

**A successful first year for the History Group**

This Newsletter reports on what the Group has been doing since July, sets out what we have lined up for 2002, and includes a number of contributed articles. It shows that we have firmly established ourselves, with an elected committee, a constitution, a bank account, a good membership list and an interesting programme of activities.

We have inherited a great deal of material from some of our founder members, including the *Ferring Millennium History* by Kath Worvell, and a large archive of local history sources collected by Frank Leeson.

What we need now is more opportunities for our members to involve themselves in the work we can carry out. That means, for example, making use of the archives to write some history, and contributing this, or original material from memories of the more recent past, to this Newsletter.

Please let me know what you can do. - *Ed Miller.*

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**West Pier**

On Friday 13 July, Group members enjoyed a conducted tour of Brighton's West Pier, soon to be entirely renovated in a £30 million project supported by National Lottery funding. The pier, which closed in the early 1970s, is now virtually derelict but with the aid of a specially constructed catwalk one can walk out over the Victorian decking and supporting structures, through the Concert Hall (opened in 1916) and out towards the buildings at the pier head (erected in the 1890s and at various times a landing stage, a theatre, and a funfair) which are not yet safe to visit. Members of the Group were given a conducted tour by one of the enthusiasts who have fought for the restoration programme – Geoff Mead, Convenor of the Local History Project at Sussex University. He gave a fascinating talk on the social, as well as the architectural and engineering history of the pier, much enjoyed by the visitors, who were fitted out with life-jackets at safety helmets for the occasion.

The West Pier dates back to the early 1860s, long before the Palace Pier (still flourishing, of course) was built to replace the old 'Chain Pier' of 1823. It was always socially ambitious, as well as enterprising in its design and business development. Originally intended (and very much used) as a 'promenade' pier, where solid citizens could take their ease in their Sunday best, and refined young people could meet the opposite sex for a little mild flirtation, it gradually developed into an entertainment complex, including at various times a bandstand, concert hall, roller-skating rink, theatre, funfair, and venue for numerous diving and novelty acts.

Weakened by wave, weather and war (partial demolition and booby-trapping as an anti-invasion measure in 1940) and left behind by changes in holiday fashions (especially the cheap Mediterranean packages), the pier head was closed in 1970, and the entire pier in 1975. The plan now is to restore the West Pier to its condition in the early 1920s, shortly after the Concert Hall was added. The money has been secured, the approvals obtained from the many planning and other public authorities involved, and as Geoff put it 'the Trust is only a cigarette paper away from getting the go-ahead for the construction work to begin'.

(The full story of the pier is very well told in *Walking on Water* by Fred Gray, published by the West Pier Trust)

### Officers and Committee Members

The following officers and committee members were elected at Ferring History Group's Inaugural General Meeting on 17 August.

Chairman: Kath Worvell; Secretary: Ed Miller; Treasurer: Tony Hayes.

Committee Members: Sally Andrews, Pat Attree, Alec Francis, Mavis Ibbett, Penny Maisey. Joyce Cooper was co-opted as an additional member.

### Highdown Hike by Ed Miller

On August Bank Holiday afternoon, our Chairman, Kath Worvell, took a group of members and other visitors on a guided walk over Highdown Hill. We had fine weather and an interesting afternoon. Although a newcomer to Ferring, I have walked over Highdown half a dozen times but, clearly, had not really known what I was looking at.

First stop was the Miller's Tomb – not one of my ancestors but John Olliver, who kept the windmill on the hill until it was destroyed in a storm at the end of the eighteenth century. So attached was he to Highdown that he left instructions that he was to be buried there. And so he was, in 1793, upside down according to some accounts, and there his tomb is still to be seen, with its elegy of Olliver's own composition carved into the stone and becoming more and more unreadable as it sinks, line by line, into the turf. (*Would any reader like to offer a transcription for our next issue?*) Kath told us about Olliver's magnificent funeral, and his colourful life (including his involvement with the local smugglers) and the nineteenth century 'coach parties' that came to see his unusual memorial.

Further up the hill, the path divides, one track continuing up to the remains of the Iron Age Fort, the other leading to the wood on the scarp slope. Before we took this path, Kath reminded us of what the Fort had been – an embankment with a ditch in front and a stockade behind, dating from about 500 BC, whether for serious defence or purely ceremonial purposes it is not clear, but clearly involving a community of a substantial size. The hilltop had been occupied even earlier, around 800 BC, in the Bronze Age, and was later used as a burial ground in the early Saxon period, with Christian and pre-Christian burials. On the southern slope there had been a Roman Villa. The evidence for all this was, among other things, in the archaeological finds now in Worthing Museum.

But we took the path through the woods, known for centuries as Pot Lane, down to the A27 interchange. On the way Kath showed us the area right at the north west corner of the Parish boundary, which she believes is the 'circle of fields' [*circuitu campestris*] mentioned in the 791 AD Charter (*see p.4-5*). The walk past Patching Pond and along Water Lane towards Angmering illustrated another theory – that Highdown was once virtually surrounded by water, and it was only when the water receded in the late Roman period, that the present Parish boundaries were established.

Our walk then took us through Ecclesden Farm, and along the side of Ecclesdon Manor, in earlier times a Nunnery (nb: *ecclesia* is Latin for 'church'), but after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s was sold off and converted to a manor house. It has remained a family house ever since. The owner at the time of the First World War, was a great admirer of the French Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Foch, and left him the house in his will. Foch died a few months before he did and so the house passed to one of the Marshal's distant relatives, who spoke no English and, having no desire to live in Angmering, promptly sold it on. It now belongs to a Worthing business family.

My own walks over this route usually include a visit to 'The Spotted Cow' at this point but on this occasion, the party walked straight back to the Highdown Car Park along the lane half-way up the south slope. This lane had been a main thoroughfare,

we were told, and at the Highdown Crossroads, where the lane up from Ferring crosses it, there had been a fateful meeting of the 'Swing Rioters', campaigning for a living agricultural wage with cattle maiming, rick burning and other threatened violence. The conspirators were denounced: one of them was hanged at Horsham jail not long afterwards, and the others transported for seven years.

For those who have not walked over this route, it is a fairly gentle stroll of about two hours, with much good views over Ferring, and across to Brighton to the east; Arundel, Littlehampton and a distant view of the Isle of Wight to the west; and the crest of the downs to the north. But for the historical and geological interest (which I have only summarised briefly here) why not join Kath next time she does one of these guided walks? We'll let you know the dates.

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### **Ferring in the 1930s**

*One of the oldest community groups in Ferring is the Residents and Owners Association. Kath Worvell once made a study of their early minute books and here are some extracts from what she wrote in the FROA magazine in the 1970s.*

[In 1933] .. the main thoroughfare northwards from the sea was Ferringham Lane – no more than a cart track which was at times impassable. ... The motor car was becoming a headache in problem numbers at the focal point on the beach – The Bluebird Café. The Strand was undeveloped and the Rife meandered round the Bluebird, where one of its crossing points was a ramshackle bridge. The only bus service through Ferring was provided by a single dilapidated vehicle belonging to a Mr Smart.

But things were beginning to change. The Association of Ratepayers campaigned for a metalled road up from the beach [Ocean Drive? West Drive?], and for a Post Office in South Ferring. Southdown agreed to take over the bus service and plans were drawn up to drain the Strand/Car Park area and channel the Rife to its present course.

The earliest minute book now surviving shows the Association in October 1937 debating a proposal for a Recreation Ground in North Ferring. The Association's leadership was strongly against the proposal. A poll was taken of all Ferring's local electors (under 1000 of them – that's how small the community was before the War), and the objectors won the day. At the AGM that year, the first item was the impending rate increases, and the burden they would impose on many Ferring Residents. 'They have very little private means and only a small fixed income and they are very much to be pitied. They are lured down here by attractive advertisements from speculative builders who offer buildings at small figures. .. The first thing that faces them are such expenses as main drainage, main water and the Rife scheme. ... Every halfpenny on the rates means more sacrifice for them..'

Litter was also on their minds. In 1936 the Association had employed a man for two-and-a-half days a week for ten weeks to keep the beach and the verges clear, at a cost of £5, but this expense was regarded as unacceptable, and not repeated.

The state of the roads was also a continuing concern. Inadequate to begin with, they were made worse by the constant digging up as the water and sewer mains were extended to serve the new houses and bungalows, and by contractors' vehicles. No help was forthcoming from the District Council, the County Council or the Government ministries concerned, and eventually the Association formed a Roads Committee, with charges to be levied on all frontagers. Unfortunately, very little was accomplished before the outbreak of war, and the prohibition of all road repairs other than for military purposes

Another preoccupation was the state of various pieces of marginal land, covered in weeds and litter, such as the path between Ferring Grange and Sea Lane and the triangle of land in front

of the Ocean Drive/Ferringham Lane shops. In January 1939 the District Council wanted to build an Air Raid Shelter on the latter piece of land but a few months later it was agreed to take it over as a garden site. Perhaps like the Daily Express, the Association thought there would be 'no war in Europe this year'. However, war did come later that year and before long it had overwhelmed the Association, which suspended all its activities in 1940 until the war should end.

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### **Roman Coins and brooches**

*David Smith*, introducing his talk on Roman brooches and coins (given at our 7 August meeting), described himself as 'primarily an ornithologist, and not a historian, but an enthusiastic amateur of Roman artefacts'. He illustrated his talk from his own collection, built up over the years, by purchases and a few finds of his own. Passing them round for closer examination, he gave a fascinating commentary on over 30 brooches and similar items, and a dozen coins.

Roman brooches were primarily functional – for fastening clothes in the days before buttons and zips. Very few are found complete with the pin because that was usually made of iron, which rusts away. The main part of the brooch was made in bronze, or perhaps silver (rarely gold), and as time went on became more decorative: most of the brooches he was showing were in 'zoomorphic' style (that is, representations, realistic or stylised, of animals). The animals represented ranged from the familiar (horse, duck, chicken, frog, fly) to the exotic (lion, leopard, dolphin) and the mythical (dragon, sea monster). They were often enamelled, and patches of the enamel were still visible in many of the brooches he handed round.

Strictly speaking, he said, most of the brooches and other items from the first century A.D. were Romano-Celtic rather than purely Roman: they were probably made by Celtic craftsmen (usually cast), and the designs reflected Celtic art just as much as Roman symbols or styles.

Most of the coins he showed were definitely Roman, however, and in circulation throughout the Empire. The obverse showed the Emperor (or sometimes his wife) – his own collection included most of the rulers from Augustus through to Antoninus Pius (the latter had a faint image of Britannia on the reverse). He reminded the group of the grisly fate of most of these gentlemen, very few of them dying from natural causes. His oldest coin was in fact Greek – from 420 B.C (though naturally, not bearing that date), featuring the owl of Athene, another zoomorphic and powerfully mythological symbol.

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### **Mysteries of the Ferring Charters**

The first mentions of Ferring in recorded history are the two Saxon Charters of 765 AD and 791 AD. These are fascinating glimpses of what was going on in Ferring over 1200 years ago but the documents contain many mysteries ..

#### Charter for the Monastery at Ferring, 765 AD (translated from Latin)

"In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Be our guide, O God, in whom we believe and worship and know to be the rewarder of all our acts. Therefore, I, Osmund, have been asked by my thane, Walhere to be so good as to grant him a little land for the building of a monastery; and in answer to his plea I grant him the same land which he indicated, freely and eternally, for the good of my soul, that is twelve hides of land which are called Ferring with all things pertaining thereto, fields, woods, meadows, rivers, springs and woods at Coponora and Tithesham. This charter was written on the third day of the month of August seven hundred and sixty five years from the Incarnation of our Lord. I, Osmund, have signed the grant with my own hand. I, Osa, bishop have agreed and signed"

Who was Osmund? He does not identify himself in this document but in a similar document five years later refers to himself as 'king' (of the South Saxons). Who was Walhere? Did he

ever build the monastery? (This is the only mention of such an establishment in Ferring). Where were Coponora and Titledham? Were they places in Ferring or, as the nineteenth century scholars thought, somewhere in Hampshire? It is all very mysterious.

Charter by Eadwulf for land at Buncton(?) 791 AD (translated from Latin)

In the name of the holy saviour....I, Ealdwulf, Alderman of the South Saxons, with the agreement and permission of Offa, King of the English, have taken care to give and set down in writing to Withun the Bishop a little piece of wood under my jurisdiction in the place which is called Gealtborgsteal for the church of St Andrew which is situated on the land which is called Ferring. But this wood is defined by certain limits; on the western side, by the high road which runs from south to the north and on the other side in a circle of fields.....And this was done in the hill which is called Biochandoune in the year 791 of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ with the consent of all who are named and written down below. I, Eadwulf who have granted firstly have impressed the sign of the holy cross. I, Aedelwulf, agree and sign ...

Again, the identities of the individuals named is not completely clear, but the locations are even more obscure. A Victorian scholar, Blaaw, argued that they related to Buncton, north of Chanctonbury. This contention was unchallenged for 150 years. Kath Worvell has challenged it however...

Why Buncton? *writes Kath:* Blaaw proposed that the 'hill called Biochandoune' (*Biochandune in the 1947 transcription*) is a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon name Bongetune (*Buncton*) and that although not directly transcribable, the site referred to as *Cealtborgsteal* is the small hill on which Buncton church is situated, on the scarp side of Chanctonbury.

The land is described as 'a little piece of wood' and 'my small donation' so it is obviously modest in extent and too modest to be economic if it is so far removed from the home parish (especially as woodland at Buncton would be unlikely to produce more than scrub) and too trivial in extent to warrant a meeting place for the legal transfer as far away as Chanctonbury, 9 miles north of Ferring. It would be much more logical to use an adjacent venue when a cursory pointing of the finger and a sweep of the hand could encompass the whole of a modest donation.

In any case, there is only slight correlation between the names Biochandoune and Bongetune, and the 'doune' syllable within its title of the former we can now equate with 'down'. The remainder of the name resists the suggested translation but the place is described within the document as a hill, and Blaaw suggested some 150 years ago that Biochandoune might be translated as 'Birch Hill'

The site named as *Cealtborgsteal* can be transcribed as 'a way through a mound or steep area'. The transcription of the *Cealt* prefix (*Gealt* in the 1947 transcription) is conjectural but could it be a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon 'healh' i.e. 'corner of land'?

The boundaries defined by the donation are very vague. This implies that it was small and relatively unimportant. The curtilage is described as 'on the western side by the high road which runs from south to north and in the other part is open country' (or surrounded by fields) [circuita campestris]

From the geology we can see that to the immediate west of this site, the present Rife formed a marshy outlet to the streams pouring off Highdown Hill. Further west, at Poling, the agricultural land is drained by the broad wide bed of the Black Ditch - an ancient inlet of the River Arun - which is still very obvious within the landscape and which the Angmering villa excavations of 1939 indicate might well have provided a harbour site.

J R Armstrong in *'History of Sussex'* suggests that in Roman times, this tributary of the Arun extended behind Highdown Hill. With Broadwater (*Bradwatre*) on its eastern side, Highdown Hill would have been a peninsula connected to the hinterland by a narrow neck of land north of Worthing.

With the eventual lowering of the water table, there would have been a slow gradual restoration to exposed land around the northern flanks of Highdown Hill – initially of marginal size and value but gradually incorporated into holdings, re-established with scrub vegetation. It is relevant that the birch tree is a transitional coloniser on newly established land.

The woodlands of Highdown Hill are now largely well-managed hazel coppices but the area would have undergone some transitional specie dominance of birch (in this Blaaw's interpretation as 'Birch Hill is relevant) and possibly alder as the water table receded. Evidence of the marshy nature is still very apparent. A massive highway improvement incorporating two large roundabouts and the junction of 5 roads has required the engineering of deep drainage channels in the Titnore Lane, Ferring/ A27 junction with a large brick catchment chamber. The drainage ditches here are some 2 metres (or more) deep. Newly built, it is an effective drainage feature but, despite 20<sup>th</sup> century engineering, its geological history is still very evident. After the storms of October/November 2000 there was much evidence of standing water and Patching Pond reached breaching levels.

This heavily engineered area would appear to be the successor to a natural reclamation of 1200 years ago. Is this ancient reclamation the *Cealtborgsteal*, 'the corner by a path through the hill' which had been given to Ferring church in donation?

The search for the 'true' sites of the 791 AD Charter logically focuses on Highdown Hill. Today, Highdown has two paths opening on to the open downland at the top. They emerge from the wooded slope of the north (scarp) side. Both are truncated by the hill ridge and can be said to run from south to north. The most westerly forms the parish boundary, although it only appears on maps in recent times. The eastern of the two (known locally as Pot Lane) occurs on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps and on the Gardner & Gream map of 1795. Looking north from the ridge today, the scarp slope consists of a patchwork of scrub, coppiced woods and open clearings running down into the clays of the London Beds only some 500 metres from the ridge.

Working on these suppositions therefore, which are admittedly highly conjectural, the possibility is that *Cealtborgsteal* was a small area of woodland on the eastern side of Pot Lane. Only 100 metres or so further east, runs a curving fertile valley [*circuita campestris*?]. This now forms part of the eastern parish boundary. To incorporate 'a little piece of wood' probably did no more 'tidy up' a relatively recently established proprietorial boundary.

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### **Visit to Fishbourne**

On 7 September a party from the History Group were given a guided tour, by the Curator, of Fishbourne Roman Palace. This is one of the largest Roman buildings so far discovered in England, and merits the title of 'palace' because of its enormous size and opulence. The site, excavated mainly in the 1960s, is also very important in the story of the Roman invasion in 43 AD and the early days of Roman occupation. We are very fortunate to have it only a stone's throw from Ferring.

What survives of the Palace is, of course, the foundations, some low walls, and, most spectacularly, many floors with very decorative mosaics – most of them largely intact. The floor levels of the north wing of what was a huge square palace are now on view, within an elegant modern building (the other wings are still unexcavated), and there is an excellent museum displaying the artefacts (and one of the skeletons)

that have been recovered. It is well worth a visit at any time, but we were very pleased to have David Rudkin's commentary.

Fishbourne seems to have been one of the earliest Roman sites, with evidence of granary buildings dating from the invasion period. The Chichester Inlet came right up to the site at that time and the buildings would have served as a military and supply depot for the conquest of the south and south-west of Britain, supplied by ships from Roman-occupied Gaul. This may even have been the site of the invasion itself (usually assumed to be in Kent but the recorded details are very vague).

David Rudkin explained the development of the palace itself, some 20 years later, as representing a major civic centre, and probably the court of a British 'client' king, (possibly Togidumnus) ruling within the Roman imperial system. The palace seems to have been burnt down around the year 270 AD and much of the masonry was used in building the walls of Chichester. The site was presumably left derelict, and used for various purposes (including the burial of at least four bodies from the Saxon period), and was gradually covered with soil and used for agriculture. The first indication in modern times that a very large Roman building lay under the fields was in the trench dug for a new water main in 1960, but some of the mosaics show damage by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century ploughshares, and fragmentary finds were reported back in 1806.

There is an excellent book on Fishbourne, by the man who excavated it in the 1960s, Barry Cunliffe (*Fishbourne: Roman Palace (rev.1998)*) available from Rustington Branch Library (and no doubt other Branches).

### Ferring Inventories

Joyce Cooper, one of our founder members, is looking for help in one of the Group's continuing projects - of transcribing ancient 'inventories' (lists of possessions of village people compiled for probate purposes).. The original documents are in the handwriting of the day, which is often difficult to read – but it gets easier with practice. The inventories reveal a great deal about everyday life in earlier centuries. Here is one from almost 300 years ago – that of the property of John Tydy, of Holly Cottage (which still stands, on the corner of Church Lane and Ferringham Lane):

An Inventory of the goods and Chattles  
Of John Tydy of fferring in the County  
Of Sussex deced taken and Appraised by Thomas  
Olliver Nicholas Mant & John Brooks Apprizers  
This Eighth day of June Anno1720 as foll (viz

	£: s: d
Imp ed His Waring Apparell & money in purse	20:00:00
In his Kitching	
Sixteen pewter dishes and One }	
Duzzen & a halfe of plates .... }	01:15:00
Item a Settle & Table .....	00:15:00
Item the Jacks & Spitts & other Iron thing	02:02:00

*(He seems to have been pretty well-dressed but rather short of furniture – but what was the 'other iron thing'?)*

There are 60 of these inventories to be transcribed. Any member who would like to join in this work should get in touch with Joyce, at 30 Sea Lane Gardens (Tele: 249136).

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### **Programme for 2002**

Our four regular meetings for next year have been arranged as follows:

*Friday 8 February:* 'Archaeological sites and finds in Ferring and surrounding areas' by John Mills, County Archaeologist.

*Friday 24 May:* 'The History of Ferring' by Kath Worvell.

*Friday 16 August:* (AGM and) 'The Port of Arundel' – a talk by Rosemary Hagedorn/

*Friday 1 November:* 'Glorious Goodwood – its Owners and Treasures' – an illustrated talk on Goodwood House by Cynthia Bacon.

We also hope to arrange more visits to local sites and an on-going programme of other activities.

### **Archives**

Frank Leeson has lodged with me, for the Ferring History Group's use, his substantial 'Ferring Local History Archive'. I am quite happy for members to come and consult this archive at 17 West Drive. There is an enormous amount of raw material here for any member who would like to write up some village history. Here is the briefest listing:

1. Ferring Parish Register Transcripts 1558 to 1815 (bap), 1940 (mar), 1900 (bur), with notes on land holdings, building works etc
2. Monumental Inscriptions in the Church and Churchyard
3. Ferring and Kingston Wills 1542-1858 (complete listing and some copies)
4. Ferring Inventories 1587-1759 (listing and some photocopies)
5. Ferring Land Tax Assessments 1780-1832
6. Ferring Tithe Apportionment 1840 (maps, listings, index etc)
7. Ferring Buildings (Frank's personal compilation of photographs and documents relating to nearly all of Ferring's pre-Victorian buildings)
8. Ferring Censuses 1841-1891
9. Ferring Directories (extracts on Ferring in County and Worthing Directories)
10. Ferring Histories (photocopies of extracts from various sources 17890 onwards)
11. Sussex Archaeological Collections (Listing of all references to Ferring in Vols 1-125, *Sussex Notes and Queries* Vols 1-17 and *SAS Newsletter Nos 1-50*)
12. Early Inhabitants of Ferring and Goring (including transcription of Domesday Book entry and mediaeval Subsidy Rolls)
13. The Standing Papers (Extracts from the East Preston local historian Richard Standing's files on Ferring history including many photocopies of 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century records and original articles (e.g. one on coastal erosion at Ferring Rife 1621-1976)).
14. Card Indexes (Frank's indexes of Ferring personal names, field names, building names etc). *I hope to put this card index on computer files at some stage. Can anyone help?*

I also have a copy of Kath Worvell's *Ferring Millennial History* (there is another copy in Ferring Branch Library, and a copy of *Highdown and its Saxon Cemetery* by Martin Welch.

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### **Worthing Archaeological Society**

*Forthcoming meetings at Worthing Library:*

6 November: Trevor Povey on 'The Archaeology of Maritime Shoreham'

11 December: Neil Faulkner on 'The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain'

8 January: Peter Topping on 'The Causewayed Enclosures of the South Downs'

8 February: Gustave Milne on 'Smallhythe Mediaeval Shipyard'

12 March: 'Rodney Castleden on 'Ancient British Hill Figures'

Please check start times with the Secretary: Tele: 01903 916190

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