

## 1888 - Thomas Hardy's Binegar Fair

Let's go to our renowned Binegar Fair again but this time its place in classic literature. I must thank Andrew Salvidge for this gem.

It was no less an author than Thomas Hardy – he of *Far from the Madding Crowd* – who included our Fair in two of his Wessex works.

He knew Binegar as a four-day fair at Whitsun with “an immense supply of horses”, as reported in the *Dorset County Chronicle*.

*A Tragedy of Two Ambitions* is the story of two brothers, Joshua and Cornelius Halborough. Their mother scrimped and saved enough to fund a university education for her sons to ease their way into church careers but she died young. Their father was a millwright whose business declined as he took to the drink and spent every penny of the legacy his wife had left for the sons.

It was not, then, via university that the brothers made their way into careers in the Church. It was by relentless ambition and application in the face of hardships and handicaps, chiefly their father.



Selinar – the gypsy wife as illustrated by George Lambert

He was an embarrassment to the ambitious brothers. Once, he appeared at Joshua's theological college with “a buxom woman with great earrings”, his “strapping gypsy wife – if she were his wife”. He was after a meal from the mortified Joshua: “Why, we've called to ask ye to come round to take potluck with us at the Cock-and-Bottle, where we've put up for the day, on our way to see mis'ess's friends at Binegar Fair where they'll be lying under canvas for a night or two. As for the victuals at the Cock I can't testify to 'em at all; but for the drink, they've the rarest drop of Old Tom that I've tasted for many a year.”

Despite their best endeavours, the brothers could not get their father out of their lives. He was always there to threaten their ambitions. The end of the story is too exquisitely delicious and painful to give away. It is an (online) good read and a moral tale.

Our Fair is also in the 1873 edition of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Omitted from later editions, I can tell you nothing about it. Can you find it?

Typical, I suppose, that Hardy should associate Binegar Fair with the father!