



Small is beautiful

All of HPB's sites are in glorious locations – but there are few that have such a diverse range of attractions so close at hand. Langton House, your Dorset home, is one such. Seven years in and not once having ventured south-west on Bond business, editor **Jonathan Broom** reckoned it was high time he pay the place a visit.



Why had nobody told me? This place is just beautiful! Thus I mused as I headed ever further south. As motorway became dual carriageway became (roundabout-studded) A-road became windy B-road, the beauty just kept on coming, culminating in the soft undulations of the Purbeck Hills, in the middle of which sits Langton House.

Langton House's location is perfectly positioned, set within stunning landscapes and an ideal base to explore the Isle of Purbeck, which is, quite simply, jaw-droppingly lovely.

Arriving at teatime, I checked in, freshened up and took myself off to the Scott Arms, a 10-minute drive from Langton House, recommended by site manager Karen Travers. "The food's great," she said, "but the view from the garden is so spectacular you won't care what you're eating anyway." Karen was right: the food was fine; but the views out over the Purbecks, with the ruins of Corfe Castle centre stage, were beyond fine.

The following morning, before leaving to explore further afield, I took Karen's advice once again and did the short walk to Dancing Ledge and back. "Everybody does it," she said. "Especially first-timers. You can be there and back in under an hour, and it's a spectacular first view of the sea." Off I set, expecting to encounter hordes of Bondholders en route.

And received my first surprise. Given the weight of traffic on the way down, I had expected Dorset to be crowded – and maybe it is, in some parts; but not there, it wasn't. On I strolled, under soft summer skies, in warm sunshine, wild-flower meadows to either side of me, a few cows, the odd sheep or two – and I didn't encounter another soul, Bondholder or otherwise. It was a wonderfully peaceful experience. Dancing Ledge itself was sort-of inaccessible; there's a final fence, and a stile, but beyond it a herd of cattle had made the cliff-edge very much their own. Cows are benign creatures – except when they're not; and given the proximity of a sheer drop onto the rocks below I just didn't fancy it.

Time to strike out, and discover more of what the Isle of Purbeck is all about...

A chunk of Dorset limestone jutting into the English Channel, Purbeck is not a real island; but it feels like

one – especially, I'm told, when arriving on the chain ferry that chugs across Poole Harbour to Studland Bay. First impressions are of Studland's long strip of white powdery sand: a dream beach for castaways.

Studland is also home to the Pig on the Beach, a new(ish) boutique hotel and "destination" restaurant whose gardens offer unrivalled, spectacular views of Studland Bay and Old Harry Rocks. While I didn't eat there – the photographer had suggested it as a meeting point – on a future visit I'd love to; all the food is local, fresh as fresh, their kitchen garden is fantastically well stocked, and that view is to die for. It's not cheap, but for a celebratory meal out you could go a lot further and fare a lot worse.

Talking of going a lot further... in Dorset – the bit

I was in, anyway – that's one thing you don't have to do. The beaches, the quaint little villages, lovely Corfe Castle, the rolling Purbeck meadows, the vibrant coastal town of Swanage – all are no more than 10 minutes apart, and no more than 10 minutes' drive from Langton.

To Swanage presently, but first I wanted to take a look at Fort Henry, an easy five-minute walk from the Pig on the Beach.

Built by Canadian Engineers in 1943, Fort Henry was the largest and strongest Observation Post to be built in Britain. Churchill and his chiefs of staff used the heavily fortified bunker as a base from which to conduct Exercise Smash, a rehearsal using live ammunition in preparation for the D-Day Landings. It took place

on Studland Beach because the sands of Studland and nearby Shell Bay closely resembled those in France, where the real action would happen. Visiting in 2016 and looking out at that same view, on what was not the brightest of days, it wasn't hard to "see" the beach swarming with soldiers and packed with heavy ordnance, nor to "hear" the cacophony of exploding heavy munitions. A sobering experience.

In terms of target practice, Churchill found other parts of Dorset much to his liking too. The nearby village of Tyneham, plus 7,500 acres of surrounding heathland and chalk downland around the Purbeck Hills, were requisitioned just before Christmas 1943 by the War Office for use as firing ranges for training troops. 225 people were displaced, the last person leaving a notice on the church door:





“Please treat the church and houses with care; we have given up our homes where many of us lived for generations to help win the war to keep men free. We shall return one day and thank you for treating the village kindly.”

This measure was supposed to be temporary for the duration of World War II, but in 1948 the Army placed a compulsory purchase order on the land and it has remained in use for military training ever since. Though littered with scrap used as targets, and subject to regular shelling, the land has become a haven for wildlife as it has been free from farming and development. In 1975, after complaints from tourists and locals, the Ministry of Defence began opening the village and footpaths across the ranges at weekends and throughout August. A visit to Tyneham is both fascinating, and a little spooky: a true “ghost” village, in every sense.

Heading south from Studland, across the wild heaths of Ballard Down, narrow roads meander down to a spectacular stretch of the Jurassic Coast (a World Heritage site), running from Studland’s Shell Bay to Lulworth Cove. There is one walled, market town (Wareham) and one old-fashioned beach resort with a pier: Swanage.

An attractive seaside town, Swanage is built along a sheltered, gently sloping beach of fine white sand, with the Purbeck Hills rising up behind. You could argue that the place has seen better days – certainly a lick of paint here and there wouldn’t go amiss – but that all depends on your taste in seaside towns, I guess. Me, I like a bit of faded grandeur. And it’s got

everything you’d expect: decent shops, amusements and entertainments (the Mowlem Theatre is apparently very good), and some fine eateries. I was particularly taken by Gee Whites, an al fresco seafood restaurant overlooking Swanage Bay. Very atmospheric, and the food couldn’t be fresher; owner Mick is up every morning at 5am to get the best crabs, whelks and cockles.

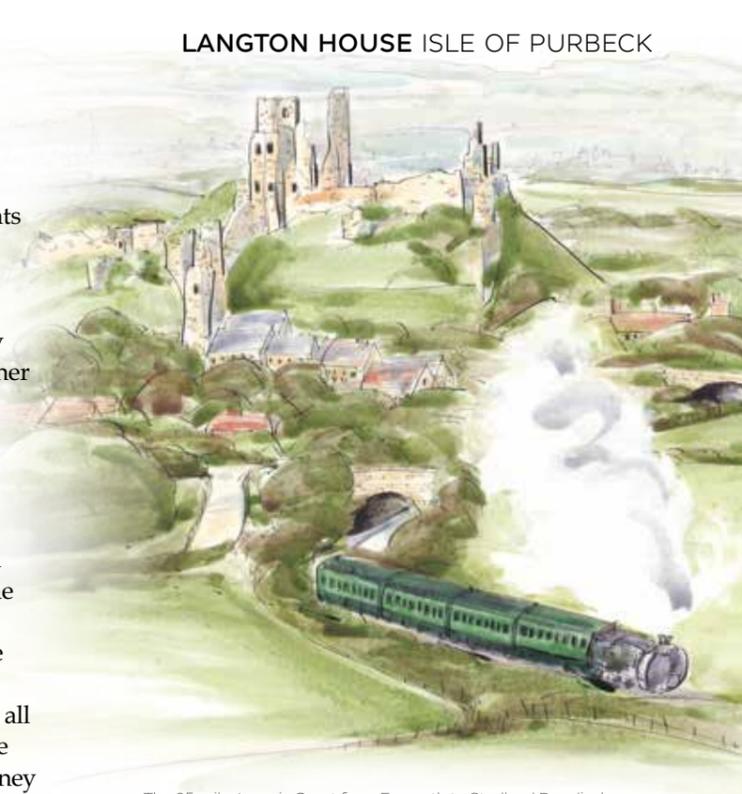
In the countryside, the gentle landscapes of the Purbeck Hills are the essence of Thomas Hardy (think *Far From the Madding Crowd*), all ancient tracks, sheep and chocolate-box villages of thatch and Purbeck stone. And in the heart of the isle, the ruins of William the Conqueror’s magical Corfe Castle sit on a pudding-basin hill overlooking the village that shares its name.

And the best way of getting there, while enjoying all that lovely countryside, must surely be the Swanage Railway. Whatever the weather, you can take a journey back in time; sit back and relax during a leisurely trip behind an historic steam locomotive. The six-mile trip shows off the best of Dorset; and at the end of it you can spend time exploring one of Britain’s prettiest villages, and admiring the magnificent ruins of an iconic Norman fortress. If you’re feeling up to it, the walk back to Swanage is not too arduous, and is very rewarding (see next page). And if you’re not – well, there’s always the train back!

As you travel on the train, you’ll be struck not just by the beauty of this place, but its geology too. And to see that geology at its most awe-inspiring, take the short walk out to Old Harry Rocks.

Three chalk formations including a stack and a stump located at Handfast Point, midway between Studland and Swanage, Old Harry Rocks are all that remains of what was once a long stretch of chalk between Purbeck and the Isle of Wight. While I imagine Old Harry can be more than a bit forbidding in bad weather, in a benign mood, with a gentle zephyr blowing, the wild cliff-top flowers in bloom and the sun gleaming off the white chalk of the rocks and Handfast Point itself, it’s the sort of place that makes you feel good to be alive.

Like Dorset itself, really. 

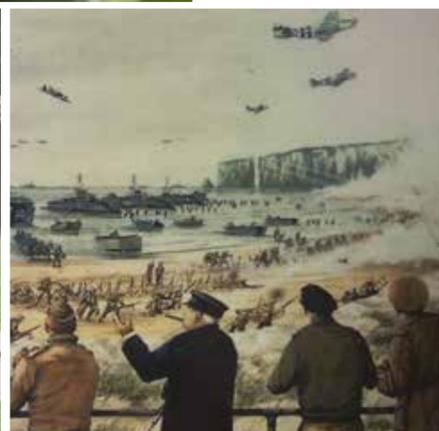


The 95-mile Jurassic Coast from Exmouth to Studland Bay displays a near unbroken run of triassic, jurassic and cretaceous rock features, together with outstanding geological phenomena such as a barrier beach and lagoon, cliffs and raised fossil beaches. With this amount of history embedded in the cliffs, the coast is a treasure trove for fossil hunters.

Jonathan, pictured below, jumps on a steam train at Swanage – a boyhood dream. Destination: Corfe Castle.



Jonathan, pictured above at the amazing vegetable and herb gardens at the Pig on the Beach, and right at the fortified bunker which Churchill used.



“Churchill used the heavily fortified bunker as a base from which to conduct Exercise Smash, a rehearsal using live ammunition in preparation for the D-Day Landings”



YOUR PROPERTIES Langton House

The main house has been converted into 25 one, two and three-bed apartments, and there are two two-bed cottages adjoining the Clubhouse building, one two-bed apartment above the clubhouse and one detached two-bed cottage nearby. There are 11 pet friendly, one mobility friendly and two wheelchair friendly properties. Facilities include an indoor swimming pool, a sauna, tennis court, children’s play area, croquet lawn, clubhouse and more. Landscaping works around the reception area and tree management works have recently been completed. Additional car-parking spaces have also been created.



The Blyton connection

The Dorset landscape has inspired many literary figures, from Hardy and John Fowles to Minette Walters, but arguably none is more cherished in the hearts of children, parents and grandparents alike than Enid Blyton.

The writer, born in 1897, visited Dorset three times a year for more than 20 years, and the coast, Poole Harbour, its islands and heathland have provided inspiration for many of her books, especially the Famous Five series.

One of the best ways to experience Blyton's Dorset is a walk along the Purbeck Way from Corfe Castle to Swanage, where she wrote many of her stories. The footpath to the top of the ridge is steep, but the views of Poole Harbour, Bournemouth and the English Channel are spectacular.

The ruins of Corfe Castle rise from an outcrop in a gap in the Purbeck Ridge, and can be seen for miles across the county. Built towards the end of the 11th Century, it was regarded as one of Britain's most impregnable fortresses until Oliver Cromwell destroyed it in 1646. Kirrin Castle, which appears in the Famous Five books, is believed to be based on Corfe Castle, which Blyton visited in 1941. The walk begins in the quaint village of the same name.

Starting from Sandy Hill Lane, pass under the railway and turn left over a stile. Follow the footpath up to the Purbeck Ridge. At the top of the ridge turn right (signposted Rollington Hill) and follow the path. From here you can look down to Poole Harbour with its eight islands, including the largest, Brownsea, the inspiration for Blyton's Whispering Island and a popular destination; the island fairly hums with natural beauty and teems with wildlife, with red squirrels the star attraction.

In time the stone track starts to descend and ahead of you is Swanage Bay. Go down to Ulwell Road and turn right. From here you can shorten the walk by continuing along the road into Swanage. Nicer, though, to continue on the Purbeck Way by taking the footpath from the second layby on the left. Follow the signs for the obelisk.

From the obelisk, turn right towards Ballard Point and join the South West Coast Path, which is signposted into Swanage.

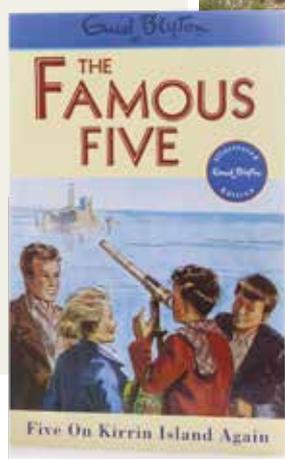
The Famous Five 21 books featured Julian, George, Dick, Anne and their dog Timmy. Their escapades, set during the '40s and '50s, saw the children having virtually adult-free outdoor holidays where they solved mysteries while drinking lashings of ginger beer. Titles include *Five on a Treasure Island* and *Five Go to Smuggler's Top*.



HPB's Langton House walk packs

Visit mybond.hpb.co.uk/Properties/Bond/LH and download more than 10 walk packs for the area.

Top: take Walk 7 to go past Corfe Castle; **Middle:** take Walk 9 to go along Studland and Shell Bay; **Bottom:** editor Jonathan Broom takes Walk 10 along Old Harry Rocks.



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