

# Times Past

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Storrington & District Museum

Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow

## THE WILBERFORCES IN SUSSEX

During this year we shall read and hear a great deal about William Wilberforce who worked for many years to abolish slavery in the British Empire (effectively the West Indies) and eventually secured emancipation in 1833 – a month before his death. He began his political career as M.P. for Hull but finished it as the member for Bramber. We hold him in great esteem now for his role in the abolition of slavery, but in his own day it was his son – Samuel – who was as well known but for very different reasons. Almost by accident he became the squire of Lavington.

Samuel, widely known as “Soapy Sam” both for the ease with which he was able to ingratiate himself with those who could be of use to him in his ambitions but possibly because he had the habit, when addressing a meeting or congregation, of putting his hands together in front of his chest and wringing them as if washing them. It was the kind of name that one is likely to acquire at school but that lives on into adult life. It was unlikely that Samuel would have enjoyed this sobriquet for it followed him even into the House of Lords where one speaker made reference to the bishop’s “saponaceous” speech. No doubt some of the noble lords were aware that the word means both “soapy” and “unctuous” and demonstrated their scholarship and indignation loudly.

But Samuel was able to ride such ridicule by the quality of his oratory. He was persuasive and witty and was able to command a large and approving audience wherever he went. Usually this was because his subject was one that had wide appeal among those in the Church of England who felt themselves under attack on several fronts, from Dissenters like Methodists and Baptists and - increasingly important – the Catholics now freed by the Emancipation Act of 1829. The importance of this reform (which his father had favoured) resulted in the

defection of many “High Churchmen” to Rome. Ironically these converts included two of his own sons and two of his best friends – Manning and Newman – who later became cardinals and highly influential in the Catholic revival in England.

Samuel’s acquisition of Lavington came because it passed from his mother-in-law to her daughter, Emily Sargent, due to the pre-decease of Emily’s father and sons. There being no male heir Emily, upon her death, passed the estate on to Samuel. Readers who have walked the



“Soapy Sam”

area will know Lavington as being one of the delights of rural Sussex. It lies at the foot of the downs, close to Graffham and consists today largely of Seaford College campus sharing a border with a stud farm. Samuel’s father-in-law was the rector of Lavington and Graffham and both he and his wife welcomed their daughter’s choice for a husband.

Samuel’s appointments, especially when he was made Bishop of Oxford, meant that he spent less time at Lavington than he would have liked, but his devotion to Emily and their children always drew him back.

Things should have improved when he was promoted to Bishop of Winchester, a diocese that then included most of south –east England south of the Thames and also the Channel Islands, a huge area when travel was largely by horse. Being above all a conscientious servant of the Church he insisted on visiting as much of his realm as he could and this made his breaks even fewer than when he was Bishop of Oxford.

Samuel's concern for his Church was to cope with a new threat, this time arising from the discoveries of a young biologist, Charles Darwin, from a five-year voyage on the "Beagle", a government-backed scheme that was to change the thinking of most scientists and question even many Christians. Darwin carefully noted the differences among animals and birds from others of the same species and in different parts of the world. Even in the small area occupied by the Galapagos Islands there were differences and Darwin, on reading his notes when he returned to England, was convinced that change, particularly if it improved the chances of survival in natural competition between creatures in the same region, was the result of natural selection, not divine creation. This would not have bothered the Church over-much had his findings not been published and made widely available to educated people in his "Origin of Species".

Scientists, many of whom doubted the notion of the Creation anyway, developed Darwin's new thesis and thus questioned a basic tenet of the Church. Various slogans, some of them inaccurate, were used to describe the new theory or to ridicule it. "Survival of the fittest" was an obvious truth and already accepted by the Church. One issue arose that caused even some Evolutionists to wonder. Agreed that creatures are more likely to survive if they adapt to new and changing conditions, but can they pass these qualities on to their offspring?

The debate raged with opinions crystallising on both sides. Matters came to a head with the calling of a meeting of the British Association at Oxford June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1860, one of the most important meetings ever. What occurred came to be called "the Great Debate"; one that might not have taken place had not Thomas Huxley been persuaded to stay and speak. He, aware that there would be an overwhelming majority against Darwinism, made to leave the hall but a friend - persuaded him to at least stay to hear the principal speaker for the Creation lobby – Bishop Wilberforce. Samuel, a fine orator, was so confident of victory that he began to taunt his opponents by asking them if they could trace their grandparents back to apes. It was a mistake, particularly in Oxford with its traditional respect for the rules of debate. Such tactics led Huxley to remark, "The Lord hath delivered him into my hands!" and he accepted the invitation to reply to Wilberforce's rather foolish taunts.

"If there were ancestors I should feel ashamed of recalling, it would rather be a *man* – one of restless and versatile intellect – who, not content with success in his own sphere of activity, plunges into scientific questions with which he has no real acquaintance, only to obscure them by aimless rhetoric and skilled references to religious prejudice." This brought much applause from people who, whatever their views on the subject in hand, still felt that Wilberforce had taken unfair advantage of his opponents. The references to man's relationship with apes was summed up by one observer who said that given a choice, he would rather have descended from an ape than from the Bishop!

The Bishop never fully recovered from this humiliation and found his life a sad one. His wife and some of their children lay in the little churchyard by his home, three more had crossed over to the Catholics and the estate was in financial difficulties. He still travelled around his huge diocese but three heart attacks had their effect. Travelling on horse from London to Abinger in Surrey he fell off and had a fatal heart attack. He was taken back to Lavington although an offer of a tomb in Westminster Abbey was declined as was his wish. He was buried as he would have wished, beside his much-loved family at their Sussex home.

E.P.B.

# ARCHAEOLOGY IN AND AROUND STORRINGTON

by

Prof. Nigel Foxell

Though Storrington, archaeologically speaking, is not all that rich, there has been the odd discovery, as we would expect from the area between the Arun and the Adur, for this was the most active in all Sussex during prehistoric times. Of course, neither in density of population nor in the splendour of the surviving monuments can the South Downs compare with Salisbury Plain, but its people were no sluggards when it came to industrial development - the mining and working of flints - or to the shift from hunter-gathering to crop-farming. Though sites that were excavated have been re-covered, some of the many mounds that must once have dotted the north scarp on either side of South Downs Way are still plainly visible. They may lack the drama that invested them when they were new, for they then rose steeply from their surrounding ditch, almost blindingly chalk-white, like a freshly lime-washed house. But now Nature has softened their contour and grassed them over. Assimilated into the surrounding landscape, these upturned saucers might be taken for the work of Nature alone.

More monument-like, one could say, are the trunks of trees that were toppled by the storm of 1987: beneath their lichen and fungi they are already historical, and they may persuade our fancy that they are prehistoric. Their roots, south-facing, display a whiteness that once compared with that of tumuli when new.

If, after a drink at The White Horse, I walk home via Church Street, I shall not reach Amberley in less than two and a quarter hours, the first third of which will land me no further than the top of the Downs. The bridleway, at its steepest - and muddiest - is printed with hooves, crossed with roots. Then clay becomes chalk, and, finally, flints, which in winter are clear to see on the left side of South Downs Way, where the plough has been, while on the right is pasture that sheep closely crop.

Press on and the soil becomes flint-free. Tumuli appear, also an earthwork of some scale and complexity, whose purpose remains unknown. On the western slope of Amberley Mount is a barrow, or rather a parallel pair of them. Here, maybe, some headman is buried, a dagger at his side, even a whetstone to keep its blade keen.

A little to the left, above Downs Farm, is what we nowadays call a dewpond, though the Oxford Dictionary dates the word no further back than 1877: there were half a dozen older words for it, each of them more appropriate, because the condensation of water counts for little. Why do we not say 'rainpond'?

The Neolithic period was warmer and wetter than now, permitting man to dig and line ponds by the score. If he had his problems, drought was hardly one of them. As for the springline, on which our present villages are strung out at intervals of four or five miles, it offered little attraction: what are now winterbourns, or nailbourns, were then in continuous spate.

It was for defence, according to Tacitus, that the Britons under Caractacus lived on hilltops, and certainly the Bronze Age saw warlike invaders, but the Neolithic peoples, though apparently pacific, had already displayed a similar aversion to valleys. An aversion even to the entire lower half of a slope. Downs Farm, for instance, stands on the midpoint of Amberley Mount; and Paul Strudwick, who owns it, told me the soil at this level is waxy, while that further up is much more easily workable. And it was further up that in 1985 the signs of two circular huts were excavated, dating from the late Bronze or early Iron Age. There were probably many more, an entire 'town', one might say.

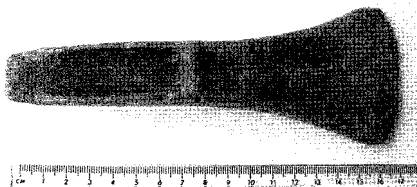
If the Downs above Storrington are more flinty, this is far from meaning that they were uninhabited, possibly the reverse, for industrial areas tend to be more densely populated than agrarian one. And the sinking of shafts, leading to galleries at a depth of between 25 and 39 feet, was labour-intensive, as was the mining of them with antlers by the light of oil lamps. Unsurprisingly, clay urns have been found in this area, containing incinerated human remains, and a well-preserved one had retained some fragments of the cloth in which it was wrapped, together with a brass pin.

In the late 1980s a flint axehead was discovered by George Layzell, retired Head Keeper of the Knepp Castle Estate, on the scarp slope of Kithurst Hill, and a second to the west of it. Both were ovate (egg-shaped), though the former has been classified as cordate (heart-shaped). They have been finely worked across both faces, and, in the latter stages at least, were manufactured by soft hammer reduction. These finds are exceptional for the area. Though Storrington Down has yielded further artefacts, they were poorly

provenanced and have been lost. An assortment of contextually unrelated material has emerged from the Arun terrace gravels at Storrington (1905), Wiggonholt (1929) and Parham (1981).

In 1970 an early Mesolithic site was excavated on Sparrite Farm, within the Parhan estate, about a mile from the Downs escarpment, and also, some 400 yards to the north, a late Neolithic site, where worked flints were discovered. Closest to the village of Storrington, indeed now within it, are the excavations undertaken in 2000. A detailed account of them is to be found in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, Volume 140 (2002), pp. 7-19, entitled 'A prehistoric and later medieval agricultural landscape at Dean Way, Storrington', by Christine Howard-Davis and Bryan Matthews. Catalogues of the stratigraphic and finds data are lodged in the Worthing Museum and Art Gallery, WM2000. 108. In May of that year, on behalf of CgMs Consulting, the Oxford Archaeological Unit carried out an evaluation of the site on which Barratt Southern Counties proposed building. Under expert supervision, two test-pits and twenty-seven trenches - in August a further eight - were

excavated by machine. This stretch, sloping eastwards down to the River Stor, had previously seen pasture and woodland. Earlier finds in the vicinity had been relatively insignificant: a Neolithic axe at Cootham and a few Roman objects near the Roman road that runs 500 yards to the north. The area, with evidence of field boundaries, had clearly been a farming



*Bronze Age Axehead found by Tony Gill  
on Sue & Paul  
Strudick's farm, in 2006*

one in prehistoric times, with some evidence of habitation: early Iron Age pottery, heat-shattered stone and flecks of charcoal.

There is every likelihood that there will be further archaeological finds. As recently as 2006 a Bronze-Age axehead and a Roman silver coin were found on Amberley Mount.

### **Curator's Corner**

The Museum is very hidden away and hence we intend to bring it more into the public eye by uncovering the Museum and office windows to give a display. In the reception hall the old shutter will be removed and a display case introduced.

We are also aiming to put a lot more local information in the Museum, such as maps and censuses. If there is any information you think should be available please let me know.

The general lighting is also being improved, together with more light on our special exhibition cabinets.

A short time ago we were given £100, anonymously, to restore some of our pictures. Some money was left over and we are using it to copy three wonderful Storrington water-colours from the vicarage with the kind permission of the Rev. Malcolm Acheson. They will shortly be framed and hung in the museum.

In the last "Times Past" Joy Gunton's name was spelt wrongly and it was her only brother Cyril who sadly died while playing with his hoop. -Our apologies.

**Gina Wilmshurst**

### **Museum Society Committee:-**

**Chairman:** Meg Everitt

(Contact No. 01903 745051 )

**Secretary:** Kate Wise

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**Programme Secretary:** Pauline Archibald

**Membership Secretary:** Jean MacWhirter

**Education Officer:** Jill Atkins

**Web Master:** Michael Leeming

**Members:** Philip Beaumont, Patricia Colebrook, Trish Cook, Gena Grenney, Michael Taylor, Cindy Waters, & Helen Whittle.

**Archivist:-** Mrs Joan Ham

### **Future Activities:-**

April 26, 2007, Thursday - Fishbourne Roman Palace @ 2.15

May 25, Friday - St. Mary's House & Gardens , Bramber @2.15

June 19, Tuesday - Sackville College, East Grinstead @ 2.15.

### **Future Exhibitions:-**

**May & June: Storrington's Medical Past:**

**July & August: Local Writers**

### **Editorial Team**

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