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NEWS

Norrie and Hardy

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By Nicola Rayner »

THE success of the BBC series Tess has reawakened interest in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

The last living link with Hardy is 102-year-old Norrie Woodhall from Owermoigne.

Norrie, the last of the Hardy Players, has done her fair share of interviews, but until now none have been recorded for posterity on camera. Now a video diary of Norrie has been recorded on DVD and is on sale at Dorset County Museum. The DVD offers a menu of categories: life in Dorchester, World War II and chickens, and Thomas Hardy and the Hardy Players.

Joe Illing of Full-Video Solutions explained: "I noticed last March that the New Hardy Players were doing a show at The United Church in Dorchester. We saw that Norrie was going to do a part and we thought that that sort of thing should be filmed. So we called Devina Symes and asked if we could film it and she said she would love us to. We asked if anyone had done a film on Norrie, and she said that they hadn't, so a week later we went round to her house and chatted to her for a couple of hours and recorded that. Even after that she was still going strong. She's so bright and sparky."

He continued: "It's a nice insight into those days. We stuck it together over last summer and tried to make a little documentary with the photos that the museum allowed us to copy. The Warmwell Aerodrome Society let us copy some pictures of the planes too."

Joe, who has been involved in the film industry in London all his life, moved down here a few years ago.

Full-Video Solutions makes corporate films, but also has an interest in local stories. In addition to filming Dorset Voices, the New Hardy Players production, he and his business partner, Hugo Middleton, have made a DVD on a local woodfair, and one called Wild Hart, a musical play written for primary schoolchildren commissioned by Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

What appealed about their latest subject matter? "I'm a bit of a conservationist so I like the juxtaposition of what Dorchester was like then and what it is like now," said Joe. "I liked her description of Poundbury and of what it looked like in those days with Poundbury fair."

As for Norrie, he said: "She's from a bygone time and she can still stand up on stage and do her stuff. People of that age, who have known people like Thomas Hardy, are now a sort of rarity, there are not many of them left."

The DVD costs £6.95, with a contribution going to the Dorset cancer charities, which Norrie supports.

To order a copy, call 01929 427 650 or email joeillingediting@aol.com

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