June 2, 1840. It was in a lonely and silent spot between woodland and heathland that Thomas Hardy was born, about eight o’clock on Tuesday morning the 2nd of June 1840, the place of his birth being the seven-roomed rambling house that stands easternmost of the few scattered dwellings called Higher Bockhampton, in the parish of Stinsford, Dorset. The domiciles were quaint, brass-knockered, and green-shuttered then, some with green garden-doors and white balls on the posts, and mainly occupied by lifeholders of substantial footing like the Hardys themselves. In the years of his infancy, or shortly preceding it, the personages tenating these few houses included two retired military officers, one old navy lieutenant, a small farmer and tranter, a relieving officer and registrar, and an old militiaman, whose wife was the monthly nurse that assisted Thomas Hardy into the world. These being mostly elderly people, the place was at one time nicknamed ‘Veterans’ Valley’. It was also dubbed ‘Cherry Alley’, the lane or street leading through it being planted with an avenue of cherry-trees. But the lifeholds fell into hand, and the quaint residences with their trees, clipped hedges, orchards, white gatepost-balls, the naval officer’s masts and weather-cocks, have now perished every one, and have been replaced by labourers’ brick cottages and other new farm-buildings, a convenient pump occupying the site of the mossy well and bucket. The Hardy homestead, too, is weather-worn and reduced, having comprised, in addition to the house, two gardens (one of them part orchard), a horse-paddock, and sand-and-gravel pits, afterwards exhausted and overgrown: also stabling and like buildings since removed; while the leaves and mould washed down by rains from the plantation have risen high against the back wall of the house, that was formerly covered with ivy. The wide, brilliantly white chimney-corner, in his child-time such a feature of the sitting-room, is also gone.
Some Wordsworthian lines — the earliest discoverable of young Hardy’s attempts in verse — give with obvious and naïve fidelity the appearance of the paternal homestead at a date nearly half a century before the birth of their writer, when his grandparents settled there, after his great-grandfather had built for their residence the first house in the valley.¹

The family, on Hardy’s paternal side, like all the Hardys of the south-west, derived from the Jersey le Hardys who had sailed across

¹ The poem, written between 1857 and 1860, runs as follows:

**DOMICILIUM**

It faces west, and round the back and sides  
High beeches, bending, hang a veil of boughs,  
And sweep against the roof. Wild honeysucks  
Climb on the walls, and seem to sprout a wish  
(If we may fancy wish of trees and plants)  
To overtop the apple-trees hard by.

Red roses, lilacs, variegated box  
Are there in plenty, and such hardy flowers  
As flourish best untrained. Adjoining these  
Are herbs and esculents; and farther still  
A field; then cottages with trees, and last  
The distant hills and sky.

Behind, the scene is wilder. Heath and furze  
Are everything that seems to grow and thrive  
Upon the uneven ground. A stunted thorn  
Stands here and there; and from a pit  
An oak uprises, springing from a seed  
Dropped by some bird a hundred years ago.

In days bygone —  
Long gone — my father’s mother, who is now  
Blest with the blest, would take me out to walk.  
At such a time I once inquired of her  
How looked the spot when first she settled here.  
The answer I remember. ‘Fifty years  
Have passed since then, my child, and change has marked  
The face of all things. Yonder garden-plots  
And orchards were uncultivated slopes  
O’ergrown with bramble bushes, furze and thorn:  
That road a narrow path shut in by ferns,  
Which, almost trees, obscured the passer-by.

‘Our house stood quite alone, and those tall firs  
And beeches were not planted. Snakes and efts  
Swarmed in the summer days, and nightly bats  
Would fly about our bedrooms. Heathcroppers  
Lived on the hills, and were our only friends;  
So wild it was when first we settled here.’