

Writers in Bath – Thomas Hardy Aquae Sulis

THE
ROMAN
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BATH

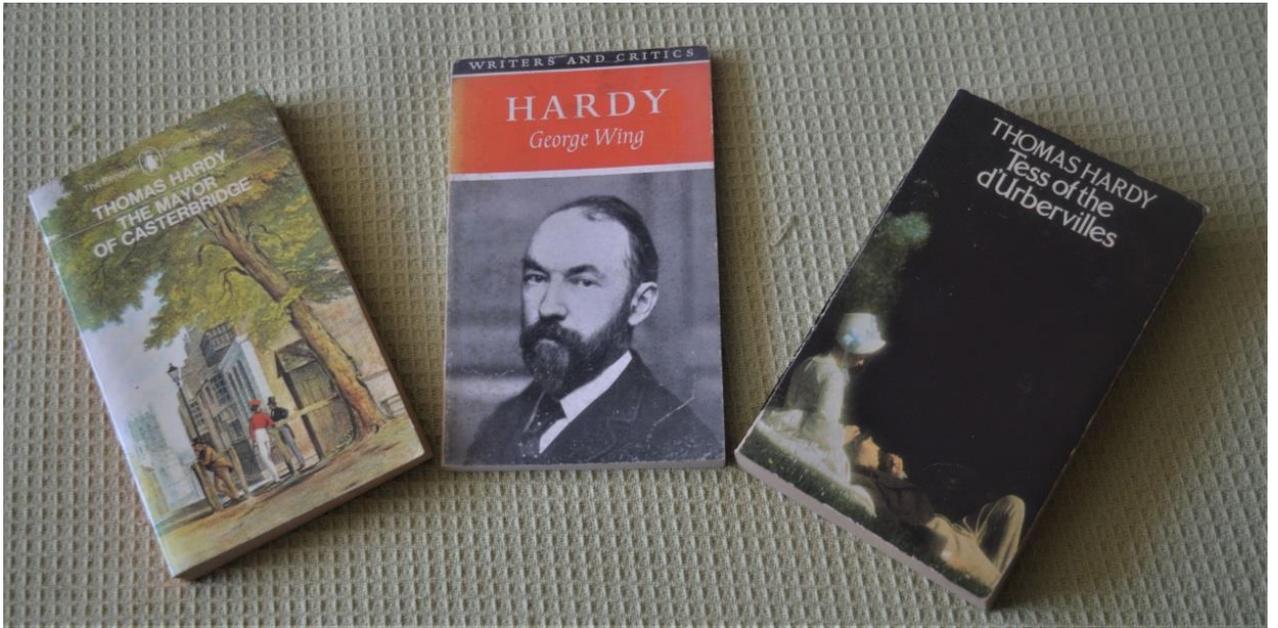


Although he is more associated with his native Dorset, Thomas Hardy does have a few connections with Bath. In June 1873 he visited Bath with his wife-to-be Emma Gifford. She was staying in the city with Miss d'Arville who would chaperone them. He stayed for ten days. One night Hardy walked to Beechen Cliff where he looked down on the city where she was sleeping and thought how he would like to 'walk the world' with her, and how she matched 'the maddest dream's desire'. This formed the poem 'Midnight on Beechen, 187_' (1873). A similar view to the one Hardy would have seen is shown above.

<https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/midnight-beechen-187%E2%80%93>

Thomas Hardy wrote the poem 'Aquae Sulis'.

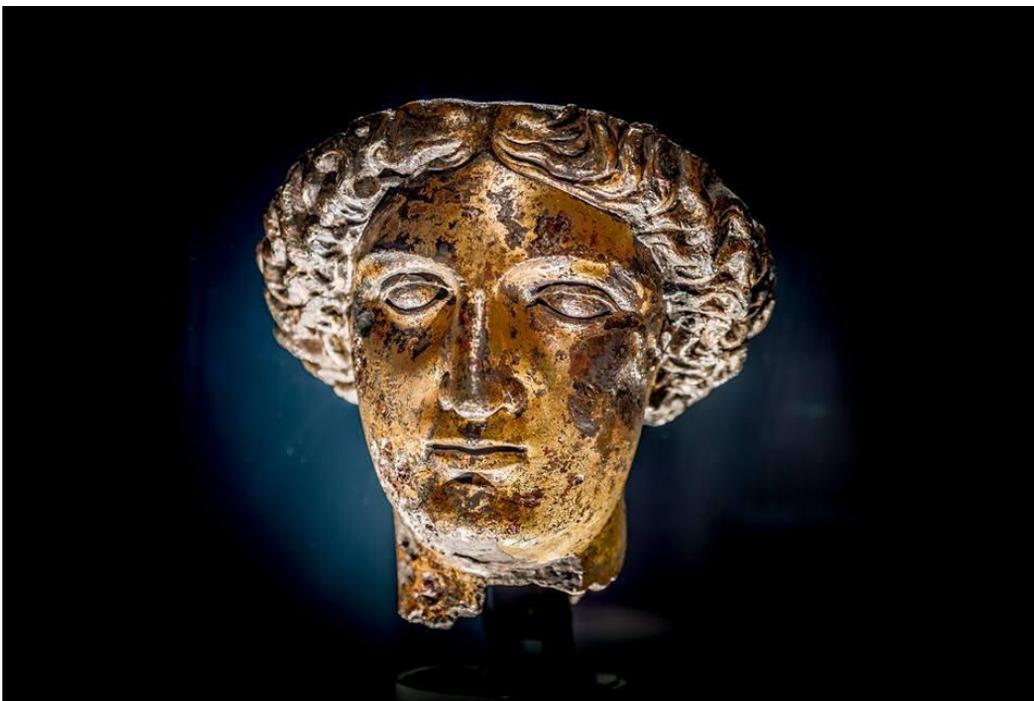
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/aquae-sulis/>



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Hardy was interested in ancient history and was a member of an archaeological group at his home in Dorchester. His poem, written when he was visiting Bath, clearly shows that he had studied the archaeology of the city. He talks about 'Roman investigations' as well as 'the bubbling waters played near the excavations' and the 'warm air [coming] from underground'.



Interested in the ancient gods he writes of the 'Temple of Minerva, 'the goddess whose shrine was beneath the pile' and the Christian Abbey built above it: 'And what did you get by raising this nave and aisle/ Close on the site of the temple I tenanted?'

He talks of the ancient 'olden dark' and 'gossamer noise fading off in the air/ and the boiling voice of the water's medicinal pour.'

In October 1877 Hardy visited Bath again, this time with his father, to take the waters. Hardy's father, suffering from rheumatism, wrote of Bath that it was 'a very Grand Place' and though he had taken 'two Glasses of the Water a Day' he had 'not gained much Benefit by it'. He commented on the 'thousands and thousands of Bath Chairs' and that 'the Drapery Shops are very grand and numerous.'

