The Landmark Trust

DUNSHAY MANOR

History Album

Caroline Stanford

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BASIC DETAILS

Built	**16th, 17th and early 20th centuries**
Listed	**Grade II***
Tenure	**Freehold, as bequest from Mary Spencer Watson**
Opened as a Landmark	**May 2019**
Conservation architect	**Andrew Thorne of Robinson Thorne Architects**
Conservation builders	**Ellis & Co. of Shepton Mallet**
Structural Engineers	**Jon Avent of Mann Williams of Bath**
Quantity Surveyor	**Adrian Stenning**
Electrical M&E	**Simon Scott Electrical Ltd of Bridport**
Plumbing M&E	**D & B Mechanical Ltd of Weymouth**

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Acknowledgements

This album draws on the work of local Dorset historians, especially Ilay Cooper, whose *Purbeck Arcadia* (2015) provides a fuller history of Dunshay Manor and its inhabitants. Ilay knew Mary Spencer Watson from boyhood until her death in 2006 and in 2019 still lives on the estate for much of the year.

Joan Brocklebank was also Mary's old friend, and was asked by Mary in 1983 to provide some notes on Dunshay's early years, which became an extensive (unpublished) essay. At Joan's death in 1987, Mary carved a simple stone bench in her memory, now beneath the east window of Affpuddle Church.

Muriel Sparks provided information on the 1919 sale of Dunshay.
Jessica Sutcliffe, daughter of photographer Helen Muspratt, kindly allowed use of her mother's photographs of Hilda and Mary.

Phil Wilton, our volunteer bookbinder, freshened and repaired books formerly owned by Mary Spencer Watson for the Landmark bookcase.
Dr. & Mrs R. Jurd made a donation towards the cost of the Landmark books.

We thank them all, but most of all we acknowledge Mary Spencer Watson's great generosity in bequeathing her home to us.

Dunshay Manor sits in its own small valley, surrounded by ancient field patterns and the grassy undulations of medieval stone quarries, in sight of Corfe Castle.

Dunshay Manor – Summary

From 1923 to 2006, Dunshay Manor was home to the Spencer Watson family, a trio of remarkable artistic figures. Mary Spencer Watson, the daughter (1913-2006), was a renowned sculptor. Her father George Spencer Watson, R. A. (1869-1934), was an accomplished society painter and her mother Hilda (1879–1952) was a mime artist and dancer who devised her own shows, with Mary often also taking part as a child and young woman. Mary bequeathed Dunshay to Landmark, to be used 'in the custom and manner of the Landmark Trust, asking only that its artistic heritage be cherished.

Dunshay/Downshay is an ancient site, once part of the Manor of Worth. It lies surrounded by Purbeck stone and marble deposits, and the hollows around it are shadows of ancient opencast workings. In the early 1200s, de Pole widow Alice de Briwere (*d.*1233) held the manor. She made a generous gift of Purbeck marble to Salisbury Cathedral where it was used for the decorative shafts on the pillars (Purbeck marble is a dark, hard limestone that can take a high polish).

In the Middle Ages, Dunshay was owned by a sequence of owners from prominent Dorset families. In 1349, the manor passed to the Matravers family and then by marriage to the Earls of Arundel. In 1560, the then Earl, heavily in debt, sold the manor of Worth in four parts.

Dunshay was bought by Henry Dolling (*d.*1560), of another a well-established Dorset family. In 1676, Henry's widow bequeathed the farm to their son, Christopher (*d.*1616). With his wife Elizabeth, he rebuilt what was probably by then a dilapidated farmstead. Windows on the west (rear) range of the house still bear their initials. Christopher's grandson John Dolling (1609-63) and his wife Anne further enlarged the house in the 1640s, adding two gabled ranges to either side of a porch. Under John, Dunshay became the manor house for Worth. He left their initials 'I A D' on the lead rainwater hopper dated 1642 on the porch (the obelisk gateposts beside the pond are probably early 18th century)

When Civil War came, John Dolling fought for the King, and was later fined by the Parliamentarians for this loyalty. From its style of dress, the headless figure of a man put up on the north wall of the house may originally have represented Major Dolling. Dollings held Dunshay until 1675, when the estate was divided among three daughters. One, Margaret, married John Pyke who became lord of the manor, and so began Dunshay's next dynasty.

The Pykes were another prosperous local family, living in the manor house, but mostly leasing out the farmland. A later John Pyke fell into debt and by 1771 had sold most of his Worth lands to John Calcraft of the Rempstone Estate. Just before his death in 1776, Pyke sold Dunshay to Thomas Hyde, a rich Poole merchant, but in 1793, Hyde himself went bankrupt. John Calcraft II seized the moment to add Dunshay to the Rempstone Estate, leasing it out as a farm.

From 1796, Benjamin Jesty (1736-1816) leased the house and farmed its land. Jesty, from Yetminster in West Dorset, was a pioneer in vaccination. In 1774, he had noticed that milkmaids did not seem to catch smallpox, and attributed this to exposure to the milder cowpox. During a local epidemic, he therefore inoculated his wife and children with fluid from an infected cow. None of them caught smallpox. Jesty's experiment was some 20 years earlier than Dr Edward Jenner's but the honest farmer did not at first publicise his work so Jenner got the credit.

One tenant followed another through the nineteenth century. A first floor room in the south range is marked as a Cheese Room, for exemption from the Window Tax, in graffiti that must pre-date the tax's repeal in 1851. The pigsty and dairy were built, but the house itself became increasingly dilapidated. By 1881 (and probably more than 40 years earlier according to the 1840 tithe map), most of the north wing had fallen, or been pulled, down.

In 1901, the Rempstone Estate was inherited by Captain Guy Marston, RN, who moved into the family seat at Rempstone Hall his seat. By now, Dunshay was in serious need of repair. Marston commissioned Arts & Crafts architect Philip Sturdy to rebuild the north wing of the house. Sturdy created the Dunshay we see today. Many of the internal features are also his work: the offset corner fireplaces, and the staircase. Some earlier panelling and joinery survives, for example the panelling in the sitting room, but not in its original position. Another rainwater hopper on the porch bears the initials 'G M M' (Guy Montagu Marston). Marston however began selling the southern part of the Rempstone Estate. In 1919, Dunshay was bought by E. J. Holland, a farmer.

In 1923 he sold the house to George and Hilda Spencer Watson, who moved in with their ten-year old, Mary, at first dividing their time with their London house. George and Hilda converted the Dairy to a studio, created the pond and built a stable block, which Hilda then converted into a studio theatre. After George's death in 1934, Hilda and Mary spent most of their time at Dunshay. As a young girl, Mary was fascinated by the Purbeck quarrymen and their work. One gave her a chisel to have a go, and so began her lifelong vocation for sculpture. She studied at Bournemouth Art College, the Royal Academy, the Central School of Art and finally in Paris. After the War, which Mary spent with Hilda at Dunshay, commissions began to flow and her works include many public sculptures. She worked mostly in stone and wood, either in the Dairy studio or, if the weather was fine, outside in the little stone shelter beyond the pond.

Mary died in 2006. Wishing Dunshay and its artistic legacy to be protected, she bequeathed the estate to the Landmark Trust, the buildings by then in a state of some dilapidation. Landmark has repaired and refurbished Dunshay, and gently reversed some of Mary's later changes. Today it is presented to evoke the Spencer Watsons' life in the 1920s and 30s, when Arts & Crafts mingled with Hilda and Mary's bohemian world in the interwar period.

Dunshay: the early centuries

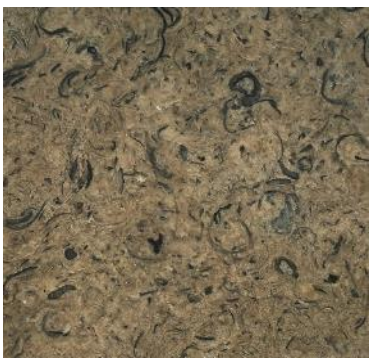
Dunshay Manor[1] (also known as Downshay until the 1920s) is an ancient holding, although it does not appear in the Domesday Book in its own right. This is because it formed part of the Manor of Worth, held by Roger Arundel. Worth Manor was originally created by an amalgamation lost in time of the smaller manors of Dunshay, Weston and Woodyhide, whose boundaries are still demarcated by old hedges running straight up the hillsides. There were also some smaller farms held by free tenants through payment of rent as a commutation of the feudal services normally owed to the lord, such as Quarr, Capplestone and Haycrafts, the names still finding an echo in today's landscape. Arundel descendants held Worth until the mid-16th century, often through a rather circuitous female line by marriage. In the late 12th century, Roger's great-great grandson Roger de Pole married one Alice (1153-1233), known to history by her maiden family name, di Brewere (since her Roger seems to have died on crusade to Jerusalem in 1190).

Alice, and Downshay, first surface in the documentary record thanks to John Leland, that indefatigable traveller through England immediately after the Dissolution on his commission from Henry VIII to record the libraries of the dissolved monasteries. In his *Itineraries* (c.1535-43) Leland recorded that 'Alice Bruer conferred on that church [Salisbury Cathedral] all the marble for the new fabric for 12 years.' Dunshay was not named but the narrow bed of Purbeck marble in Worth Parish runs directly through Dunshay, beneath today's drive.

Alice's notable generosity speaks of the geological riches that have defined this part of Dorset from at least the Roman times, making its land desirable for its natural resources as much as much as its agriculture. The Isle of Purbeck is renowned for its limestones (and indeed it bituminous blackstone, but that is a story that belongs more to Clavell Tower, another Landmark building not far away at Kimmeridge Bay). Alice di Brewere was donating Purbeck marble, most prized of all the Purbeck limestones for its decorative qualities.

[1] Pronounced locally as Dun-shay.

Great quantities of dark grey Purbeck marble decorate the pillars of Salisbury Cathedral, donated in the early 1200s by Alice di Brewere who owned Dunshay,



Examples of Purbeck stones: clockwise from left: some Purbeck marbles; Thornback; Grub, Freestone; Downsvein. The limestones vary in hardness, colour and fossil content according to their bed.

Haysom Purbeck Stone Ltd

Purbeck marble is not a true marble, but rather a hard dark grey or sometimes greenish, Cretaceous limestone, rich in small fossilised shells, and one of the few British limestones that can take a high polish. This made it one of the most prized decorative stones in medieval architecture. At Salisbury Cathedral, it is used for the slender shafts that embellish the soaring load bearing pillars in the nave.

Leland does not mention Dunshay and there is no evidence that Alice lived at Dunshay, but through the Manor of Worth, it was in her ownership at the time, and so too were the marble quarries. At the southern end of the Isle of Purbeck, a rising plateau of limestone falls away southwards to the sea. The beds outcrop at Peveril Point east of Swanage and then fade westwards, marking a spring line along which manorial settlements sprang up, among them Dunshay. In the Middle Ages, the area was alive with quarries, and Dunshay especially was renowned for its marble beds. Later, as fashions changed, other limestones were exploited for masonry and roofing: Purbeck freestone (a creamy white limestone with few visible fossils that can be cut in any direction) and other Purbeck limestones that display their fossil content more obviously and have names like Downsvein, Thornback, Grub and Feather.

The lumps and bumps in the fields that surround Dunshay bear witness to this former exploitation, and pieces of stone still work their way to the surface, some carrying the signs of the workings of medieval masons. Such fragments can also be seen in walls of local cottages and houses. Quarrying still goes on in the area, and Dorset residents continue to be proud of, and in some ways defined by, the geological richness of their terroir.

After Alice di Brewere's death, Worth passed through various inheritances to the Fitzpaine family, and thence, probably around 1349, to the next significant owner, John Maltravers of Lytchett. The date is significant, because this was when the Black Death was raging through southern England – indeed, the disease came ashore a mere 20 miles west of Worth at Melcombe Regis. Perhaps the plague explains the change in ownership.

John Maltravers (also Matravers) left his name as suffix to both Worth Matravers and Langton Matravers. As Constable of Corfe Castle from 1330, Maltravers was one of the two keepers of Edward II when Roger Mortimer imprisoned him at Corfe, before that unfortunate monarch's ill-fated final journey to Berkeley Castle to meet his unpleasant end with a red hot poker. At Maltravers' death in 1365, Worth passed to his grand-daughter Eleanor, wife of a son of the Earl of Arundel, and so the manor returned to the Arundel family.

The Dolling Family 1560-1675

It is only in 1560 that Dunshay (or Downshay) begins to take on a clearer identity of its own. Before then, there is no clear physical or documentary evidence that a manor house existed on the site, although it seems likely that one did. The village of Worth Matravers was still the core of the main manor in the mid-16th century, its strip fields held by copyhold lease from the lord of the manor for two or three lives.

The term manor has a precise legal meaning until the late 17th century or so. It was a unit of judicial administration, once or twice a year holding a manor court under the aegis of the lord of the manor. Its business was the amendment or confirmation of the copyhold leases (an entry payment being due to the lord from the new leaseholder whenever the lives of a copyhold expired through death) and also 'presentments'. These were lists of all the things that needed the lord's attention, usually disciplinary, such as ditches left uncleared, livestock straying or grazing in common fields before the appointed date. It is only in the early 1600s that clear evidence emerges of the house at Dunshay being used as a manorial seat in its own right.

By the start of the 1500s, it has been estimated that as much as a third of England's land was owned by religious houses. In Dorset as elsewhere, the monasteries' Dissolution in the 1530s by Thomas Cromwell brought an earthquake in land ownership. Almost half the county came suddenly onto the market as the Crown sought to reap the financial benefit of its religious policy, and the land was snapped up by the aristocracy and rising new men alike. Many

overreached themselves financially in an era of growing courtly ostentation, and the Earl of Arundel, still owner of Dunshay, was one such. In 1559, Elizabeth I gave Arundel permission to alienate (sell) the property of Worth Manor, which he presumably held of her for some form of knight's service. With mounting debts, sale of Worth, Lytchett Matravers and Langton Matravers no doubt helped the Earl's liquidity even if it was not a good time to sell, with the market so flooded by former monastic lands.

The Earl initially sold the Manor of Worth to Nicholas Wiltshire and Thomas Butler, who were presumably agents. They immediately sold the manor on in its constituent parts, and Dunshay was bought by John Dolling (perhaps of the related Corfe branch of the family) and Denys Wye, who were executors for one Henry Dolling. Dolling was already an old Dorset name, recorded in the county from at least the mid-14th century. Henry Dolling appeared on the Lay Subsidy Tax lists as the leading main in Dorset, and seems to have had free tenancy of Worth Farm. Henry died in 1560, perhaps while the sale was being negotiated, since the purchase appears to have been on behalf of his widow Agnes and thereafter as a seat for his young son, Christopher. The sale deed records that the sale was 'to hold to the said John and Denys and their heirs to the use of Christopher Dolling, his heirs and assigns.'

Agnes Dolling died in 1576, having written her will in 1569. She left a long list of minor bequests of the livestock, debts and accoutrements of an Elizabethan matriarch to her six daughters, servants and relatives : 'to every of my servants as well men as maidens five shillings apiece'; 'my new medley gown that was last made' to Mary Roberts; 'my violet gown that the sleeves are open' to her daughter Elizabeth; 'my black colt mare [and] one of my best pans' to Thomas Dolling; '12 pence' to every household in Wareham; '6 of my best kerchiefs…I give to each of my daughters'; 'to every wife in Worth one of my holland kerchiefs apiece' – and so on, for more than fifty separate bequests.

Among these bequests, Agnes left to her son Christopher 'my lease the which I have yet to come into reversion forty years after my decease of and in the Farm at Worth in the Isle of Purbeck and County of Dorset.'

This lively map in Ralph Treswell's 1585 *Survey of the Isle of Purbeck* shows Dunshay in the possession of Christopher Dollinge.

'Farm' in this context is slightly ambiguous, since it can mean rent from land as well as the holding itself, and she does not mention Dunshay by name. It also suggests that Agnes and Christopher were at that time living at Worth Farm rather than in a house at Dunshay. She also left Christopher 'two feather beds with their furniture' and a plough team of eight oxen with harness and plough tackle, implying that he too was a farmer. From the clear freehold tenure of Dunshay by later Dollings, the reference to a forty-year lease implies that her husband's trustees had bought up the remainder of a forty-year lease, with transfer to freehold at the end of that time.

John Dolling's trustees had done well to acquire Dunshay in its sheltered valley; in 1571, Sir Christopher Hatton, one of Elizabeth I's favourites, acquired most of the rest of the Isle of Purbeck. In 1576, Elizabeth made Hatton Lord Lieutenant and Vice Admiral of the Isle, and Constable of Corfe Castle, in effect creating him local despot. In reality, Hatton was little interested in his Dorset holdings other than as a source of income and means of extending his influence at Court. He was more focussed on the great house he was building at Holdenby in Northamptonshire, and managed Purbeck chiefly through his deputy at Corfe Castle, Francis Hawley. It was a time of rife buccaneering with much local chicanery, and Hatton and his men were not always neutral witnesses.

For all his absenteeism, in the 1580s Hatton commissioned Ralph Treswell, one of the leading cartographers of the day, to produce a *Survey of the Isle of Purbeck*.[2] This is an invaluable source for Purbeck as Christopher Dolling knew it. Hatton's lands included the Manor of Worth, but not Dunshay. Because of this, the Survey does not give any details about the site, as it does for lands directly owned by Hatton, but it does depict a house beside the name, albeit a merely as windowless icon according to the cartographer's convention. Underneath is written 'Christopher Dollinge'. This gives convincing evidence that a house existed at Dunshay by the mid-1580s, and a sufficiently important one to be recorded for the great Vice Admiral.

[2] Deposited at the Dorset History Centre, a facsimile book has been published by the Dorset Record Society which is in the bookcase.

The deeds recording the purchase of Dunshay from the Earl of Arundel in 1560.

Dunshay from the west is a jumble of accreted outbuildings around a little courtyard. Christopher Dolling's late16th-century range is the one with the dormer window, now overshadowed by the later wings. On its right today is the large cider barn, and on its left is the detached Dairy.

Whether it replaced an earlier dwelling or not, it seems certain that the house Christopher (*d.*1612) and his wife Elizabeth (née Fry, of Mapouder) built was today's west range, containing today's kitchen and easy-access bedroom and bathroom. This range has one three-light and one four-light stone window: both have concave mullions, indicative of a 16th-century date, and hood mouldings. The top one of this pair of mouldings bears two initials, C and D; the lower has E and D.[3] It is impossible now to say whether this was inserting better windows into a former structure or a major new build in the late-16th century. The latter seems more likely. However, the terrace on which the house stands is an artificial one, perhaps created with the spoil from quarrying, and this implies an earlier farmstead.

In its original form, this late-16th-century range probably had a living room in line with a service end for buttery and kitchen, and bedrooms above. Behind was a scullery passage with a small attic above in a lean-to roof. The mid-17th-century south wing will later block the original windows of Christopher Dolling's parlour.

Christopher Dolling died in 1612 and was buried in Swanage. Dunshay passed to John, the eldest of his and Elizabeth's five children. As lord of the manor, John, who we must call John Dolling I, instituted (or more probably re-instituted) a manorial court for Worth Matravers on 22nd April 1613 - no records for such a court at Worth survive before this, and its preamble records that it is the first court of 'John Dollinge.'

This 1613 court was unusually, running over several days, and also suggesting that it may have been some time since the last. All ten copyholders of the manor were present, to have their leases confirmed by their new 'lord' after the death of old one (even if by now he was probably more their landlord than feudal lord). Thereafter, Courts were held two or three times a year until 1618, and then once a year until 1622, then a gap until John held his last Court in 1626. It is not clear whether the Courts were held at Dunshay itself, as the

[3] These initials are now very worn, and on the scaffolding, there was a degree of debate within the Landmark team whether the 'E' was in fact an 'I'. They are however still stylistically convincing for the late-16th century.

manor is still called Worth Matravers, but there is an interesting reference in the Pyke family agreements about Dunshay in 1682 to the 'farm of Dunshay alias Wourr.'[4] 'Manor house' is a term rather loosely bandied about by estate agents and others today, in disregard of its original precise legal implication of the site of a manor court. There have probably been successive 'Manor of Worth' houses over the centuries, not necessarily on the same site. From 1613, and perhaps earlier, it seems that Dunshay was indeed 'Dunshay Manor' in the sense that the Worth Matravers manor court was held by John Dolling. There is, however, no evidence of a Manor of Dunshay per se in the legal sense of the term.

John Dolling I married Judith Seymer of Hanford. Their first son was born in 1609, but must have died in infancy, for a second John was born in 1611. John I died in 1628, apparently somewhat unexpectedly as his will is made on 8 January when he is 'sick of body but of perfect memory.' John II was only 17, and this was a cause of some anxiety to his dying father:

> 'whereas my said son John is as yet under the age of one and twenty years and I know not whether any of my lands which shall descend unto him be so holden of the King's majesty that His Highness shall or may be entitled unto his wardship and marriage and unto the custody of his lands during his minority, therefore I humbly desire that Right Honourable the Master of the Court of Wards and Liveries that they would be so pleased as to grant wardship and marriage of my said son unto my said overseers or any two of them to the use of my said son at such reasonable rates as is usual in that High Court, if in case it shall fall out upon the finding of an office after my decease that His Highness shall be thereunto entitled.'

Here is an interesting insight into the Tudor and Stuart years, when monarchs were increasingly turning to extra-parliamentary sources of income. In 1540 under Henry VIII, the office of Master of the King's Wards was replaced by the Court of Wards, which assumed complete control of wards (those whose father had died but had not reached adulthood themselves) and the administration of their lands. In 1542, absorbing liveries (revenue collection) it became the King's

[4] DHC D-RWR/T/504

Court of Wards and Liveries, under which the Crown assumed responsibility for young orphaned heirs where their father had been a Tenant in chief of the Crown, including the right to the income generated by the majority of the estate until the heir reached adulthood, and control of their marriage.

Wardships were usually sold by the Crown to the next of kin or the highest bidder as a further means of income, or given to individuals as a reward for services. Not surprisingly, it was a deeply unpopular system. It's unclear whether John II did fall under the Court of Wards' aegis, since it was theoretically only for the offspring of Tenants in Chief of the Crown, which his father was not. But the family had accrued wealth over the past two generations, and John I was able to leave his three daughters, also minors, £300 apiece, a not inconsiderable sum. Clearly, he was worried that the Crown's greed might encroach upon the family's wealth.

His will also gives a tiny, intimate glimpse of Dunshay's interior in 1628. 'I give and bequeath unto my son John Dolling my best silver bowl or cup and my bedstead standing in my little chamber over the buttery with the feather bed on the said bedstead and all other furniture whatever with the same usually occupied.' This may refer to today's single bedroom above the kitchen.

In the event, John II (1611-1663) apparently succeeded smoothly to the manor, holding his first Manor Court in 1632, when he had safely come of age. Three years later, he married Anne Culliford of Encombe. Their eldest child, another John, was born in 1638, and three daughters followed (two children died young). Despite gathering storm clouds of civil strife, the 1630s were a time of growth at Dunshay as John and Anne transformed Dunshay Manor broadly into the form we see today. John and Anne Dolling added the two gabled wings extending forward from each end of Christopher Dolling's 16th-century west range, with a porch in between, with a landing and bedrooms above.

John and Anne Dolling added the south wing (to the left of the porch) in the 1640s, recording this by putting their initials on a rainwater hopper. They added a symmetrical wing on the north side too, but the one we see today is a 1900s replacement. In the Dollings' day, the porch was lower.

The fine obelisk gate finials are thought to be later, probably dating to the early 1700s.

The southerly wing held a large and no doubt elegant room, probably lined out with wainscoting (although that at the far end today is not in its original position). The simpler panelled partition in the bedroom above probably also dates from the same period. We do not know what the north wing held, because it fell down in the early or mid-19th century. The south wing too was affected and had to be shored up just in time with three massive stone buttresses, but the Dollings knew nothing of this, simply enjoying their elegantly extended home.

It may also be that the Dollings brought forward an existing stone door surround, as the flat arch of the present door surround looks earlier than the 17thcentury, as does the little arched stone window below the cheese room. Diamond set stone paviours led to the front door, and the completion of the works is marked in lead on the rainwater hopper on the south side of the porch with their initials:

1642

D

I A

Perhaps the Great Rebuilding postulated by building historian W. G. Hoskins came relatively late to Purbeck, for the mid-17th century was a time when many substantial farmhouses were built in the Isle – Quarr, Worth, Haycrafts, Eastington, Scowles to name but a few. The Purbeck Society of Marblers was founded in 1651, suggesting that quarrying was once again booming. Such activity is particularly noteworthy, because of course 1642 saw the start of the First Civil War.

Major Dolling and Dunshay during the Civil War

Charles I's relations with Parliament had become increasing fractious. Parliament refused to vote supply to a monarch they saw as despotic and Catholic, and had imprisoned the Earl of Strafford, the king's principal advisor, in the Tower of London. The king pressed on, seeking means to raise taxes without seeking parliamentary consent, not least to pay for war against the Scots. In 1641, he imposed a Lay Subsidy on land, and its returns are an invaluable source of life in 1641. Commissioners were appointed in each county to assess the taxable values, and John Dolling was appointed one of five Commissioners for the Blandford Division in Dorset. It was an unpopular tax, and it is often said that the lands of the gentry, usually the friends and neighbours of the Commissioners, were typically valued very low.

This doesn't seem to be the case in Worth Matravers. John Dolling's pre-eminence in the list is striking: his lands are valued at £100, on which he is to pay £5 tax. He is the only landowner classified as a gentleman; the other ten names appearing are all copyholders, including his uncle and cousin Henry Dolling senior and junior, probably resident at Worth Farm. None of the copyholders hold land worth more than £20, on which they pay not more than 5s tax, double the rate that Dolling imposes on himself. (There is just one woman in the list: Widow Edmunds, who has land worth £5 on which she is to pay 1s).

Relations between King and Parliament continued to deteriorate, and on 8 January 1642, Charles, still desperate to raise money and obstinate in defence of the royal prerogative and his unpopular religious reforms, brought 400 soldiers into the chamber to arrest five MPs.

In May 1641, the Commons had insisted on an oath of loyalty for members of both Houses, to defend 'the true Reformed Protestant religion, expressed in the Doctrine of the Church of England, against all Popery and Popish Innovations to defend the Protestant religion'. This was known as the Protestation. On 18 January 1641, Speaker Lenthall ordered the oath to be rolled out to all males in

the country over the age of 18, administered by the parish priest and church wardens. The implication was that any who refused to take it would be deemed Catholic, and therefore barred from public office, and the returns over the next year provide an invaluable snapshot of the male population and often their occupations too.

John Dolling signed the Protestation on 20th Feb 1641 in the presence of Francis Lewis, Vicar, the Churchwarden and the two parish overseers, one of whom is Henry Dolling, junior. Once again, he heads the list, as the only 'gent.' specified among them. Only 38 names appear in the list, plus three more 'att sea that have not taken the Protestation.' It was not a large settlement.

John Dolling then mostly disappears from Dorset view for the rest of the Civil War. The next manor court, on 15th October 1642, was held without him. He apparently went to fight for the King, which we know only because a swingeing fine of £350 was imposed on him by the Committee of Compounding of Delinquents.[5] Set up by Parliament in 1643, the Committee allowed Royalists whose estates had been sequestrated to 'compound' for their estates — pay a fine to recover them — if they pledged not to take up arms against Parliament again. Not to compound risked a charge of treason, and the size of the fine depended on the worth of the estate and how great their support for the Royalist cause. Compounders also forfeited the right to the rents from their estates – another handy way of swelling the Parliamentarians' coffers. Dolling's fine of £350 on lands worth just £100 according to the Protestation return, implies that Major Dolling (as he became) was a fierce supporter of his Majesty. The typical fine was three times annual income, already a heavy penalty.

The Committee was represented in each county by a Standing Committee, and later in the war, Parliament ordered all their minutes to be destroyed and Dorset is the only county where they survive - but they include no mention of such a fine for Major Dolling.

[5] John Hutchin's *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 1773.

Corfe Castle has dominated the Purbeck skyline since the Norman Conquest, commanding a gap in the Purbeck hills. In 1572, Elizabeth I sold the castle to Sir Christopher Hatton, and in 1635 it was bought by Sir John Bankes. During the English Civil War, his wife, Lady Mary Bankes, held the the castle successfully against the Parliamentarians in 1643. By 1645, Corfe was one of the last remaining royalist strongholds. It finally fell early in 1645. In March that year Corfe Castle was slighted on Parliament's orders.

The headless statue now set up in a niche on the north elevation at Dunshay was apparently rescued from the undergrowth. It has been known locally as 'Old Pyke' after the next dynasty of Dunshay owners who were descended from the Dollings, and from its 17th-century costume, it may even represent Royalist Major Dolling himself in happier times.

The only relevant item in the Minutes is that 'John Dolling of Duncehay' owed the late Lord Bankes of Corfe Castle, whose estate had been sequestrated, 20 bushels of wheat and £4 10s, now to be paid to the Parliamentary County Treasurer. His cousin Henry Dolling, meanwhile, was supplying food to the Parliamentary garrison besieged in Poole.

Sir John Bankes had bought Corfe Castle from the Hatton family in 1635. His wife, Lady Mary Bankes, led the defence of the castle through two Parliamentarian sieges. The first, in 1643, was unsuccessful; perhaps John Dolling was part of the defending force. We can imagine Anne Dolling and the children watching anxiously across the fields, and it is hard to imagine that foraging Roundheads did not come knocking at Dunshay's door.

The castle held out until early in 1645, one of the last remaining royalist strongholds in southern England, when it was besieged by a force under the command of a Colonel Bingham. One of the garrison's officers, Colonel Pitman, colluded with Bingham. Pitman proposed to Lady Bankes that he should go to Somerset and bring back a hundred men as reinforcements, but the troops he returned with were Parliamentarians in disguise. Once inside, they bided their time until the besieging force attacked, so that the defenders were attacked from without and within at the same time. This time, Corfe Castle was captured and Lady Bankes and the garrison were allowed to leave. In March that year, Parliament voted to slight (demolish) the castle, using gunpowder to bring down its mighty walls. (The Bankes family regained their properties after the Restoration in 1660, but rather than rebuild or replace the ruined ancient castle, they chose instead to build a new house at Kingston Lacy on their other Dorset estate near Wimborne Minster.)

Manor Court records survive for 1653 and 1655, by when order of a kind was returning under Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth, but perhaps the absence of documentary evidence for John's whereabouts in the 1640s and 50s should not necessarily be understood as physical absence from Dunshay during these turbulent times. John Dolling signed two leases in 1642 and 1647, and a second daughter, Mary, was born in 1648. His wife Anne, meanwhile, must

have stepped up, pregnant or not, like so many women during the Civil War, to take on duties more normally left to their men.

Eventually, of course, Charles II was invited home from exile to assume the throne, amid a general nostalgia for former times and in the absence of a worthy successor to the late Oliver Cromwell. 'Major Dolling' (and it is assumed by local historians that he is 'our' John Dolling of Dunshay) appears among the signatories of a Declaration made by the knights and gentry of Dorset who had been the late king's army on 16th April 1660. His name does not however appear in the Loyal Address of the Gentry of Dorset sent to Charles II later that year, nor in the records of the Manor Court held in 1662. John Dolling died the following year, and was buried in Worth on 30th April 1663. Tragically, he had lost his eldest son and heir two years earlier when he was just 23.[6] He left no written will, but instead a Memorandum 'declared…nuncupative or by word of mouth…uttered and spake in the presence of Robert Culliford, Esq., John Pike and others.' Perhaps his death was sudden. After the usual bequests to the poor (which were not large - £40 to Corfe, 40s to Worth and Sandwich, 20s to Langton and Studland), his servants (20s each) and his children (10s each to be bought rings in his memory) he left all the remainder of his estate 'to his wife to do therewith as she thought fit.' The upward mobility of the previous generations of the Dolling family has surely been severely checked by the Civil War years.

There is one more codicil to John Dolling II. The headless stone figure that lay for a long time disregarded on the ground before being installed in a niche on the north elevation of Dunshay was long known locally as Old Pyke, after the next Dunshay dynasty. However, what we can see of its attire places it more in the mid-17th century as the later years. It is made of cliffstone, and those who know find it closest to beds found at Winspit, a quarry that once fell within Dolling's

[6] An entry in *Alumni Oxonieses* records that this John Dolling, gent, eldest son of John Dolling of the Isle of Purbeck, Esg. and an alumnus of Oriel College who matriculated 18th March 1658 and went on to Middle Temple, was buried in the Round Walk at Temple Church on the night of 26th February 1661. His night-time burial could imply that he died of the plague or cholera, both endemic in London at the time.

estate. Perhaps it should rather be known as Old Dolling, perhaps one of a pair with his wife's, commissioned to celebrate the 1642 completion of works and later used as target practice by Parliamentarian soldiers, or perhaps simply falling from its place and part-shattering, when Anne and John's north wing fell down in the 19th century.

The last Dolling at Dunshay was their second son, Robert (1651-1673) who was only twelve when his father died. He held his first Manor Court in March 1673 when he came of age, and a second in July the same year. Then, and before his mother's death in October, he died suddenly, we do not know how. He left no will, and his two elder sisters Mary and Selina, applied for the administration of his personal estate, goods and chattels in April 1674. His mother Ann's will has not survived, but presumably it stated that the Manor of Worth was to be divided between her three surviving daughters, Margaret, Mary and Selina, for this is what happened next.

Dunshay in the 18th century: Pykes, Dukes and Hydes

Margaret was the only one of the Dolling daughters to be married at this point, to John Pyke (or Pike), perhaps the John Pike who witnessed John Dolling II's last wishes. In 1674, John Pyke, as the new lord, held a Manor Court with the three sisters also present; in 1675, Selina married George Duke, who lived near Salisbury, and from then on shared the role of lord of the manor as absentee landlord. Mary died soon after and her portion of the estate was divided between her sisters and their husbands. It seems to have been an amicable relationship and various legal agreements survive as land was divided between them, including the 1682 document that refers to 'Dunshay alias Wourr', when George Duke sold his share of the Dunshay lands to John Pyke.

As minor gentry, the Pykes lived in the house while their land was farmed by a tenant, at least by 1683, when the tenant farmer Anthony Hall made his will.

Little is known about John and Margaret Pyke's time at Dunshay, although it may be that the staircase fits stylistically with their tenure, and opinions differ as to whether the elegant east gateposts that give Dunshay so much of its character belong to the late-16th or late-17th centuries.

Hutchins records that John 'Pike', gent., was buried within the altar rails at Worth Church and records his inscription (since lost) with his date of death as 15th April 1703. It seems Margaret had died some years earlier, and that he had married a second Margaret, a widow from Poole. John and Margaret I's son Robert Pyke, born in 1663, inherited Dunshay. At the relatively late age of 50, Robert married Sarah Dixon of Clanville, a country house near Andover, and from then on, Clanville became an alternative centre of gravity for the Pyke family. Of Robert and Sarah's four children, two were baptised near Clanville and two in Worth. Robert Pyke died in 1746, and their eldest son Thomas Pyke (born in 1714) married Sarah Foreman the following year. Thomas too spent much of his time at Clanville, although he was buried at Worth in 1756. His son, John Pyke II, took over the family estate, including Dunshay.

In the 1740s and 50s, John Calcraft appeared on the Purbeck scene. Rumoured to be the natural son of the Whig leader, Henry Fox, 1st Baron Holland, Calcraft was a hearty, gregarious womaniser who funded an extravagant lifestyle through a career as an army funding agent. He had a meteoric career. By 1762, he was agent to 57 regiments – almost half the army – and was making up to £500 per regiment according to Georgiana Bellamy, his mistress of ten years. Calcraft spent his money acquiring land and property in Kent and Dorset. In 1757, he bought Rempstone Farm a couple of miles north of Dunshay and developed its farmhouse into a modest country seat, re-christened Rempstone Hall. After Wareham suffered a serious fire in 1762, he bought up most of the town. He also bought himself the parliamentary seat of Wareham in days when bribery was the main qualification for election. In Poole, Calcraft made the acquaintance of Thomas Hyde, a successful Poole merchant who had made his money trading clay and fish and served as mayor of Poole in 1765. Hyde

advised Calcraft on local politics, and in return Calcraft gave Hyde access to rich clay deposits.

John Pyke of Dunshay, meanwhile, had fallen badly into debt. Calcraft commissioned a valuation of Pyke's land in March 1771, in which Calcraft's Rempstone agent Mr Bishop reassured him that 'I am well satisfied that the quarries are fully valued in the land', and predicted a continuing market for their stone in the building of Ramsgate harbour.[7] In August 1771, Ralph Elwall of Andover, as an agent for Calcraft, paid John Pyke £430 'for 1,000 year lease at 1 peppercorn a year', thus bagging the Pyke share of the Manor of Worth Matravers as well. Calcraft also acquired the Duke family's share of the holdings in the same month, so folding almost all Worth manor lands into the Rempstone Estate. Not yet quite all of them: the survey of the Worth estate that Calcraft commissioned to record all his tenants and acreage, ran right up to The Grove, the wood through which today's drive to Dunshay passes - but did not yet include the farm or house.

Calcraft was after the house too, but died suddenly aged just 46 in August 1772. This was a cause of some consternation to both John Pyke II and his nephew, Reverend John Pyke, Rector of Swanage. Reverend Pyke was described by Bishop as 'a most sorprising man' [sic], who married the daughter of the innkeeper of The Rose in Worth. Both he and his uncle John Pyke II were heavily in debt, and Dunshay, now as the lesser seat to Clanville, was the obvious sacrifice. In December 1772, Dunshay Manor was mortgaged 'in lieu of debt' with Anthony Lucas Seymour.

Over the next few years, negotiations continued with the representative of John Calcraft II, who had inherited the Rempstone Estate. But then in 1776, Thomas Hyde, that wealthy and sometimes unpopular Poole merchant, swooped. In 1776, he bought Dunshay's house and remaining land for £6,530. So the Pyke and, indirectly, the Dolling, ownership of Dunshay came to an end.

[7] DHC D-TWR/T504

Thomas Hyde when he was mayor of Poole in 1765. Hyde made his money trading in valuable china clay and Newfoundland cod. He bought Dunshay from John Pyke in 1776, owning it only until his own bankruptcy in 1793.

John Calcraft the younger MP (1765-1831) brought Dunshay into the Rempstone Estate in 1793, where it would remain for the next 126 years. Calcraft was a man of political principal and an ultimately tragic figure. A Tory originally, he voted with the Whigs on the Great Reform Bill in 1831. Existing depression was intensified by the perceived criticism of his fellow MPS, and he was driven to take his own life.

From 1793, Dunshay was let as a farm.

However, Thomas Hyde's influence was also on the wane. In 1792, there was an acute financial crisis driven by a shortage of bank liquidity. Like many a company at the time, Hyde was declared bankrupt. As part of his bankruptcy sale, Dunshay was put up for auction in January 1793 at the Red Lion in Wareham. The sales description for the first six lots is worth quoting in full:

> 'All that compact, desirable and improveable Freehold Farm, called Dunshay, situated in the parish of Worth Matravers, in the Isle of Purbeck, Dorset; comprising a capital messauge or Mansion House, fit for residence of a genteel family, with stables, coach-house, barns and other necessary buildings, and 480 acres, or thereabouts, of arable, meadow, pasture, down, coppice, withy bed, and orchard, all lying within a ring fence. The premises command a most extensive and delightful prospect of the English Channel, the Isles of Wight and Portland, the picturesque vale of the Isle of Purbeck, and that venerable antique ruin of Corfe Castle; abound with game and afford many agreeable spots to build on; are within a mile and a half of a good turnpike road that communicates with all the great turnpike roads in the kingdom, and lye in the vicinity of Hills, commanding distant land and sea views, and affording airy and agreeable rides; are replete with stone quarries, and at the distance of about four miles from Swannage [*sic*], from whence all Purbeck stone is shipped, to which there is a good turnpike road, and where there is a most excellent shore, much resorted to for bathing; are about two miles from Corfe Castle and six from Wareham.'

But perhaps that the house was yet 'improveable' the agent could almost have been writing Landmark's Handbook entry for us. While still 'fit for the residence of a genteel family,' 'improveable' suggests that under the Pykes latterly distracted ownership the house had already entered a phase of progressive decline that would continue for the next century.

Predictably, these six Dunshay lots were snapped up by John Calcraft II for the Rempstone Estate and it remained in Rempstone ownership for the next 126 years. The farmland was already leased to tenants, tilled by the Smith family in the 1780s and early 90s. In 1796, the first Rempstone tenant moved in, both to occupy the house and farm its acres: Farmer Benjamin Jesty.

Honest farmer, Benjamin Jesty (1736-1816), pioneer of smallpox vaccination through inoculation by cowpox. Initially from Yetminster, Jesty lived and farmed at Dunshay with his wife and seven children from 1796. This portrait was painted by M. W. Sharp in 1805, the year Jesty took himself to London to present himself in person to the Original Vaccine Pock Institution, seeking recognition for his discovery, which predated Dr Edward Jenner's work (Jenner is generally credited with the discovery of vaccination). Farmer Jesty is buried with his wife in Worth churchyard.

Wellcome Trust Collection, on loan to Dorset County Museum.

Benjamin Jesty (1736-1816): pioneer of vaccination

The arrival from Yetminster in West Dorset of Benjamin Jesty represents an unexpected additional aspect to Dunshay's otherwise bucolic history. His wife Elizabeth and their seven children came with him, and as he is described as 'of Downshay' it seems this was the first time that the inhabitants of the present house also tilled the land. Jesty's sons no doubt helped him, and one, George, cheekily left a record of his own arrival there by scratching 'G Jesty 1796' on the Dollings' 1642 lead hopper. The family arrived at a time of heightened national security, especially along the South coast: Britain was at war with France as Napoleon's ambitions got underway. 60-year old Benjamin signed up with the Dorset Volunteer Rangers, and two sons, Benjamin and Thomas, joined the Dorset Yeomanry, the local militia.

Jesty arrived at Dunshay already a prosperous farmer. In Yetminster, living at Upbury Farm beside the church, he paid for the carriage of stone to lay a new path to the church and had been an Overseer of the Poor. He was also demonstrably a close observer of the natural world and a man of independent intelligence. Smallpox had been a blight on the population for centuries, often severely disfiguring and sometimes causing blindness or even death. Voltaire estimated that as much as 60% of the population caught smallpox, and 20% died. The much-travelled lady of letters, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu first introduced to England the idea of inoculation by scratching the matter from the blisters of an already, mildly infected patient to an uninfected person. She observed this practice (which she called 'engrafting' and others 'variolation') in Turkey in 1717, and successfully used it on some of her own children. Lady Wortley herself had been disfigured by the disease, and her brother died of it. Thereafter, various medical men and quacks claimed skill in the practice, but direct transfer of the disease was risky and often still resulted in serious illness and occasionally death.

In 1774, there was an epidemic of smallpox around Yetminster. By coincidence, there was also an outbreak of cowpox nearby. Cowpox is zoonotic, meaning that it can pass from one species to another, typically to milkmaids as they hand milked the cows, and is milder than smallpox. Jesty noticed that milkmaids never seemed to catch smallpox. Jesty himself had had cowpox, so counted himself immune from smallpox, but worried for his family. He took fluid from the udders of infected cows and inoculated his wife and children, using a (presumably unsterilized) stocking needle. The two little boys suffered mild fever, his wife's infection was somewhat worse, but none of them caught fullblown smallpox. Jesty, however, was a countryman not a scientist and he did not initially publicise his findings to the world. Indeed, he was criticised in Yetminster for putting his family at such experimental risk, and is possible that this prompted his relocation to Dunshay. He continued inoculating locally in a low key sort of way, usually successfully.

More than twenty years after Jesty's first foray into inoculation, indeed the year he moved to Dunshay, Dr Edward Jenner, physician and scientist, began his own trials. On 14 May 1796, Jenner successfully inoculated the hapless eight-year-old son of his gardener. He then carried out further trials on others, eventually writing a paper for the Royal Society. This was not initially published, but Jenner was supported by his colleagues and the King in petitioning Parliament, and in 1802 he was granted £10,000 for his work on vaccination, followed by a further £20,000 in 1807 when the Royal College of Physicians had confirmed the widespread efficacy of vaccination.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Dr Jenner the London-based, formally trained medic and scientist should know better how to disseminate and profit from his findings than Farmer Jesty. George Pearson, founder of the Original Vaccine Pock Institution, had brought evidence before the House of Commons of Jesty's work in 1774, but Jesty's well-documented case was weakened by his failure to petition in person, so no reward was forthcoming.

Unaware of George Pearson's previous attempts, once at Dunshay Jesty was encouraged to pursue recognition by the Reverend Dr. Andrew Bell, rector of Swanage and a great supporter of vaccination. Dr Bell preached sermons in support of Jesty's method and encouraged some 200 parishioners to be inoculated. In 1803, Dr Bell wrote a paper proposing Jesty as the first vaccinator, sending copies to the Original Vaccine Pock Institute and the local MP George Rose.

At this George Pearson took up Jesty's cause again, and in 1805, the Dunshay farmer was summoned to London to give his evidence before a panel of twelve medical officers of the Institute at its base in Soho. His family tried to persuade him to dress in a more up-to-date fashion, but he refused, saying that "he did not see why he should dress better in London than in the country". A letter written in 1860 by the Rev. J. M. Colson of Swanage gives boyhood eyewitness of the honest farmer setting out in high hopes to seek his fortune in London:

> 'I have a perfect recollection of old Jesty coming to our house in Corfe…to borrow of my father a pair of saddle bags – to contain his clean shirts when he was going to London to give evidence of his discovery of Vaccination – and being *vice* [failing] the saddle bags (a thing of bygone ages, now quite an *extinctum genus*) supplied with a portmanteau as the more convenient vehicle.'

Robert, Jesty's oldest son (by then 28 years old) went with him and agreed to be inoculated with smallpox again to prove that he still had immunity. After his cross-examination, Jesty was presented with a long testimonial and pair of gold mounted lancets (small surgical knives then used in inoculation), but this was as far as his reimbursement went. He was however despatched to the studio of the portrait painter Michael William Sharp in nearby Great Marlborough Street. Jesty proved an impatient sitter, and so Mrs Sharp played the piano to try to soothe him as Sharp painted. After a chequered history, the portrait is now owned by the Wellcome Trust and is on loan to the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester.

The Reverend Colson's letter suggests Jesty had not found his trip to London an entirely comfortable experience, but for one silver lining:

> 'On his return he gave a very unfavourable report of the metropolis, but *per contra* said there was one great comfort indeed, *viz.* [namely] that he could be shaved every day instead of wearing his beard from Saturday to Saturday, on which day alone when he rode into Wareham he was relieved of that encumbrance.'[8]

Benjamin Jesty 'of Downshay' died in April 1816 at the good age of 79, and is buried in Worth churchyard. His wife Elizabeth survived him by eight years and is buried alongside him.

Decline as a tenanted farm

In 1818, a John Smith took over the lease of Downshay (as the site was consistently known through the 19th century). So began a period of decline and increasingly threatening dilapidation in what was now a working farmhouse. The Rempstone Estate had troubles of its own. John Calcraft II served as a local MP from 1880 to 1828 and became a prominent member of the Whig party, promoting parliamentary reform. However, in 1828 he defected to the Duke of Wellington's Tory administration, caught up in Catholic Emancipation, another of those fault lines in British politics that have played havoc with a two-party system. When the Great Reform Act was brought before Parliament in March 1831, Calcraft could not find it in his heart to follow the Tory whip in voting against it. The crucial division was carried by a single vote. His fellow Tories could not forgive him, interpreting Calcraft's career-defining support of electoral reform as mere duplicity. Already suffering from depression Calcraft became convinced that he was vilified by both sides of the House, and that September, he took his own life, leaving five children. His eldest son, John Hales Calcraft inherited the Rempstone Estate.

[8] Quoted in Ida Woodward, *In and Around the Isle of Purbeck* (1907).

By 1841, Smith, by now aged 60, had no other family at Dunshay, a daughter having died at 16. Also living in the house were John Deamer (single, 45), two single women, Elizabeth Dunning (55) and Jane Holland (15), and two women each recorded in the census as Elizabeth Barnes, aged 20 and 30, and described as 'Ind[ependent].'

Perhaps the women were employed as dairymaids: as Dunshay opens as a Landmark in 2019, the window of the first floor room in the southwest corner of the south wing still has chalked above its lintel in now faint red chalk the words 'Cheese Room.' This is a reminder of the exemption of dairies and cheeserooms from the Window Tax, provided they were clearly labelled. The Window Tax was first introduced in 1696, as a method of taxation in proportion to the resident's prosperity. It imposed a flat rate of 2s for up to ten windows and a pro-rata'd rate above that. The tax was easy to assess and not unduly onerous on the resident, but it was an unpopular, said to be 'on light and air.' With various amendments, the Window Tax survived until 1851, and so the marking of the Cheese Room at Dunshay probably dates to John Smith's tenure.

The 1840 Tithe Map still shows the historic access road to Dunshay as running north-south past the front gate, rather than today's driveway from the east off Haycrafts Lane. The north-south access continued until after the 1901 OS map; by 1928, it had changed to the current driveway. (The footprint of the house and its outbuildings on the 1840 map, however, is confusing. The pigsties have apparently not yet been built, and the dairy house – today's studio – is shown with the wrong orientation. No porch is shown.)

John Smith died in 1842 and his son Thomas Gover Smith moved from Afflington Farm to take over Dunshay, dying himself in 1861. His son, also Thomas and aged just 27, took over the lease, described in the census of that year as 'Farmer of 488 acres at Downshay.' Dairyman James Long was also present on census night, with his wife, Thomas Smith's elder sister Sarah. Another sister also lived on the farm.

The Cheese Room window, photographed in 2009, relic of days of the Window Tax when such rooms were exempt. The tax was repealed in 1851. Note the wasps' nest!

By 1880, Dunshay was an increasingly dilapidated tenant farm. Most of the north wing had collapsed. The boundary was marked with a rudimentary fence of stone slabs, and one of the gate finials had tumbled. The mounting block beside the gate is already in place, as are the pigsties behind the house.

Charles Edmund Newton-Robinson, *A royal warren: or, Picturesque rambles in the Isle of Purbeck* (1882)

By 1871, the Longs had left, replaced by John, James, Jane and Alice Marsh, itinerant farm workers. By 1881, the Smiths had gone, to be replaced by a sequence of short tenancies.

Even by the 1860s, it seems all was not well with the old house. The final edition of Hutchins (1862) remarks cryptically 'Here was the ancient seat of the Dollings, most of which is still standing.' By 1882, a picture of romantic decay is painted in words and recorded in a drawing by Alfred Dawson. The front garden wall is simply thin slabs of stone set upright in a ragged grin and the north wing has definitively collapsed:

> 'All is imbued with [an] air of passed-away grandeur, but more shrunken from its former size by the pulling down of the uninhabitable north wing, and boasting more signs of ancient opulence, in the elaborate old terraced garden with stone paths edged, in diamond fashion, in the great yews of unknown age, the tall box hedges and the rookery of towering elms that shelter all from the northern blast, it looks as may have looked the places where, by enchantment as the old tales tell, fair maidens were locked up for centuries…in the midst of silent ruin, till they should be wakened by a kiss at last into life again.
>
> 'The strangely elegant stone piers at the garden gate are, in themselves, the epitome of the whole story. One stands still erect, in all the glory of its delicate mouldings and quaint spire-like top, as when the wealthy gentleman who first build himself the fine brand-new house…first entered at the gate with the fortunes of his race on his head. The other has long been broken at the point where the top joins the pedestal. The pedestal itself is overgrown with ancient ivy, the top stands neglected on the ground, and has remained there who knows how long, at the foot of the one pier still intact; fallen, like the race of Dolling and Pyke, and as little thought of or cared for.'[9]

At the turn of the century, there were again changes at the Rempstone Estate. John Hales Calcraft died in 1880, having inherited his grandfather's good looks and propensity for sowing wild oats. His wife Caroline lived another ten years and her last surviving son, William Montagu Calcraft, carried on the Calcraft name for another eleven years. But neither William nor his two brothers ever married, and so the estate passed to his nephew Captain Guy Marston, RN.

[9] Charles Edmund Newton-Robinson, *A royal warren: or, Picturesque rambles in the Isle of Purbeck* (1882), p. 149.

Rempstone Hall, seat of the Rempstone Estate, lies a couple of miles north of Dunshay as the crow flies.

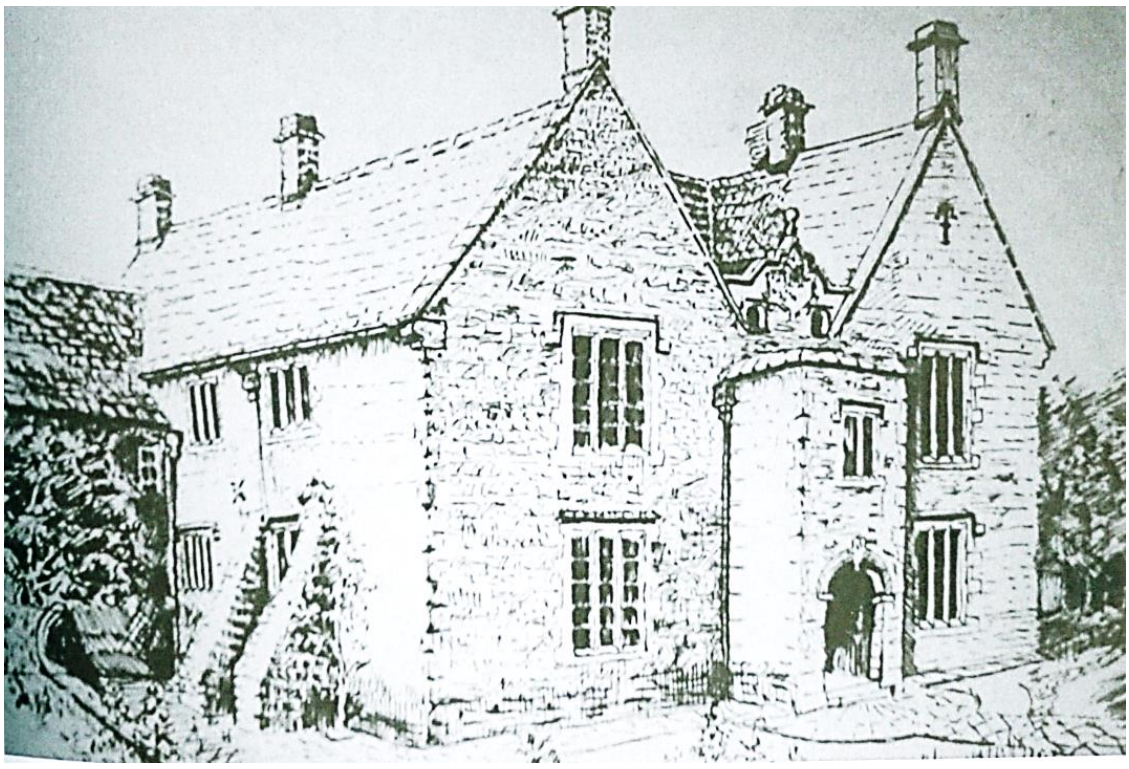
Arts & Crafts Revival at Dunshay

Guy Montagu Marston was born at Rempstone Hall, and joined the navy as a midshipman when he left school. By 1910, he had command of a cruiser, *Blanche.* Marston is an enigmatic character, often away at sea, with Remsptone Hall let for long periods to his cousin, Daisy Bevan and her husband. It is chiefly his private life that has proved mysterious. Marston never married but was infatuated with Daisy and there is an implication of a *ménage à trois* at Rempstone. Rupert Brooke was a friend, visiting Purbeck several times in the years before the Great War sometimes with the Bloomsbury set. Marston was probably bisexual, and certainly open-minded. Aleister Crowley was another friend who stayed at Rempstone, known as 'the Wickedest Man on Earth' for his open 'pansexuality', founder of the pseudo-religion of Thelema (which took as its watchword the Rabelasian 'Do what thou wilt'). Crowley was a practitioner of the occult and experimenter in hallucinogenic drugs. The Calcraft family history claims Crowley performed 'sex magic' at Rempstone in 1910: certainly he left Guy Marston a signed photograph.[10]

Whatever Marston did in his private life, Dunshay probably owes its survival to his conscientious estate management. Early in 1905, his agent Mr Clark took Bournemouth architect Philip Sturdy to the house to prepare a condition report. The tenant farmer refused to let them upstairs: even without, this Sturdy's report makes depressing reading. 'Ground has been allowed to accumulate on the East and South sides and this has caused dampness and to a certain degree dry rot…Owing largely to there being no eaves gutters to the Roof and also to the weight and old movement in the roof, the South side wall is considerably buckled and out of plumb. The old buttresses have to a great extent checked further damage….but it appears that the wall is still insecure…The North wall along the side of the Hall having formerly been merely an inside wall in spite of its thickness is very much out of plumb and is very much decayed in places…

[10] Richard D. Ryder, *The Calcrafts of Rempstone Hall* (2005).

Architect Philip Sturdy's drawing of Dunshay as he found it in 1905, and his proposals to Guy Marston for the reconstruction of the north wing (Rempstone Estate papers). He proposed adding an elaborate 'Jacobethan' parapet to the porch to conceal the awkward join between the gables; in the event, the same result was achieved by simply heightening the flat roofed porch. Otherwise, Sturdy's proposals were adopted.



'The stone gate post on the North side of the entrance gate is much out of perpendicular…there is imminent risk that the slender neck of the handsome pyramid will break off… the masonry generally of the house is exceedingly good but it is now in a condition to rather rapidly deteriorate unless judicious repairs be undertaken…most serious dry rot in the Drawing Room…has completely destroyed a good Deal floor only renewed about seven years ago and has unfortunately attacked the very nice joinery also…as the Beam supporting the ceiling over this room is reported to have sunk some years ago, and the Ceiling is much out of level, it is probable that the same dry rot had already existed before the new floor…The whole of the woodwork affected must be taken out and burnt.'

Apart from remedial works, Sturdy also suggested some alterations and replacements. He proposed rebuilding the lost north wing to match the south one, following its original footprint and creating a dining room, taking the opportunity to take down the original, very thick entrance hall wall and replace it with a thinner brick one, to widen the hallway. He also proposed a reorganisation of the service rooms at the back of the house to create a new back entrance and a service door and WC behind the dining room. These latter changes were 'to allow the tenant to enter without going through the front passage or kitchen.' He suggested creating two new bedrooms above the new dining room, each with a fireplace, and 'I consider a bathroom should be provided for a property of this size.'

Sturdy argued in favour of robbing the old enclosing walls to use on the house, rebuilding the former in new stone, and of using 'old weathered' tiles to repair the roof, 'they are sounder than new and will match the old better.' He suggested new steel casements in place of the wooden ones he found in situ. Finally, he drew the house as he found it, and also as he proposed it might be renovated, with a new north wing and a rather quaint miniature Dutch gablet between the two wings, to mask the rather awkward junction between them.

In the event, Captain Marston agreed with all Sturdy's proposals, with the exception of the gablet above the porch, which was instead simply heightened to a flat roof with a heavy cornice and given a larger, three-light window – probably the right decision.

The Dunshay we see today is therefore largely Philip Sturdy's adaptation of the ancient manor house. It seems likely the headless statue of Old Pyke/Major Dolling was put in its current position at this point. Sturdy brought with him a sensitivity for the Arts & Crafts ethos and a fair eye for interior detailing (even if his ultimately rather clumsy widening of the hallway cuts awkwardly across its window). The corner-set fireplaces are his, and the replacement north wing is hard to distinguish from its original partner on the other side of the porch. Marston recorded his own role as client for the works with another rainwater hopper on his new wing to match that of the Dollings, recording his own intervention with the date, 1906, and his own initials 'G M M.' Similar hoppers were added to Rempstone Hall in the same year.

The two semi-detached cottages on Haycrafts Lane opposite the entrance to Dunshay's drive were probably also built by Sturdy around the same time, to house the staff required for the improved house. It's also likely he built or expanded Downshay Farm next door, whose sitting room is similar to Dunshay's new dining room. In its newfound Edwardian gentility, it was already anticipated that the farmer of Dunshay's acreage might not live in its manor house. No residents are recorded for the 1911 census, but by 1915 *Kelly's Directory* tells us that William Homer was farming here.

All was not well at Rempstone Hall, however. Guy Marston had brought a libel case against Jane Panton, author of a gossipy book about Purbeck days and ways in the late nineteenth century called *Fresh Leaves and Green Pasture* (1909). There is possibly a hint that more up-to-date gossip might be about to emerge about Marston's own private life, a whiff of gambling debts or even blackmail. Possibly it was simply a case of poor administration as the estate,

and the country, emerged from the Great War. Either way, on 29 July 1919 Marston sold all his Worth holdings representing the southern part of the Rempstone Estate: the whole of Worth village, the south side of the hill, and 'Downshay Farm.'

The sale particulars describe it as

Consisting of a charming

17th Century Manor House

recently restored at great expense, containing large Drawing Room, Dining Room and Entrance Hall, fitted with oak, third room panelled, handsome Staircase, Landing, seven Bedrooms, Bathroom, W.C. Large Kitchen, Scullery, Larder, Milk House, Cellar, Cheese Loft, etc. The [out]buildings are excellent and consist of a large recently erected Dairy House, Stalls for 43 cows, Stables for eight Horses, six Pig Styes, Barn, Granary, Cart Shed and three exceptionally good Cottages.

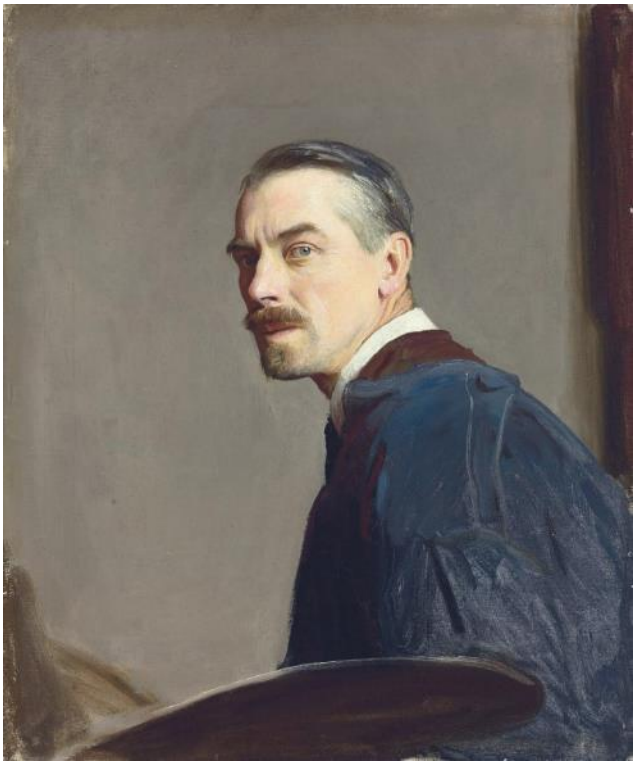
This lot forms a good Sporting Property.[11]

A Mr Painter had an annual lease on 'Manor House, Buildings, Lands, etc.' for a rental of £160.[12] The Downshay lot was bought by E. J. Holland, a farmer more interested in its acreage than the old manor house and now with a comfortable new farmhouse to live in across the track. He let the old manor house to artist Lucy Kemp Welch (see below). The whole of Worth village was snapped up for just £9,900 by estate agents Meesrs Bright & Beach, who sold it on just a month later, no doubt for a tidy profit. This again hints that Marston was selling with some urgency.

In 1923, Mr. Holland decided to put Dunshay Manor on the market. Hearing of the rumour, George and Hilda Spencer Watson, a London couple who had been spending an increasing amount of time in Dorset in a holiday cottage they rented in Studland, bought the house. It was to be the beginning of the tenure that will now forever define Dunshay's character.

[11] DRO D/NJH/B/E2

[12] The information on the 1919 sale was provided by Muriel Sparks.



Above: *Hilda & Maggie*, by George Spencer Watson, RA (1869-1934), painted in 1911 two years after his marriage to Hilda. Below: *Self Portrait.* While he also painted at their London house on Holland Park Road, George made a studio at Dunshay in the former dairy, where he painted many paintings of his wife, daughter, their favourite animals and their Purbeck house.

Until Mary's death in 2006, both these paintings hung in the sitting room at Dunshay. She bequeathed them to the Tate Gallery.

The Spencer Watson Years

Hilda and George Watson were, above all, a highly artistic couple. George (1869-1934) was a well-established painter, in what is described as a late-Romantic style. He was the eldest son of Georgina and William Spencer Watson (a prosperous surgeon), and his parents encouraged his interest in painting. George was a member of the Royal Academy and of many other painterly societies. Dunshay was once full of his paintings: he loved to paint the house, and his wife and daughter Mary in the Dorset landscape they all loved so much, informal windswept paintings with dogs, horses and goats, capturing an apparently carefree, golden interwar idyll. Before turning to their life in Dorset, however, some of their London context should be established.

As his self-portraits hint, George was a shy, introverted man, nervous but charming and given to flashes of whimsical humour. In 1909, already 40, he married Hilda Gardiner (1879-1952). Her father William was a wealthy merchant trading especially in Australia, and his success guaranteed Hilda a healthy income from 'W. Gardiner & Co. Ltd., Australian Wholesale Merchants & Warehousemen, London & Sydney' for the rest of her life (although the couple were comfortably off rather than wealthy – in 1918/19 and again in 1921, Hilda's bank wrote to her for considerably exceeding her overdraft facility). It was the money she brought to the marriage that largely funded the comfortable and artistic lifestyle that she and her husband enjoyed. Hilda was a charismatic person, tall, intense and *nerveuse*: in Ilay Cooper's words 'In every memory of her, Hilda stands out as striking, eventful.' While her marriage with George was outwardly conventional, after Mary's birth in 1913 it was a platonic one and she had a number of affairs, including, briefly, with Ambrose Heal, furniture designer and founder of the eponymous furniture store. There was Heal's furniture at Dunshay during the Spencer Watson era. In 1920, she underwent psychoanalysis with Dr Maurice Nicholl and, a year later, with Carl Jung in Switzerland.

Hilda as Pan in one of her performances. She generally played the male parts.

Below: examples of Ballet Russes costumes, which may have influenced her style.

Hilda was an inveterate hoarder of papers, however trivial, and it is primarily from a notebook of her thoughts and dreams, and the things she wanted to discuss during her sessions, that we know such intimate details about her life. By coincidence, Jung came to Swanage in 1925 to hold a seminar in a marquee, on 'Dreams and Symbolism.' Hilda and Mary drove over in their pony and trap to surprise him, and afterwards he came to tea at Dunshay, sitting at the long kitchen table and holding forth on the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Twelve-year old Mary was, however, more preoccupied that her donkey had knocked her off its back that day, walking under one of the chains Hilda had used to fence off the drive. Jung merely found it funny.

In 1915, George and Hilda bought 20 Holland Park Road, which Hilda kept until 1936. George had his studio upstairs, and in the drawing room, Hilda developed the dramatic performances of mime and dance that it seems she had been putting on for friends since at least her marriage. As they became better known, she developed a very recognisable style: highly stylised, and set to spoken or sung words or music, often drawing from themes of Classical mythology. From the stills that come down to us, the work of her friend, Swanage photographer Helen Muspratt, her pieces have something of the two-dimensionality of a Classical frieze. In the words of one of the reviews that Hilda collected obsessively (she subscribed to no fewer than four press cutting services) 'All the action has been simplified until it is readily grasped as a symbol.' In a way, Hilda was perhaps channelling through her work some the human archetypes that Jung identified.

She also made all her own costumes and props. The scenery and backdrops were often designed by George or other artists, the former made out of sugar crates. The costumes especially evoke Léon Baskt's and Alexandre Benois' designs for the Ballets Russes, the touring ballet company founded by Sergei Diaghilev and based in Paris that performed between 1909 and 1929.

Hilda and a young Mary performing in one of their best loved works, *Walk, Shepherdess, Walk*, after a nursery rhyme by Eleanor Farjeon.

Almost all Ballet Russes performances were in London; it would have been astonishing if Hilda was not familiar with their work, and indeed there was the programme for their London season in 1914 among her books. Hilda was not classically trained in ballet however, and developed her own unique style of self-expression.

The American Isadora Duncan, a pioneer of free dance, was also a near contemporary of Hilda's, similarly performing in wealthy London drawing rooms and drawing inspiration from the Greek vases and bas-reliefs in the British Museum. Duncan was perhaps another influence, although her much freer style of dance and clothing had little in common with Hilda's tightly choreographed style.

And from a very early age, Hilda was joined in performance by her lithe daughter Mary. It is said Mary performed from the age of three; while she generally played the subservient role (her mother typically took the male role in their duets) she was her mother's equal in style and grace. Some reviews judged Mary to be the star of the shows, and she became equally well known: 'Little Mary, bareheaded and wearing her Highland kilt, is a familiar figure in Kensington', wrote the *Evening News* in 1928.

In 1919, Hilda rented a mews space, formerly a sculptor's workshop and before that a stables, at 38 Warwick Gardens, which she called her Studio Theatre. Here, she and Mary performed, supported by local Dorset children and teenagers as will be described.The performance space was demarcated by a rope across the floor, the audience (up to 50 or so) sat on cushions on steps at one end. The floor was concrete, as later would be the floor of the little panelled room off the sitting room at Dunshay, 'silent not slippery, perfect for dancing' as Mary later told Ilay. It seems certain that Hilda and Mary sometimes performed in this little snug for their Dunshay house guests.

Hilda and Mary made all their own costumes, props and scenery as shown top left in a rare shot of the Warwick Mews studio theatre. The audience sat on the cushions behind them. Mary had considerable talent of her own although did not seek the limelight herself.

Hilda subscribed to multiple press cuttings services and kept all her reviews.

In London, Hilda was tireless in soliciting the presence of friends and theatre critics alike to her performances, advertising in all the leading papers of the day and from 1927 even employing a press secretary, V. Nichols, 'a young actor myself.' The reviews found mouldering in a box in the theatre barn at Dunshay were almost all positive (some even rapturous) but it cannot be denied that not everyone found the performances to their taste. 'So exactly does [Mrs Spencer Watson] and her daughter know what they want to do, so well do they do it, that criticism is quite disarmed', wrote *The Gownsman* in Cambridge when the show went there on tour in February 1929.[13] With her young daughter in unquestioning support, Hilda brought a self-belief in her creative vision of dance theatre that swept all before her. However, while through Hilda's energy the Studio Theatre was launched in London, Purbeck was simultaneously becoming an increasing focus for the family.

The Bloomsbury set had discovered Studland in the early 1900s. For a few years, they all came: first George Bernard Shaw, then Ottoline Morrell, Bertrand Russell, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Vanessa and Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, Maynard Keynes. The restless eddies of their complicated relationships had moved them on elsewhere by the time George Spencer Watson decided to rent a holiday cottage in Studland in 1913. This was Corner Cottage, a new brick and flint house on the Swanage Road that they rented from the Bankes estate for £50 a year for the next decade. Mary had just been born, a treasured only child who loved the outdoors and revelled in the Purbeck fields and beaches. At first the Spencer Watsons came only for short breaks apart from the long summer holiday, most of their life remaining in London.

[13] Dunshay was comprehensively cleared after Mary's death by the Baynes family, and any residual papers from the house were salvaged by Ilay Cooper. What papers Landmark found, almost all of them Hilda's ephemera and correspondence relating to her Studio Theatre, in a few boxes and carrier bags in Theatre Barn, have been deposited at the Dorset History Centre.

Mary loved horse riding from an early age and owned ponies and horses all her life. Her father painted many pictures of her riding, and her airy Purbeck summers were in some contrast to her parents' bohemian London life. *The Donkey Ride* (above) was one of George's most popular paintings, even parodied in *Punch.*

Below: an everyday scene on the farm track behind Dunshay, before the Dairy was converted

Shadowing her London activities, Hilda launched her Purbeck theatre project during these years. At first she performed in George's studio, a former stable beside the cottage. Then in 1919, she bought a decommissioned army hut from Ulwell and had it move to a field beside Corner Cottage (it is still there, now converted into a cottage). Mary and Hilda were now joined in their performances by local girls. Studland, though, was becoming ever more popular; a car ferry was planned from Sandbanks and a new road from Bournemouth and Poole. In July 1923, George and Hilda were invited to Ralph Bankes' coming of age garden party at Kingston Lacy where they saw plans for housing development at Shell Bay. The Studland the Spencer Watsons loved seemed doomed and they began to hunt for an alternative home in the area.[14]

The equestrian artist, Lucy Kemp Welch (1869-1958), either had a long lease on Dunshay at the time or rented it for successive summers. She painted many of the warhorses of the Great War as well as horses in the surf, often painting and sketching *en plein air.* It is not impossible that George's own painting of his family on horseback was influenced by her work, and she also illustrated horsey children's books like *Black Beauty*. Lucy rode over to Corner Cottage to see the Spencer Watsons when she heard of their interest in Dunshay; Mary later reminisced how her ten-year-old self had groomed her own pony with especial care for the arrival of such a special guest.

By 7th February 1924, George's diary records 'paying £400 for Downshay', presumably a part-payment. Beyond its immediate curtilage, over the next few years he acquired more land: the deep, damp dip of the medieval quarrying to the north of the garden wall and three little meadows beyond, the pasture as far as Haycrafts Lane. His diary jottings record the transactions: '1929: September Deposit on 24 acres £112 10s'; '10th Oct. bought Small Holding at Downshay'; '17th Oct Gillman for Small Holding at Downshay £797 10s.'[15]

[14] In the event, Ralph Bankes thought better and vetoed the development. On his death in 1981, he left Kingston Lacy and the whole of his estate to the National Trust.
[15] Muriel Sparks, pers. comm. to Landmark.

Four Loves I found, a Woman, a Child, a Horse and a Hound **shows George, Hilda and Mary in 1922. Until Mary's death, this large painting dominated the entrance hall at Dunshay. Mary had intended it for Dorset County Museum, but did not update her will, and so at her death it passed with the rest of the contents of the house to the Baynes family, and was sold it in 2009.**

An example of renowned equestrian artist Lucy Kemp Welch's work. She was renting Dunshay in 1923 when the Spencer Watsons bought it.

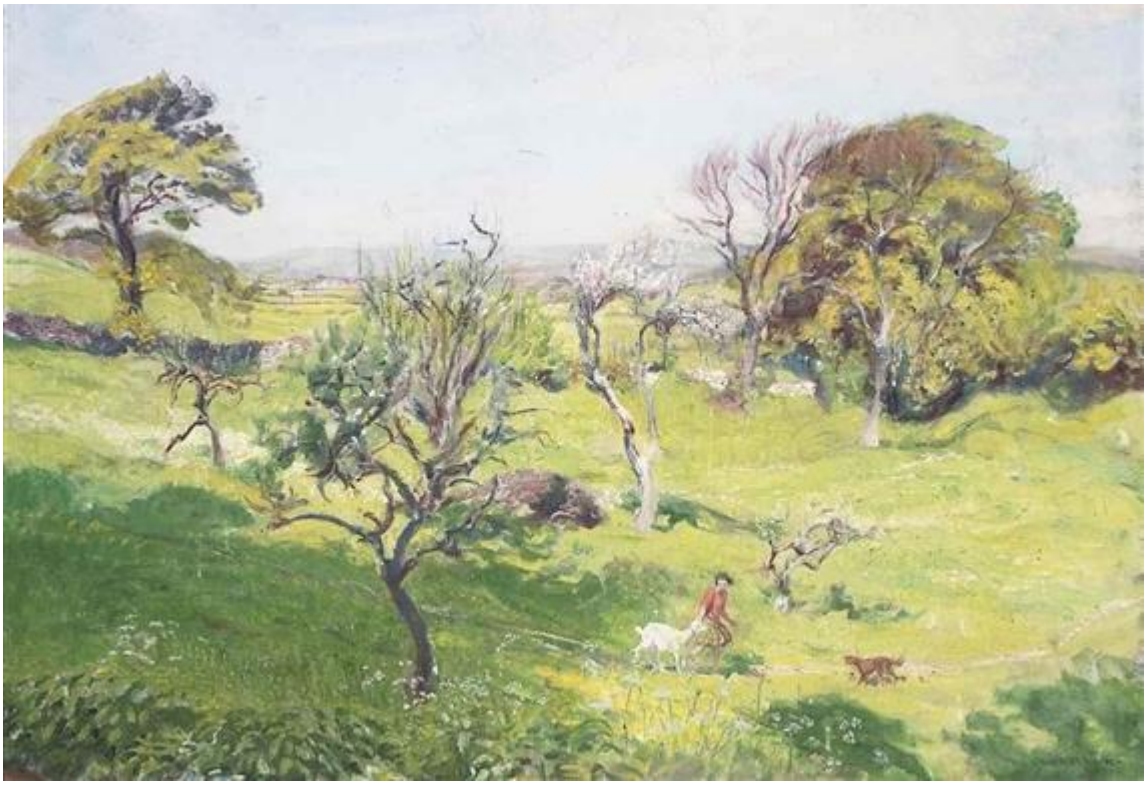
In 1928 they bought the two semi-detached cottages that front the lane, intended primarily to house staff for the house and grounds.[16] Eventually they amassed a small estate of some 50 acres. George would continue to spend much of his time in London, but Dunshay (as it was now definitively christened by George, to distinguish it from Downshay Farm) was to be an equivalent family base.

They began to make changes to adapt it to their needs. It's clear that Hilda was in charge: all the bills are made out to her and the surviving correspondence; George may have been mostly in London. The Valley Road was being metalled in 1926 to become the main road from Wareham to Swanage, and in the same year the Spencer Watsons created today's 250 yard drive through Grove Wood to approach the house from the east, replacing the old north-south turnpike. The new arrangement meant the sometimes soggy hollow, sometimes a drinking pond for passing horses and cattle in front of the gateway and shown in one of George's early paintings of the house, needed to be done away with or formalised. Meanwhile, the 18th-century barn and stables beyond the southern boundary were now part of Downshay Farm and so new stables were planned. Quarryman Titus Lander came down from his quarry at the top of Downshay Lane to look at the site, and suggested that the marble rag block that would need to be shifted for the foundations could be used to line the pond, with a narrow ramp at one side so that livestock could still reach the water. George's diary records that the pond was begun on 9th August 1926. The new stable block was originally thatched and the names of its builders are inscribed on the stone copy of George's *Four Loves* painting still inside, according to Ilay probably carved by Mary.

[16] One of the cottages was eventually let by the illustrator, Henry Justice Ford, an old friend of George's. Among other works, Ford illustrated the twelve fairy books by Andrew Lang, each identified by colour and hugely popular at the time. Mary was a great fan as a child and kept battered copies of the *Fairy Books* in the house until she died.

George's painting of the soggy watering hole for cattle and horses outside the gate as it was when the family arrived at Dunshay (top), and another of the pond it became in 1926. At this stage the new barn was still a stable.

The vegetable garden, Dairy (by now George's studio) and pigsties, painted by George in high summer and (below) Mary reading in the sun above the house.



Mary loved goats as well as horses and dogs, even attempting to train them to perform. Hilda too enjoyed riding, although looks less at ease in the saddle than Mary, here outside the converted Dairy Studio, with its large north-facing window.

Hilda and Mary outside the Mowlem Institute in Bournemouth in the 1920s, where Hilda held her summer seasons until the Theatre Barn was created at Dunshay. The metal hanging sign later hung above the entrance to the Theatre Barn until Mary's death (its whereabouts is now unknown).

Solarised print of Mary and Hilda performing as Jacob and Esau taken by their friend photographer Helen Muspratt.

Daily Mirror
Jan: 1st 1930.

TO-DAY'S GOSSIP

News and Views About Men, Women and Affairs in General

Mrs. Spencer Watson, wife of the portrait painter, outside her barn theatre at Langton Maltravers, Dorset.

In 1929, Hilda equipped the barn originally intended as a stable block into a theatre studio. She and Mary performed here for three weeks every summer, Hilda eagerly writing to friends and neighbours to offer them tickets. After the performances, tea was served on the Dunshay lawns.

Growing up among the Purbeck quarries, Mary had become fascinated by them, and one day, quarryman Titus Lander handed her a mallet and chisel to have a go. It was to be the seed from which grew her later artistic career. Although she was still only 13, her father planned the new stable block to include a studio for her.

In 1932, Mr Moss the builder was threatening Hilda with legal action for unpaid bills for the stables – perhaps another time when she exceeded her overdraft. The new drive also made a much earlier southern entrance from the farm track redundant. Its gateposts were reset in a new (or possibly existing) opening in the north wall, and aggrandised by adding a second pair of stone finals, smaller but otherwise replicas of the originals at the main, eastern gateway. A set of stone steps was built leading down from them to an area that Hilda cleared and had laid to grass, then known as the lower lawn. Here a cement-lined plunge pool was created (since removed) where she and Mary bathed in summer. Nature had advanced again over this area by the time Mary died.

Also in 1926, Hilda oversaw the conversion of the former dairy with hayloft above into a studio for George. Its floor was removed, its ceiling and pented ceiling panelled, new doors were inserted at each end and a large north-facing window inserted for light. As a portrait painter, George continued to work at their Holland Park house; at Dunshay, he painted for his own pleasure. His paintings of Mary and Hilda in Dorset also achieved some fame at the time, no doubt in mutual reinforcement with Hilda's theatrical activities among the chattering classes. Two of his most well-known paintings epitomise their life in Purbeck: *The Donkey Ride*, of Hilda, six-year old Mary astride her donkey and Hilda's signature dog, was exhibited in the 1919 Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy and proved the most striking work that year, even achieving a parody in *Punch*. The other painting, *Four Loves I Found, A Woman, A Child, A Horse and a Hound* (1922), showed all three of them striding the Purbeck coast.

A canvas of 56 x 77 inches, it secured George's election to the Royal Academy and hung for many years in the entrance hall at Dunshay, capturing better than anything else the Spencer Watsons' Purbeck life.

The first decade at Dunshay saw Hilda's dancing career reach its peak, with the adolescent Mary ably deserving her equal billing, although she enjoyed the pleasure of the music and movement rather than the limelight. Here is Mary's description of Hilda's work for photographer Helen Muspratt:

> 'She began work on a mime based on the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Pan and Syrinx, in two scenes with an epilogue set to Italian music. She also adapted the Argonauts, based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's version, set to a backing of German folk songs. Her Demeter and Persephone consisted of a seventeen scenes drawn from Walter Pater's adaptation of the Homeric hymns. Each had a prologue spoken by two teenage girls standing as Greek *korae* either side of the stage. For accompaniment she chose early Italian music. When playing at the Mowlem, the faint background of breaking waves on the beach was very effective in her "Dionysius" as nymphs "called him out of the sea with hymns in early spring."'[17]

Another very popular piece was Hilda's interpretation of Eleanor Farjeon's nursery rhyme, 'Walk, Sheherdess, Walk', which she set to a simple tune:

Walk, shepherdess, walk,
And I'll walk too,
To find the ram with ebony horn
And the gold-footed ewe;

The lamb with the fleece of silver
Like the summer sea-foam,
The wether with the crystal bell
That leads them all home.

Walk, shepherdess, walk,
And I'll walk too,
And if we never find them,
I shan't mind, shall you?[18]

[17] *Purbeck Arcadia*, p. 127.
[18] Eleanor Farjeon, *Nursery Rhymes of London Town* (1916). Disconcertingly, this has now become primarily associated with American Girl Scouts, having been assimilated as a folk song.

By the mid-1920s, Hilda was renting the Mowlem Institute on Swanage seafront for her performances, then a slate-roofed stone hall although replaced in the 1960s with a bland modern structure. Local children continued to take part, selected by Hilda from Betty Tunnell's dancing classes, boys as well as girls: on 8th May 1928, *The Daily News* described how children were brought from Swanage to Kensington to perform, 'amateurs, whose parents 'lend' them for rehearsals after school hours. In town, they all sleep, camping out fashion, where their performances are given.' At Dunshay, they were given 'lovely teas…in a very Healish dining room, with pleasant cream-coloured china.'[19]

Although most of the reviews she hoarded were for her London shows, Hilda was spending more and more time in Purbeck. In 1928, George took Mary on a trip to Holland. When they returned, Hilda had turned most of the new stable block into a theatre barn, already fully kitted out with lights. It was used for performances right up until her death in 1952, aged 74, and then left untouched until Mary's own death in 2006, increasingly used for storage. The unraised performance area was separated from the audience by a thin cotton curtain.[20] The backstage area was raised, and contained boxes and boxes of old 78 rpm gramophone records (in 1950 the theatre barn was equipped with 'a high power turntable reproducer working with three loudspeakers') and mouldy old books and papers, and a few photos. All papers of any interest that could be salvaged are now at the Dorset History Centre. The seating ascended at the back of the space in moveable wooden staging, and behind that was a large mirror, for Hilda to rehearse her solo work. The summer season, with the added attraction of tea on the lawn and a chat with the artistes afterwards, became a fixture for Purbeck society. From the many letters hoarded by Hilda, many seem to have been genuine fans, although in later years there are many (perhaps more) making their excuses and turning down Hilda's offer of tickets.

[19] *Purbeck Arcadia*, p. 125.

[20] Artist William Scott (1918-1989) may have been asked to paint these curtains. Scott studied with Mary at the RA and stayed at Dunshay with the Spencer Watsons several times.

The best eye-witness evocation of these days at Dunshay perhaps comes in local schoolteacher Monk Gibbon's book, *The Pupil*, an otherwise rather odd little work to today's eyes. In it, he describes riding over to Dunshay with his favourite pupil for tea with Hilda and Mary, and also to attend one of their performances. A copy is in the Landmark bookcase.

But their rhythm of life was disturbed in 1934, when George died. Hilda set about organising a memorial exhibition for him at the Fine Arts Society. Early in 1936, she announced her last London performances at 20 Holland Park Road. Then she sold the house, committing herself to Dunshay, where there was to be a summer festival in the third week of every August. Mary was by now becoming more independent as she focussed on her training in her own artistic medium of sculpture. Hilda never seems to have begrudged her this, for all her own rich artistic partnership with Mary.

When World War II came, Hilda and Mary turned Dunshay into a small dairy farm to help the war effort. In October 1944, Hilda was gored by a bull, breaking her thigh, which took some time to heal. At the end of the war, German prisoners of war helped restore the estate to order, clearing Dunshay's ponds again. In 1945, S. L. and A. F. Peters were employed to help out at Dunshay, living in one of the cottages, a young couple, he invalided from the Navy. 'I was in Canada for several years handling horses and working generally on the land', he wrote in his application letter (Hilda's underlining). 'My wife is thoroughly domesticated & able to handle her side of the role.'[21]

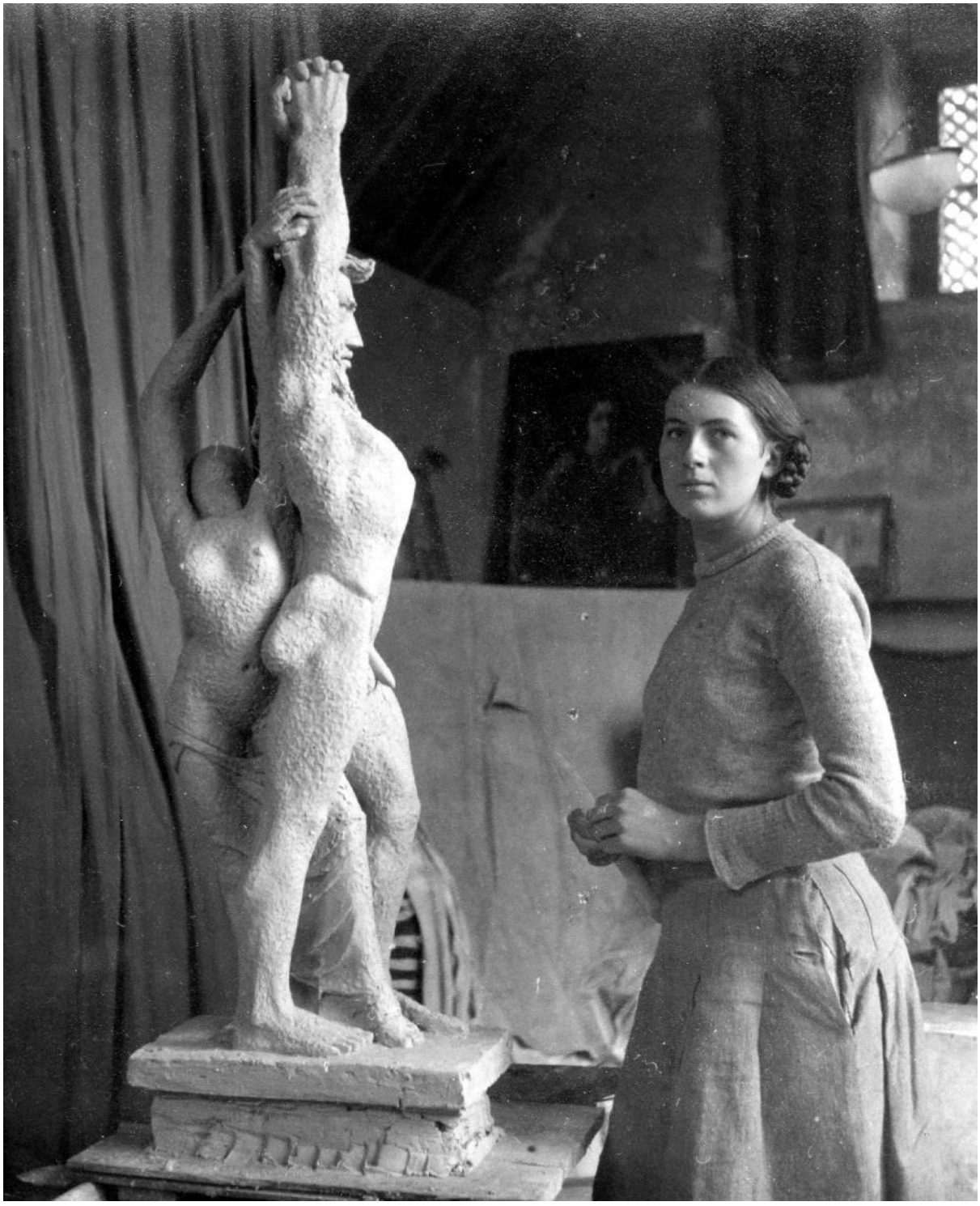
Now 65, Hilda resumed her dancing, continuing to create new works. She collapsed suddenly in the theatre barn in October 1952 and died soon after. Dance is by definition an ephemeral art form, and today her career is hardly known, unlike her husband's and daughter's more concrete output. Now with Dunshay, her spiritual home, in use as a Landmark, her career can perhaps be more fully remembered and appreciated.

[21] DHC, D/RWR/ D. 2566

Monk Gibbon's description of her is a fitting farewell:

> 'Hilda was one of those rare individuals to which one can find absolutely no parallel in all one's acquaintance. Tall, cadaverous, a female Don Quixote without armour, wearing, instead of a helmet, a wide, brightly-coloured Mexican straw hat, and driving occasionally into Swanage in a low dog-cart, drawn by two white mules and with two white spotted Dalmatians running beneath it, their noses almost touching the axle-rod. Face narrow, nose long, chin pronounced, she was nevertheless as handsome a woman as one could see; but in a mode different from everyone else. Voice mannered, incisive yet persuasive; jet black hair divided down the centre and drawn flat over each brow....Hilda was indefatigable, in her daily life and in her devotion to her art, which was mime.'[22]

[22] *The Pupil*, p. 77.



Mary Spencer Watson modelling in the Dairy, *c.* 1934.

Mary Spencer Watson, sculptor

Mary was unprepared for her mother's sudden death, which hit her hard. She was 40 by now, and well-launched on her own career. She had continued to perform with her mother if she was free until at least 1939, but although she also admired and took an interest in her mother's work, she was forging her own path. Mary later told Annette Ratuszniak, curator of her 2004 retrospective exhibition, that she felt a need to create her own life through her sculpture.

She had been working stone since she was 13, when Titus Lander first handed her a chisel in the quarry. When Mary was fifteen, in 1928, George enrolled her at Bournemouth Art School, one day a week for a year, to prepare a folio for application to the Royal Academy schools. Her application was rejected; they felt that she needed more experience, so she went to the Slade School of Art for 1929-30, where she modelled portrait heads and drew from antique casts. In 1930, by now 17, the RA accepted her.

Mary spent the next three years studying the figure, drawing and modelling from life, working mostly on portrait and composition, and living at 20 Holland Park Road. She won some prizes and medals, but there was no carving at the RA. Having completed her three years there, she went on to study under John Skeaping and Alfred Turner at the Central School of Art, where the Arts & Crafts ethos still burned brightly. There she came into contact with, and was influenced by, the current orthodoxies of direct carving and "truth to materials". Jacob Epstein and Eric Gill were other influences. A letter to Hilda from Eric Gill found among the theatre barn papers was very appreciative of one of their London performances in January 1934, even though he had had to leave early to catch his train. 'I was most impressed – and, may I add, by your most lovely daughter also.'

Top: an example of the work of medieval mason Gislebertus in Autun Cathedral, *The Dream of the Magi.*

Below: Ossip Zadkine's Paris studio, where Mary studied for several months. Both were influences upon her, especially the concept of free carving direct from the stone, without creating a prior model, and leaving chisel marks visible in preference to a polished surface.

In 1937, aged 24, Mary had her first solo exhibition at the Mansard Gallery at Heal's in London's Tottenham Court Road. Following this success, she visited Paris with her parents to see the International Exhibition at the Petit Palais and there saw, as she later said, 'all the great artists of the 20th century', including Ossip Zadkine's work.

Strongly drawn to his work, she phoned Zadkine and was accepted to spend 'three wonderful months' early in 1938 working in his studio in Paris, carving an 8ft figure in wood and producing a series of weekly compositions away from the studio. Zadkine's teaching was designed to give his students a greater understanding of mass and form. He also ordered a new set of tools for Spencer Watson, from his own toolmaker. Skeaping liked carvings to have a smooth surface, but Zadkine encouraged her towards rougher surfaces, allowing the chisel marks to be seen. While in Paris she studied medieval carvings at the Musée Cluny and visited Autun and other Romanesque cathedrals, to study the work of Gislebertus and the medieval masons. These months made a deep impression on her, and she returned only because Hilda's health was giving cause for concern, staying at Dunshay through the war years.

The time of reconstruction after the war saw Mary's reputation grow. She received important commissions from some of the best architects involved in postwar reconstruction of public buildings. Sir Frederick Gibberd commissioned *Magic Beast* for a primary school at Longbridge, and *Cheiron Teaching the Young Hero* for Harlow New Town, visiting Dunshay to see its work in progress. Closer to home, in 1952 she created *Eland* for Wyke Regis Primary School. She also held exhibitions, notably at the New Art Centre in London, the Dorset County Museum and the Roche Court Sculpture Park.

After Hilda's death, Mary was kept busy by her commissions, working in the theatre barn and doing up the theatre loft as a flat which she planned to make her home. In May and June 1954, she travelled through Yugoslavia and Greece and its islands with a friend from Corfe, Rachel Lloyd.

Mary working on *Eland,* a commission for Wyke Regis Primary School in the 1950s. Below: other examples of her work in the 1950s: left to right: *Cheiron, Adventure* and *Eland.*

Visiting the actual places where so many of the tales she had performed with her mother since childhood made a deep impression on her, and she often rose in the early hours to experience the site alone.

On her return Mary created *The Musician*, a work in Purbeck freestone exhibited in the 1955 Summer Exhibition at the RA. It was seen by Sir Edward Maufe, architect of Guildford Cathedral, who commissioned her to carve angel corbels for the Children's Chapel there. Later, *The Musician's* owner lent it back to Mary, and it stood in middle of the lawn at Dunshay for many years.

For all her success and busy-ness, Mary now found Dunshay large and empty without Hilda. She perhaps had something of the ambivalence to solitude of an only child: self-sufficient up to a point, but also in need of company. Even if she was often away herself, there could be no question of selling the childhood home she loved, but she had to find a way for it to pay for itself. In July 1953, she started to let the house, keeping the theatre barn flat as her own base. After a couple of short-lived tenancies, in 1955 she advertised in *Horse & Hound.*

A local family replied, Leslie and Margot Baynes and their four young children, Jane, Nigel, Susie and Lizzie. Leslie was an aeronautical engineer with a business based in Poole, a pioneer of the bouncing bomb and hydrofoils. His wife Margot was seventeen years younger than himself. They were looking for a home rather than a holiday let. In 1956, a fifth child was born, Henrietta or Hetty. Mary became increasingly involved with the mother and child. She was made Hetty's godmother and became first the mother's, and then also the daughter's, emotional and financial support. Mary and Margot began a discreet relationship. Lesley Baynes continued to live at the house for a while before moving out to a flat in Swanage. Mary still lived in the flat above the theatre.

In 1964, Lesley and Margot divorced. The following year, Mary bought a house in Richmond and moved in with Hetty and Margot, later moving to Kelso Place in Kensington. Mary helped Margot set herself up as a beautician, a far cry from the fields of Dorset. Mary had stopped working soon after she met Margot, and

tried to persuade Margot to return to Purbeck with her, so that she could resume her own career as a sculptor. In the early 1979s, she divided the house into two halves, north and south, so that they could live there together but separately. At the last minute, Margot changed her mind and stayed in London.

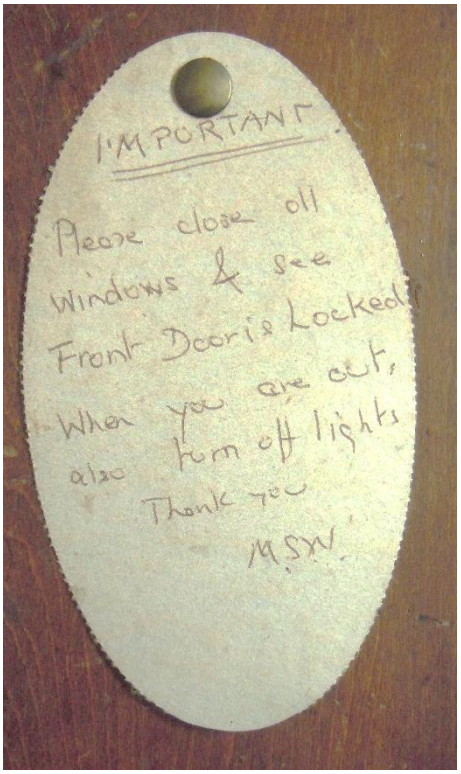
Mary now found herself alone again at Dunshay. The house was now let in two halves; Mary still spent most of her time in London, still seeing Margot and Hetty, but came down fortnightly to her flat. In 1973, the northern half of the house fell empty and she moved back in. Mary was a devotee of the I-Ching in these years, a form of Chinese divination using hexagrams drawn randomly and then interpreted using the book *Tao of Ching*. In a random accident of survival, sheets of paper recording Mary's questions of *Tao* and the interpretations of the results of the hexagrams survived the clearance of the house and were found by Ilay Cooper, who deposited them at the Dorset History Centre. They make poignant reading, and reveal Mary's lonely unhappiness and uncertainty about her relationships with Margot and Hetty, and the tangled family relationships.

In her vulnerable indecision, variations of the same questions are asked time and again: whether to sell Dunshay, whether to sell Kelso Place, how to afford to buy a flat for Hetty, guidance for her relationships with Hetty and Margot, what to carve, how to manage the grazing, how to find the right tenant for Dunshay, 'where to stay next Tues when I take my sculpture to the RA', 'how to organise my life.' The Tao's answers, duly scribbled underneath, were predictably inscrutable.

Mary's friendship with Margot and their mutual dependency dominated her life for two decades, and lasted longer. When Margot succumbed to dementia in her later life, Mary rang her almost every day and paid for her to be cared for at home. Hetty went to ballet school and began her professional career as a dancer, but then moved into acting and a career on stage and film followed. She became film director Ken Russell's third wife in 1991.

During the years she was living with the Baynes, Mary created little sculpture. But as she committed herself again to Dunshay from the mid-1970s, inspiration

began to return. She moved across to the southern, sunnier side of the house, making the front bedroom her own. The north side of the house was let during the holiday season, remaining empty much of the year. She would pin cheerful notes in her careful small handwriting about the idiosyncrasies of the house for her guests, many of which survived her by several years.



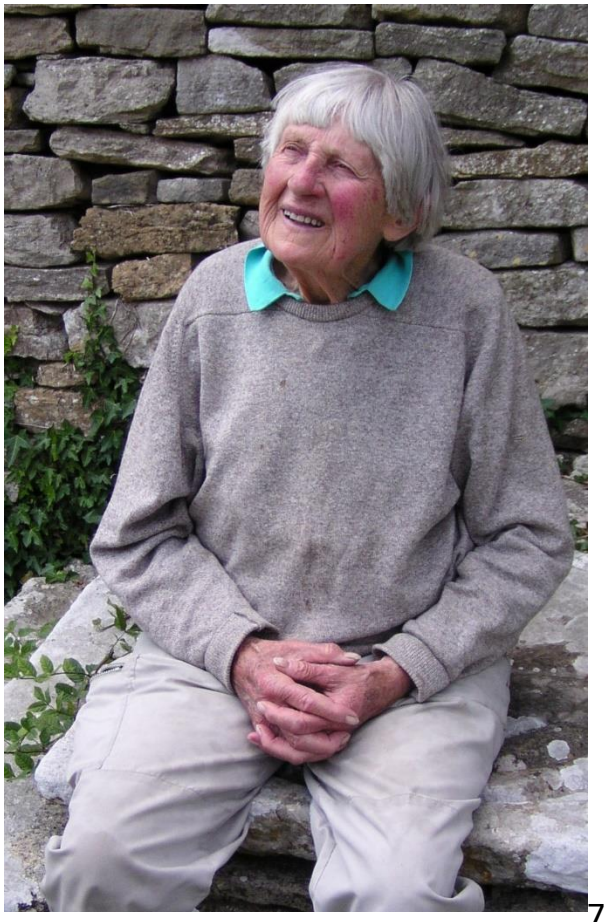
By now in her 60s, Mary also began to produce a surge of work every bit as good that she had done as a younger women. Initially, she broke herself back in with wood, often using trees brought down around the house in storms, elm, ash and yew.

Gradually she returned to the stone she loved, softer cliffstone bed at first but from 1980 turning more and more to the harder Purbeck freestone. In summer, she worked in or outside the cartshed beyond the pond. She would spend a long time looking at a raw block to discern the form it held within. In December 1994, she was thrilled when her *Four Evangelists* were acquired to stand outside Wells Cathedral, the biggest sale of her life. In 1997, she was admitted as Honorary Freeman in the Ancient Order of Purbeck Marblers and Stone Cutters, only the second woman to be accorded that honour (the other was sculptor Elizabeth Muntz).

Mary also found a solution to her former loneliness by letting her estate accommodation – the cottages, theatre barn flat, the odd caravan quietly in the fields - to congenial and sympathetic tenants, to whom she charged low rents in return for their help in keeping Dunshay ticking over as she grew older: mowing the lawns, mechanical mending, a bit of housework, errands, helping Mary get her blocks of stone into place. Many hailed originally from Purbeck, even if they had been elsewhere in the interim, a shifting cast over 20 years or so, who also became part of Dunshay's history: Dion Byngham, Emma Harvey-James and

their daughter Julia; Bunny & Doreen Farr; Bunny's sister Judy and her husband Steve Robson; Peter & Francis White; Alan & Mary Davis, and Ilay Cooper, Mary's unbiased confidante throughout and eventual chronicler of Dunshay in *Purbeck Arcadia* (2014). A tradition developed of everyone on the estate gathering to catch up over coffee on a Saturday morning in the kitchen at Dunshay.

***Water*, 1998, Purbeck Stone**



Mary in 2004. Above, she is holding a copy of the catalogue raisonné for her major retrospective exhibition in Salisbury Cathedral and Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum.

The square slab on top of the mounting block, with its concentric rings, is thought to be an old cheese press (which could therefore relate to the Cheese Room).

Photographers Andrew Whittuck's and Jed Corbett's contribution was to photograph her work. Mary gave portraitist Toby Wiggins use of her father's old studio where he painted her portrait in 2004, the year a major retrospective exhibition was held in Salisbury Cathedral, a fitting closing of a circle of the Dunshay association with the place that began with Alice de Briwere's gift of marble in the 13th century.

Mary was also still surrounded by the animals she had loved all her life: dogs, a horse she rode into her eighties, goats - until she gave them up to start sheep breeding in her seventies, only giving up on lambing when she was 88. She was a remarkable and much-loved figure with zest for life to the very end, and her tenants all had a sense of being part of something special at Dunshay.

Mary with her sheep in 1996, photographed by Jed Corbett.

Meanwhile, Mary was giving increasing thought to the fate of Dunshay after her death. In 2002, she wrote to Landmark to explore the possibility of bequeathing house and estate to us. Martin Drury, then Chair of Landmark's trustees, visited Dunshay, after which we were delighted to accept Mary's offer, with our usual proviso that it would be contingent upon the views of future Trustees as to whether the manor house would actually become a Landmark – although listed Grade II*, Mary's latter ad hoc changes to make it a house of several units had made the upstairs especially more than a little chaotic. She also accepted that, as the bequest would come with no endowment, Landmark could not be expected to guarantee the security of her tenants as she had at first wished. A codicil was signed in 2002 giving the estate to Landmark and establishing Mary's 'wish that the Dunshay Manor Estate be preserved in the manner and habit of the Landmark Trust.' She did not, however, revisit the terms of the main will she had first written in 1974, when her life had been very different.

In 2003, when we were fundraising for the rescue of Clavell Tower, Mary came with Ilay to a supporter lunch at Encombe House, then owned by Charles McVeigh, a Landmark Trustee. It was a pleasure for all of us there to meet her, by then a gentle, genial old lady whose personality still shone powerfully through.

Mary died in March 2006, aged 92. For most of that long life she was the presiding spirit at Dunshay, expressing the ancient house and its setting through her art. In early January 1936, a grateful friend from Corfe wrote to Hilda to thank the family for a New Year's party, perhaps referring to a parlour game they had all played. 'Having left the darkness and rush of wind and rain; having entered into the atmosphere of the Spirits of the House – I asked myself the riddle "why is Dunshay like the Daughter of the King?" & answered "Because she is all glorious inside"'.

Mary Spencer Watson in 1987.

COUNTRY LIVING

June 1987

CARVING OUT A LIFE

WITH A PASSION FOR STONE, AND A FAMILY OF ANIMALS, MARY SPENCER WATSON IS A DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL. BY MIRANDA INNES

Down a scarred and pitted track, winding through an archway of interlacing trees, lies Dunshay Manor. A dignified grey stone house on the Isle of Purbeck, it was still being built when Cromwell's soldiers cannonaded the last lingering Royalists at nearby Corfe Castle. The sound of the onslaught, which left the castle in ruins, must have ricocheted along the valley to Dunshay.

The site's history stretches back to the 12th century, when its owner Alice Brwere donated some of the Purbeck marble that lay under the grounds for the construction of Salisbury Cathedral, which was then nearing completion. Her reverence for the underlying stone is shared by the present owner, Mary Spencer Watson.

This indomitable lady looks 50, has the strength and vigour of a 30-year-old, and is in fact over 70. She first met Dunshay Maror in 1921, when her parents bought it as a summer retreat from London. Mary's father was George Spencer Watson RA, a painter whose serene portraiture and singing colours are much in evidence in her home. Mary's mother was a charismatic figure – a choreographer who created the first Studio Theatre, which was later called the Hilda Spencer Watson Dance Mime Theatre.

Mary was a member of her troupe: "I had a grand time – we did the Greek myths. But I was sad because it was *her* thing, and I couldn't create in that field." So her creative urge was forced to find another outlet.

She is a sculptor with a strong affection for the idiosyncratic local Purbeck stone. Her weather-beaten features tell of summers spent out of doors, working in an open shed all the hours of daylight, painstakingly recreating the transformation which first fired her passion – rough-hewn stone to finished carving.

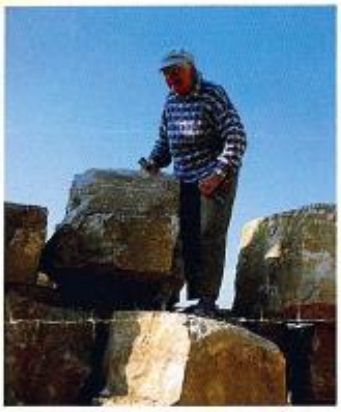
It was when the stonemasons put together Dunshay's outbuildings in the summer of 1926 that her future career was hinted at. "I used to go and talk with the quarrymen. They had no machines, every huge block was lifted and moved by simple means and traditional skills. That whole set-up completely fascinated me. It was the *life* . . . getting out the stone, working in all those little quarry huts, chipping away with hammer and tools, nothing else, until you made something." She was nine then. Later John Skeaping at the Central School of Arts and Crafts set her on the hard and ruminative road of direct carving. There she found herself among a bunch of iconoclasts who disdained the old way of the Victorians, in which a master-sculptor would make a clay model and it would subsequently be reproduced in stone by a craftsman.

"Victorian sculpture was the Greek dished up, until it just wore itself out," she says. "I came along with a revolution – Hepworth, Moc Brancusi." Mary's contemporaries prefer to carve direct, respecting the natural prop ties of the stone or wood – Henry Moore a Barbara Hepworth were inspired by the v in which natural forces carved stone. Th approach appealed strongly to Mary, who a child must have traced the legacy the winter rain on the eroded stonewo of her home.

In 1937, even though she spoke little Fren she went for a lonely but seminal sojourn Paris, where she felt the bracing influence the Cubists – Picasso, Braque, Lipchitz – her tutor Ossip Zadkine. Unfortunately t success of her first show (where Mrs Edwa Maufe, the head of the interior decorati department at Heal's, bought the *Head Moses*, her first piece) was followed by the o break of war. Mary was exiled in deep Dorset to help her mother on their 50 acres arable and dairy farmland for the war effo "That's what the war did, it revealed a m instinct for self-preservation."

This continued until Mary's mother – who hooded eyes with their distant Virginia Wo expression did not miss a thing – made t acerbic comment that Mary was becoming i possible to live with, and ought to get a job. must have been getting very frustrated would have liked to carve something."

She found a job as resident sculptor at t nearby Clayesmore school; a perfect oppo tunity to do her own work yet still keep touch with her mother. "I had a motorbik she says, "but I had to be very careful –



you had no headlights during the blackout. Went to see a friend at Bryanston. Nasty wet night. Took a wrong turn and found myself up to my waist in the River Stour."

After the war, Mary devoted all her energies to her profession and started to work for architects. Sir Frederick Gibberd commissioned her to do "a big ton and a half" at Harlow, a study of Cheiron teaching a young Hero. "My mother had just died, so it was nice to get away," she says. "Took me out and around, got me going again." Then Edward Maufe commissioned her to carve two limewood figures for Guildford Cathedral. And other architects gave her work in Cambridge, Belfast and London. She also carved mythical animals for various schools, but it was hard work. "They were big things, and it was very cold and uncomfortable on-site."

She now produces more manageable figures for people who want to embellish their gardens with a brooding eagle or ruminative donkey. "I don't do the style that they want, I'm afraid I'm always me. I don't like doing art in an attic – I like it to be a means of communication."

Her work is solid, confident and stylised in an elegant way. She works with stone in the summer, but in winter retreats indoors to carve wood. She says that sculpting is a compulsion. "It doesn't take as long as you think – you soon knock it out." A frolicsome seal with a curly smile richly embodies her nostalgic style. It had its beginnings in a trip to the zoo with her father, where she was allowed into the enclosure to feed the seals. Her father carried her home on his shoulders – "I must have been very young" – after which she amused herself by impersonating a seal in her bath. Later she returned with John Skeaping, who used to take his students to the zoo for classes. Finally a young seal came to disport itself in the bay for a whole summer. Mary recalls how a child with Down's syndrome used to play with it and "lost all his backwardness" when he and the seal were together in the water.

Animals are Mary's affectionate, bossy and inquisitive family. The dogs were formally introduced as Robbie: small, elderly and deaf – "he's a sweet little person" – and Bryn who is large, mournful and black. The nice, solid black cat is called Robert (so as not to confuse the dog). "Robert brings things home – birds and rabbits – he wants to look after his family." A pair of white Saanen goats, a milking nan and her kid, provide the milk. "Kids in t spring – blossom, daffodils – it's a wonder thing to have." And she keeps a donkey to ta to her horse.

Like her mother, Mary is an enthusiastic hors woman. "My mother had an American bug with four large wheels and a tiny chair, whi was drawn by her little Arab. She would ta it shopping round London; it was her ca Mary rides often. "This is the most perfe riding country. I go down to Poole Harbo about three times a week – there's wild heat deer, and birds." Within riding distance the is the chalk ridge, limestone, clay, and Pu beck stone, with all their different visag There are also the Bagshott Beds, Co Castle, and three miles of sandy beach. Shag black cattle innocently pick at the grass, the are pine trees, exultant yellow gorse, creel rivulets as well as the stately little gr Purbeck stone villages.

Since her first acquaintance with this part the world, Mary Spencer Watson has had strong sympathy with natural forms a materials. Her work is arduous, uncomfor able and lonely, but it grows out of the thin and places which she loves, and it gives h profound satisfaction. She has never ma ried, and remains the perfect model of contented loner.

Epilogue

As Dunshay opens as a Landmark, thirteen years have passed since Mary's death. There has been a long spell of limbo for the fate of the house. Mary left residue of her estate and the contents of the house to Margot Baynes.

However, Margot's daughter Hetty Baynes believed that Dunshay itself should have been left to her as Mary's god-daughter rather than Landmark, because of the ongoing financial support she had received from Mary over the years. Encouraged by no win-no fee lawyers, she contested the bequest to Landmark in the High Court. Landmark was placed in a very difficult position: the codicil unequivocally left Dunshay to us, and so we felt we had no choice but to do all we could to uphold Mary's wishes as declared to us, even though we knew it would be at considerable expense, and was at a time when the 2008 financial crash was starting to bite. The judge found in Landmark's favour but there was then further delay when Hetty launched an appeal with a second set of lawyers. Finally, in March 2009, three years after Mary's death, the terms of the will were upheld. In 2010, Nigel Baynes oversaw the clearance of the house contents, most of which were auctioned soon after, including all the art works.

Landmark was left to consider our next move. Dunshay was badly in need of a new roof and a thorough overhaul, but fundraising would be a problem: Clavell Tower's restoration had been completed a few years earlier, but we were now heavily committed with Belmont along the coast in Lyme Regis, having had our application for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant turned down. Fundraising for a third consecutive project in the area would have been very difficult, especially for a house not visibly at great risk. These were also years when Landmark, like everyone else, had to tighten its belt.

In 2014 we re-roofed the house and cider barn and repaired the piggeries, which were in danger of collapsing altogether, but there was still much more to be done.

With reluctance, it was decided to let the house on a 20 year repairing lease, guaranteeing tenure at low rent provided the tenant carried out the necessary

internal repairs and refurbishment. A suitable tenant was found, by whom a fair amount of work was carried out on the landscape and Theatre Barn flat especially, but then, in 2017, the tenant handed back the lease.

By now, Landmark's overall occupancy had picked up again. Very unusually, and only through an accumulation of small annual surpluses and unrestricted legacies, we have finally been able to fund Dunshay's restoration as a Landmark entirely from our own funds. There has never been any doubt that this lovely house would make a wonderful place to stay for a holiday, but still more important, we have been able to fulfil Mary's wishes that her Dunshay be kept alive 'in the manner and habit of the Landmark Trust', as she put it in the codicil to her will. We shall do all we can to keep the wider Spencer Watson legacy alive as we raise Dunshay's profile in the wider world and hope that we will also be able, through occasional exhibitions of local artists and open days, to keep its artistic spirit alive while also guaranteeing its long term upkeep by enabling as many people as possible to enjoy it for a holiday.

Dunshay around 2009

The house as it was a few years after Mary's death, already partially cleared. Her former tenants initially kept the grounds maintained.

Top: a visit by Landmark's Trustees in 2010.

Below: in Mary's day, examples of her work were displayed on the lawns.

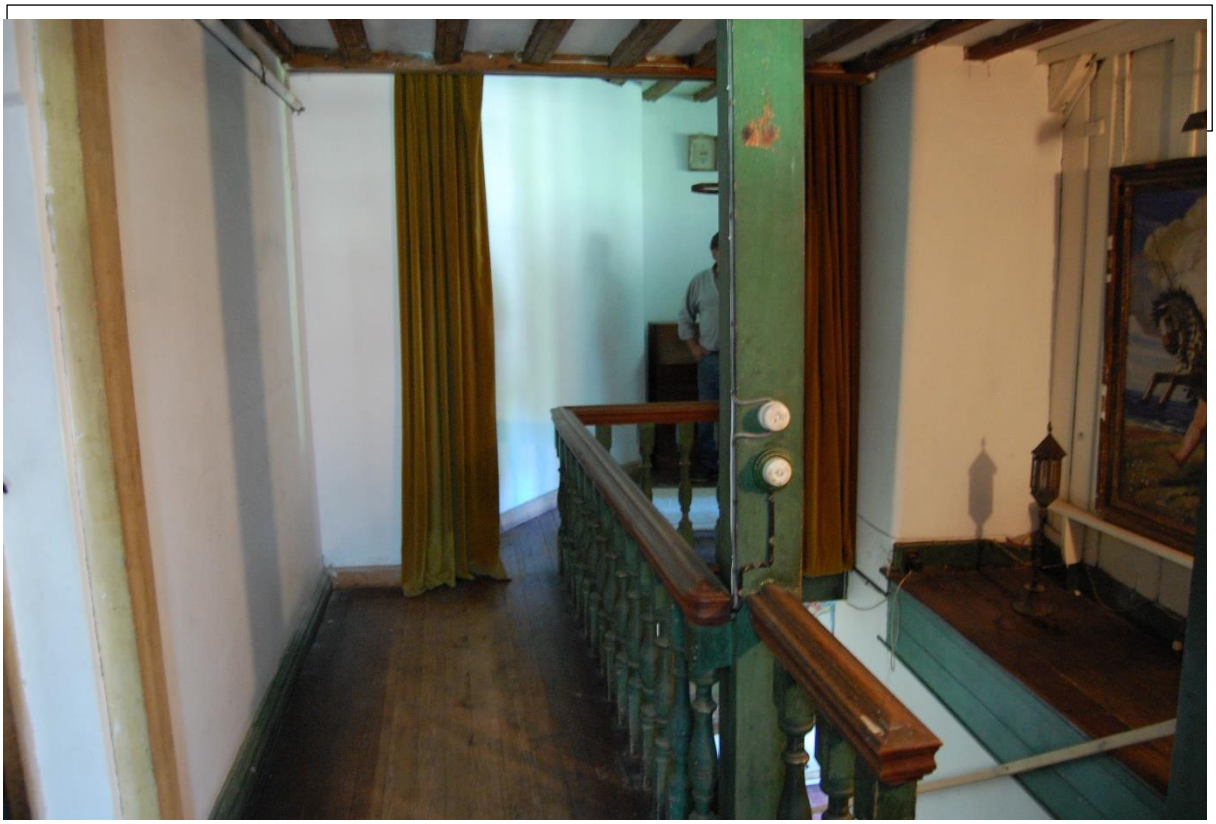
The entrance hall. Landmark has reinstated a door into the dining room, here on the right hand side. Note too *Four Loves I Found*, on the wall. At the far end is a painting of Mary as a young girl with their dog (below).

The sitting room with panelled parlour beyond (the panelling is not in its original position). Mary and Hilda sometimes used the parlour as a stage for drawing room shows.

The north range (today's dining room) piled high with Mary's many books during the house clearance. Though she received little formal education, Mary was well read. Some of her books are in the Landmark bookcase. The triptych above is thought to be by an artist called John Armstrong, used to be above the fireplace but was sold by the Baynes family with the rest of the house contents.

The Cheese Room floor had been removed to create double height kitchen. The leaded window looking into it lit one of the corridors Mary inserted when she subdivided the house. Landmark has reinstated the Cheese Room as a bedroom, to its original dimensions.

The staircase and landing partitions were somewhat clumsy and did not make best use of the space. These have now been realigned. The plank and muntin panelling above was not in its original position but may be a remnant from the earlier house. It has now been moved to the south bedroom.



Examples of the crude late 20th-century adaptations: as hoc partitions, corridors and washbasins.

The thatch on the Theatre Barn had long given way to a corrugated roof (top). The flat above the theatre created by Mary was lived in by the Robsons in 2006 (and, refurbished, is still tenanted today). The 18th or early 19th-century piggeries were close to collapse.

Restoration of Dunshay Manor by Landmark

Owing to its particular circumstances, Landmark's restoration of Dunshay Manor has happened in several phases. We held long discussions in 2010-11 about the best way to unpick Mary's haphazard insertions to recover a sense of the original spaces and create somewhere pleasant to stay, and architect Andrew Thorne was brought in at that early stage to help with this. We soon discovered that this was a particularly serendipitous choice of architect, as Andrew had stayed at Dunshay when part of it was being let for holidays:

> 'In 2000, Anne and I stayed at Dunshay Manor with close friends, who had stayed at the manor house many times before, and knew Mary well. Staying in the 'holiday' half of the house was quite a bohemian experience, perhaps not entirely up to Landmark standards, but it was fascinating to meet Mary and se her side of the house, with both parts heavily populated by her father's paintings, and numerous little notes with instructions about what to do, and what not to do, regarding drains, lights, doors etc. There were a number of her sculptures around in the gardens, and she was still working [aged 86] in the Studio. We had a conversation about the problems of working there in the winter months, and a brief exchange of correspondence about appropriate heaters!'

In 2013 it was reluctantly decided that Landmark needed to focus on other priorities: in 2014/15, we overhauled some of the roofs and repaired the piggeries before a hiatus while a long repairing lease option was in train. The potential lessor modernised the flat in the theatre barn and cleared most of the later partitions in the house, returning it to its early 20th-century floorplan..

When in 2018 we returned to our wish that Dunshay should be a Landmark let, our brief to Andrew Thorne was to create a Landmark for up eight people in a relatively light touch way; the house has evolved over centuries, including the 1906 intervention by Philip Sturdy, so it would have been quite inappropriate to do more. Even so, there was much remedial work to be done.

Externally, the main Purbeck stone-tiled roof slopes on the north and south ranges were found to need completely stripping as the wooden peg fixings had generally failed.

Re-roofing underway.

Many tiles were held in place only by extensive and inappropriate cement pointing or wire. The stone tiles were carefully relaid in their dimishing course, any new, riven replacements being supplied by Haysom's Quarry, a few hundred metres up the hill, where Mary had observed the work as a girl. The tiles were refixed with copper pegs and include bat-friendly access details in accordance with the bat license from Natural England.

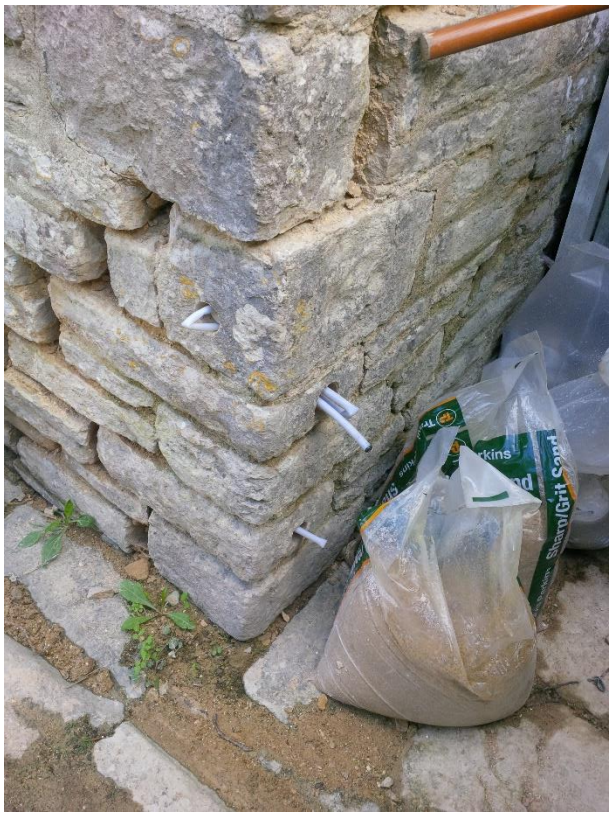
The central flat roof above the porch was completely stripped and relaid. In places, resin ties were used to stitch together cracks that had opened up in the masonry but cement pointing has not been replaced as it appears sound.

The whole house needed rewiring and replumbing; new central heating, and new kitchen and bathrooms. Laying new services required lifting almost all the stone flags around the house, which were carefully relaid.

Internally, many areas were in a very dilapidated state, with infestations of dry rot and death watch beetle. The layout of the main rooms made the disposition of the Landmark fairly obvious, but careful planning was needed to fit in an easy access bedroom and bathroom on the ground floor, optimise the first floor landing and general circulation, and decide where to put the additional bathrooms. To avoid dangerous changes of floor levels and introduce more light, a corridor behind the kitchen was removed. A doorway was inserted off the entrance hall into the north wing, but there was nothing we could to do to improve Sturdy's clumsy alignment of the hallway wall across the window.

One of the first decisions taken was to reinstate the original layout of the old kitchen area and Cheese Room space in the 16th-century part of the south range. This meant reversing the double height space the Spencer Watsons had created by removing the Cheese Room floor. The first floor ceiling above this was also in a state of near collapse and therefore needed replacement.

Elsewhere, the interior had been quite heavily altered by Philip Sturdy in the early 1900s. Sturdy incorporated several unsightly steel beams, both in his reconstruction of the north range and in the 1640s extension of the south range, where the south elevation had moved alarmingly outwards.



There were some major cracks to repair, especially where the south elevation was bowing. Resin ties (top right) were inserted to increase stability.

Bottom right: the Cheese Room floor being reinstated. This time the central beam steel tie is masked with a timber facing.

It is not clear when the three massive external butresses were added along the south range: Sturdy's drawing shows two. All three were probably built/rebuilt in 1906. The steel beams were perhaps dictated by budget constraints on Sturdy. We decided to replace the most inappropriate ones with less visually intrusive support – removing, for example, the steel beams obstructed the window heads in the sitting room and parlour. Steel work also impinged dangerously on headroom in the stairwell, and so the this beam was cut back, the stairwell enlarged and the landing balustrade extended and repositioned.

Various other structural repairs were also needed where timber beam ends ahd decayed or were undersized. A full length T steel flitch beam was inserted in the Cheese Room floor, along with new oak floor boards.

The plank and muntin panelling in the south bedroom has been slightly realigned and a new door was was inserted from the landing, rather than directly at the head of the stairs as previously.

Throughout, repairs have been carried out in breathable material, both traditional and modern. Sturdy had installed concrete floors in the main ground floor rooms of the house, replacing timber floors that were rotting because of ground moisture in this sheltered north facing valley. Sturdy had proposed that these floors be finished with wood blocks set in bitumen, but this was not done at the time (perhaps another cost saving measure). The bare concrete provided an unforgiving surface that had cracked and deflected in places, and so it was decided to reinstate a timber floor on the ground floor. This new oak flooring is fixed onto battens above a lime-based screed, itself above foam glass insulation. On upstairs floors, simple wooden floor boards have been enhanced with cork panels laid between joists, under drawn with wood wool boards and lime finishes, enhancing both fire separation and sound installation. Where new wall partitions were inserted, these are wood wool board with lime plaster finishes avoiding any use of plasterboard.

A new oak fitted kitchen in the Arts & Crafts idiom was designed, made and fitted by Mark Smitten, Landmark's joiner.

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Floor slab construction underway in the sitting room. Lime-based screed is laid on wood wool board; oak floorboards fixed on battens were then laid on top.

Extension of the landing balustrade, the new posts turned by Landmark's joiner.

Careful repointing in lime mortar.

New first floor partition reinstated on its former line.

Toby Wiggins' portrait of Mary Spencer Watson near the end of her life, painted in the Studio. She knew and loved Dunshay for almost all of her 92 years.

Photo credit: Ilay Cooper

The Studio in the former dairy has also been comprehensively repaired and is now a table tennis room with a display of large-scale photos of Mary's sculptures. The Cider House has been gently stabilised as an evocative agricultural space with all its fittings. Little has been done to the Theatre Barn. For now, it is kept locked except for public open days or by special arrangement.

Considerable tree clearance has been done, mostly removing self-seeded sycamores and re-opening the views to Corfe Castle. The dry stone walls around the site have been repaired, some, most appropriately, by a Pike of today's generation, Tom, whose father Martin, as we open in 2019, still farms from Downshay Farm next door.

The pictures at Dunshay

Sadly, none of the contents at Dunshay are original as these were dispersed by the Baynes family via their bequest to Margot..

Landmark has been able to acquire some of George Spencer Watson's drawings, some of them perhaps studies for better-known paintings. These hang throughout the house. They include studies of both Mary and Hilda.

The painting of Hilda in a red dress leading her horse that hangs in the sitting room is a reproduction of the original by kind permission of its owner.

The landscape of Corfe Castle in the dining room is a reproduction, much reduced in size, of the original by Algernon Newton, RA (1880-1968), also in private hands. As fellow Academicians in the early 1920s, it is very possible that Newton and Spencer Watson knew each other.

None of the other pictures in the house has a direct Spencer Watson provenance but we hope they evoke the themes of their lives here.