectural plans (reflecting Hardy's early apprenticeship and lifelong interest in the built environment) and photographs. The largest single part of the archive is the c. 5,500 pieces of correspondence. Like many of his contemporaries Hardy was a prolific writer of letters – and he in return received a large number. Correspondents include many of the great names in literature such as Virginia Woolf, Siegfried Sassoon and J. M. Barrie.

In 2026 we intend to make digital images of the notebooks and novels available to view via the catalogue. We encourage anyone interested in Hardy or merely curious to look through the archive at their leisure.

SAM JOHNSTON

FINANCIAL REPORT

We are pleased to report a positive update for the current financial year to date. Our income amounted to £120,152, reflecting the continued generosity of our members, donors, and supporters, alongside successful fundraising events and grant income. Of this, over £100,000 came from a legacy and a donation for cataloguing the Pitt Rivers Family Archive. During the year we spent £88,311 on our charitable activities, projects and events, principally Barnes for All! and the Pitt Rivers Family Archive. Currently, our reserves stand at £109,351. Of this, £85,372 is set aside for specific purposes such as archive projects, document purchases, and bursaries. The remaining £23,968 is unrestricted, allowing us to support ongoing activities, respond to opportunities, and meet future costs.

The organisation remains in a strong and stable position, with funds carefully managed and directed towards preserving collections, supporting research and education, and delivering events for members. Trustees are grateful for the continued support of members, donors, and volunteers, which makes this work possible.

DEBBIE SHAW

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome all new members and would encourage anyone with an interest in Dorset's history to join us.

- Attend evening talks, activities and behind the scenes tours.
- Receive a copy of our new annual Newsletter, *Parchment to Pixels*
- Join us at the annual Summer Gala, which in 2026 is to be held at Mapperton House, Beaminster.
- Annual membership for an individual is £12, and £15 for a couple.

For more information use the attached QR code, go to www.dorsetarchivetrust.org or enquiries@dorsetarchivetrust.org



The 2025 *Parchment to Pixels* Newsletter has been produced by the Dorset Archives Trust and printed by Creeds Design and Print, Bridport DT6 3JP

HANOVER FORBES

HERITAGE AND ART ADVISORY



TAX EFFICIENT SOLUTIONS FOR HERITAGE PROPERTY
SPECIALISING IN NEGOTIATED SALES TO THE NATION
REMBRANDT TO ROSSETTI - THE BRITISH MUSEUM TO THE ASHMOLEAN

FOR CONFIDENTIAL ADVICE PLEASE CONTACT GUY SCHWINGE
HANOVERFORBES@GMAIL.COM 07778 523 962



- Specialising in new build, refurbishment, small works and listed buildings in both the private and commercial sectors
- Led by a customer-driven highly skilled team
- In-house joinery workshop
- Award winning

Contact us for more information: contracting@cgfry.co.uk