

The Dorset Magazine

Dorset Life

The best of Dorset in words and pictures

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Wimborne

Colehill's 'Primitives'

Holes Bay wrecks

Poole's incredible hulks

Weymouth

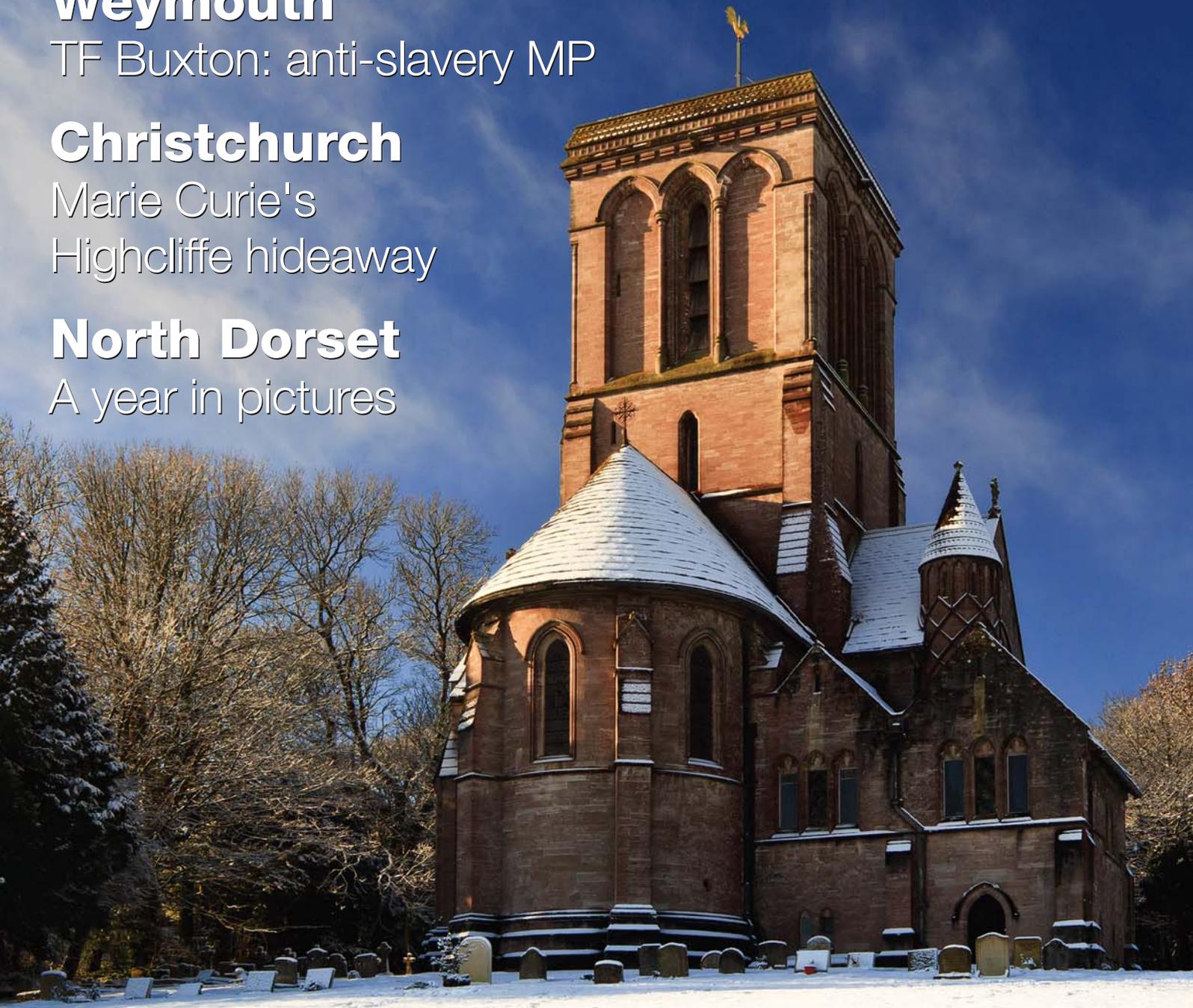
TF Buxton: anti-slavery MP

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Marie Curie's
Highcliffe hideaway

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A year in pictures



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The beautiful game in God's own county

Stephen Roberts presents a short history of football in Dorset

Dorset could hardly be considered a hotbed of football; it cannot be talked about in quite the same breath as Manchester, Merseyside or Tyneside perhaps, but wherever the game is played in the county it is played with a passion and besides, Dorset has certainly had its moments.

It is difficult to trace the origins of football in Dorset for there are so few references any further back than Victorian times. One that we do have is to the Shrove Tuesday football ceremony of the Purbeck Marblers in Corfe Castle, which dates back some 700 years and involves a custom of kicking a football around the boundary of the village on the day that new apprentices are admitted to the Company of Marblers and Stonecutters of Purbeck. The ball is never touched by hand and is just trundled along in a ceremony, which is not at all reflective of any football 'match'. Another mention of football (but sadly a gruesome one) comes in the 17th century in Dorchester when, just prior to the English Civil War, Hugh Green, a Catholic chaplain was executed there. Afterwards the Puritans were alleged to have played 'football' with his head.

The game of football that we know today really

began in Victorian times though and the oldest of all football teams in Dorset is claimed to be Gillingham Town in the north of the county; not to be confused of course with the Kentish version (just plain Gillingham with a soft G), Gillingham Town were formed as long ago as 1879.

That claim to be Dorset's oldest is complicated, however, by the county reorganisation that occurred in 1974, which led to towns like Bournemouth and Christchurch entering Dorset. Bournemouth FC (or the 'Poppies') can trace their ancestry back to 1875 when they were formed as Bournemouth Rovers, making them not only the oldest club in Bournemouth, but also one of the oldest in southern England. In 1890 they moved into their current ground, Victoria Park in Winton and also took up their current name.

Bournemouth's more famous neighbour, AFC Bournemouth, did not start up until 1899 and were known originally as Boscombe to distinguish them from the Poppies. As Boscombe flourished, to make its name more reflective of the district in which it played, it changed its name to Bournemouth & Boscombe Athletic Football Club, for many years the longest name of any club in the Football League. The more streamlined AFC Bournemouth came into being in 1972. The club is known as the 'Cherries'.

AFC Bournemouth is of course the most senior football club in the county and following the 1974 changes, its only Football League club. To illustrate that Dorset has had its high points, the club once reached an FA Cup quarter final losing to Manchester United's famed 'Busby Babes' in front of a record Dean Court crowd of over 28,000 in 1957.

Revenge was achieved in 1984 when a Cherries side, which was struggling in Division 3, beat United's FA Cup holders 2 - 0 in the 3rd round, a result which brought their young manager Harry Redknapp to national attention. Under Redknapp, the Cherries reached their highest position in league football, the old Second Division, which they occupied for three seasons at the end of the 1980s. The recent return of Eddie Howe to the Goldsands Stadium has immediately re-energised the Cherries and reawakened fans' dreams of eventual promotion.

Some of the lesser lights of Dorset football have also had their day in the FA Cup, none more so than Weymouth, who reached the 3rd round in 1949, losing 4 - 0 to Manchester United and then the 4th round in 1962, where they lost 2 - 0 to Preston.

Weymouth FC was founded in 1890 and was nicknamed the 'Terras' almost immediately on account



The 34,000 plus
Cherries fans at the Auto
Windscreens Shield Final,
Wembley, 19 April 1998



Wimborne Market Square
April 26 1992, the day
after winning the FA Vase
at Wembley

of its terracotta strip. During the 1930s Weymouth became a power in Western League football, but during World War 2 their Recreation Ground was requisitioned for the war effort and by its end it had become so dilapidated that much work was required to bring it up to scratch (it wasn't just Weymouth who were adversely affected by the war; Blandford United's ground was unplayable for some time after due to anti-tank traps).

Weymouth's 'Rec' was one of the earliest grounds to have floodlighting, installed in 1952, with a match against Southampton on 3 November being the first ever floodlit football match played in Dorset.

Weymouth, for all its illustrious history, has had almost as many financial problems as the Eurozone in recent years, so has been supplanted as the county's senior non-League club by near neighbours, and bitter rivals, Dorchester Town.

Dorchester has usually been in the shadow of its more powerful neighbour, but has had its fair share of famous faces, including Harry Redknapp and former England stars Graham Roberts and Martin Chivers amongst its past players. The club moved to a new purpose-built ground in the south of the town in the early 1990s. Having been built on Duchy of Cornwall ground the word is that Prince Charles had some input to its design, which may explain the attractive gable on the roof of the main stand.

The Weymouth - Dorchester rivalry demonstrates the passions that can be aroused by football,



Dorchester Town's ground
(The Avenue Stadium)

particularly where local bragging rights are at stake. Another example occurred between Verwood and Cranborne in the years after World War 2 where de-mobilisation brought the local hostilities back to the fore, with police being called from Wimborne to control the crowd and restrain the Reverend Williams from striking the referee with his walking stick.

Another Dorset side to have its brush with the FA Cup is Poole Town, who reached the 3rd round as long ago as 1927, only to be felled 3 - 1 by Everton in front of over 60,000 at Goodison Park, with legendary striker Dixie Dean scoring a hat-trick.

Poole has been another club to fall upon hard times, their nadir being the 1995-96 season when they lost every single league game played, except one, which they managed to draw. Thankfully they are now



Wimborne Town's ground
(Cuthbury)



Shaftesbury's ground (Cockrams)

in the ascendant again having won three successive Wessex league championships and are moving up through the leagues once more.

No Dorset side had played at the country's national stadium, Wembley, until 1992 when Wimborne Town reached the final of the FA Vase, beating Guiseley from Yorkshire 5 - 3 in the final. As an illustration of how football can unite a community, some 7500 fans travelled up to the final from the small town of Wimborne Minster for the proudest day since the club's inception in 1878. This feat was to be repeated in 1998 when AFC Bournemouth reached the final of the Auto Windscreens Shield, but sadly the Cherries lost 2 - 1 to Grimsby Town in front of over 34,000 Cherries fans, to a 'golden' goal in extra time.

There are many famous people who have some association, in one way or another, with football in Dorset. When Hamworthy United moved to its current ground, The County Ground, in 1950, the grandstand was officially opened by Sir Stanley Rous CBE, the 6th President of FIFA, secretary of the Football Association from 1934 to 1962 and an international referee. Former Christchurch defender Jody Craddock has played for Sunderland and now plays for Wolverhampton Wanderers in the npower Championship.

Sherborne Town was founded in 1894 and plays its home games at Raleigh Grove, which recalls Sir Walter Raleigh's historical connection with the town. The ground used to be a grazing field. Merley Cobham Sports FC changed its name from Flight Refuelling in 2001 to reflect the title of the sports and social club which it's associated with at its Merley Park home, near Wimborne. The name also commemorates



Hamworthy United's ground (The County Ground)

TIER	DIVISION	DORSET CLUBS <small>In alphabetical order, not position</small>
	Barclays Premier League	–
	npower Championship	–
	npower League 1	AFC Bournemouth
	npower League 2	–
Step 1	Blue Square Premier	–
Step 2	Blue Square South	Dorchester Town
Step 3	Evostik Southern Premier	Weymouth
Step 4	Evostik Southern Division One South & West	Poole Town
		Wimborne Town
Step 5	Sydenhams Wessex League Premier	Bournemouth FC
		Christchurch
		Hamworthy United
		Verwood Town
	Toolstation Western League Premier	Bridport
		Gillingham Town
	Sydenhams Wessex League First Division	–
Step 6	Toolstation Western League First Division	Sherborne Town
Step 7	Magna Housing Dorset Premier League	Blandford United
		Bridport Reserves
		Chickerell United
		Cranborne
		Hamworthy Recreation
		Hamworthy United Reserves
		Holt United
		Merley Cobham Sports
		Parley Sports
		Poole Borough
		Portland United
		Shaftesbury
		Sherborne Town Reserves
		Swanage Town & Herston
		Weymouth Reserves
	Puma Engineering Hampshire Premier League	Bournemouth Sports

Sir Alan John Cobham KBE, AFC, the aviation pioneer famous for his experiments with in-flight refuelling.

The Parley Sports clubhouse was opened by cricket commentator John Arlott on 13 October 1961. Parley also had its very own legend in the late 1960s and 1970s, striker Terry Mitchell, who broke all goal-scoring records, firing in 661 goals in only 537 appearances over a twelve-year period. His season's best came in 1977-78 when he pummelled 75 goals in 38 matches, a strike rate the centre forwards of today could only dream about.

Watching games of football in such exquisitely named places as Cockrams (Shaftesbury), Gaunts Common (Holt United), Potterne Park (Verwood Town) and Cuthbury (Wimborne Town) it is simple to conclude that, whilst Dorset may be no Manchester, Merseyside or Tyneside, it nevertheless has an abundance of characters and more than its fair share of footballing passion... and that's without mentioning any of the clubs in the Dorset Senior League, nor the five divisions below it.