

Wye Historical Society



Newsletter October 2020

As the prospect of societal changes loomed large, the Society held an emergency meeting at 6 Chequers Park on February 18th. to find a new chairman as David's health was less than robust.

After some considerable discussion the Committee for 2020 was set up as follows;

President	Revd. John Makey
Chairman	Tim Betts
Secretary	Cilla Deeks
Treasurer	Anna Clark
Archivist	Maureen de Saxe
Members	Paul Burnham
	Ellie Morris
	Rosie Fletcher
	Brian Roberts
	Kathy Roberts
	Jonathan Timms
	Sarah Morris

A further meeting, at the same venue, was held to discuss what we can do to keep members interested until Covid restrictions are lifted and we can meet again.

The outcome was this newsletter which will (I hope) be monthly and will keep you all up to date with what is planned as well as providing some light reading on matters of interest. We would be grateful for any ideas you may have for articles for the newsletter, please send to Tim Betts timb164@btinternet.com in 'Word' format. Articles should be one or two A4 pages long and can be on any historical subject, local or national. We expect to email the newsletter to members who have given us their email address and to hand deliver or post copies to those who have not.

Currently we do not expect to be able to meet in the usual way until 2021 so any ideas you have regarding the society, its activities and the content of the newsletter will be very welcome. We will also be using the Parish magazine to keep you up to date with developments.

Currently our finances are in a healthy state, nothing in, virtually nothing out, so don't let your ideas be limited by the potential cost, every suggestion will be given our full attention.

The Old Trackway

Graham Bradley

As you have listened to speakers at WHS meetings you may not have realised that an ancient trackway runs right past the doorway.

This ancient trackway has been in existence since at least Neolithic times running from the religious complex of Stonehenge and Avebury all the way to the coast near Folkestone. West of Farnham it is called the Harrow Way which translates to the 'old way'. For much of its course there are two separate tracks. One takes the high road on top of the North Downs escarpment – the ridgeway – and the other is lower down the face of the escarpment just above the spring line – the lower terraceway. The ridgeway has the disadvantage for walking of being on clay with flints, which was muddy in winter, and passed through wild and lonely country, but it had the advantage of better views to aid navigation and avoid potential trouble. The terraceway is on permeable chalk and, from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards, runs through or near several villages sited to make use of the available springs. It is likely that the ridgeway was used more in prehistoric times and in summer. The North Downs Way follows the ridgeway for much of its distance and much of the terraceway has been superseded by metalled roads.

The term 'Old Trackway' is still used on OS maps often along with the name 'Pilgrims' Way'. It is accessible from Winchester and a branch of the pathway splits off at Boughton Lees and goes to Canterbury. It could have been used by pilgrims travelling to the tomb of St. Thomas A Beckett but Watling Street would have been an easier route for many. Some experts believe that the use of the term Pilgrims' Way is inappropriate.



From Boughton Lees the track goes towards Wye where there were gravel terraces on both sides of the river with a minimum of waterlogged clayey alluvium to cross. It then crosses the Stour, somewhere near where the current bridge is (see photograph), and most likely ran up the sunken lane now called Bridge Street.

Thereafter, it splits into two with one path going to the high ground in the vicinity of the Crown and the terraceway running by Pickersdane and beyond.



Further east the two paths combine near Stowting (see photograph) only to separate soon afterwards. The lower trackway goes through Postling to Frogholt and Pean and the ridgeway passes by Edgehill and crosses the Elham Valley. The two pathways join behind Round Hill (between Caesar's camp and Sugarloaf Hill) and then it proceeds

towards the coast near the Warren in Folkestone. Thereafter, the route might have depended on how far one looks back in time.

In historic times the pathway then went to Dover and the precise pathway may have changed with coastal erosion. Interestingly, though, there is an old pathway that starts near the exit of the channel tunnel in France and extends at least 50 Km inland – La Leulene. Were the two ancient pathways at one time connected? The geology of the formation of the English Channel is complex but it is likely that in the last ice age (about 115000 – 12000 year ago), with the lowering of sea levels, the channel was effectively no more than a series of small rivers navigable by Palaeolithic and Mesolithic man. The breakthrough of the channel in the late Mesolithic period may have led to the diversion to Dover and the development of sophisticated craft such as the Dover Boat to cross at this narrow point.

As we endure travel restrictions imposed because of Covid 19 we should spare a thought for the restrictions on ancient man caused by the formation of a wide English Channel!

Interpreting Historical Artwork



Experiment on a bird in an air-pump. Joseph Wright (of Derby) National Gallery, London

The picture shows a natural philosopher (scientist) demonstrating the properties of a vacuum.

He is staring fixedly at the observer, is this a challenge? Am I doing the right thing? If I lift my finger the bird lives, if I maintain the seal the bird dies from hypoxia thus demonstrating the absence of respirable air within the flask.

The painting shows the effect on his audience. The two young girls, transfixed with horror at the bird's death, one cannot take her eyes from it, the other cannot bear to watch, are being comforted by their father whose upraised hand and finger signifies that there is a higher purpose to what they are viewing.

The seated figure on the right of the picture (the philosopher) is lost in thought, Aristotle after all, the father of natural philosophy, denied the existence of vacuum.

The gentleman seated left of centre is believed to be Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather, he had already written poetically about the origins of life and evolution.

The two lovers, to the scientist's right, are too absorbed in each other to take in the demonstration and its profound implications for the understanding of life.

During the enlightenment (1650 – 1800) it was regarded as a duty of scientists/philosophers to demonstrate their discoveries in public, thus ensuring that the search for "universal truth" was indeed at least potentially universal and not just restricted to those who could afford to experiment either through personal wealth or through affiliation to learned societies.