BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

Michael Gandy 20th September 2012

This talk was more of an amiable ramble through the social history of the British in India than a history of the East India Company. Michael Gandy admitted to his primary interest in ancestry and the records that can be used to trace people rather than places or events. Of course, the prominence of the East India Company in India from the mid-eighteenth century as primarily a trading initiative colours much of the British India story, especially until 1857 when the British Government took over administrative control of India as the British Raj after the Indian Rebellions.

In the early years of the East India Company, Michael pointed out that, in fact, very little of India was immediately under its control. Originally its presence in the early seventeenth century was as a small number of 'factories' in ports around the coast of India in places like Bombay, Calcutta, Surat and Madras. By various treaties with local rulers the number of factories expanded to 23 by 1647. This increasing trading presence necessarily drew more British to India in support roles, notably as soldiers in the East India Company Army recruited to protect the factories and forts from marauders. It was explained that many of the officers were Scots gentry, who were generally less well endowed financially than their English counterparts and so bought commissions in the East India Company Army rather than the more expensive regular British regiments. The ordinary soldiers came from all parts of Britain, but especially Ireland.

East India House. Leadenhall Street, London: the headquarters of the East India Company

These soldiers were encouraged to marry local Indian girls (Hindu) and raise families in India, which had the dual benefit to the Company of retaining their services as well as providing a new 'stock' of Eurasians for the future. However, the officers tended to stay single or have a wife back in Britain, but the taking of local girls as mistresses was widely practised. This way of life apparently worked well for a long while, until British women came out to India in the mid-nineteenth century: they shunned the Eurasians socially and discouraged the other forms of fraternisation. This situation came to a head in reverse at the 1947 independence & partition of India, where many Anglo-Indians (as they were then known as) chose to leave India.

It might be imagined that genealogists tracing family history involving family members going to India could have a challenging time dealing with the complexities of formal and informal families in India. Michael enlightened us with a catalogue of information sources – much of it in the India Office Library of the British Museum. This information came from the records collections of the East India Company, the Church of England (in India) and the Army Chaplains' records. Of course, much family history is also in records kept in India itself. This really concluded Michael's lecture, a little short on history of the East India Company itself. This was a pity as it is a very rich story of an extraordinary trading venture that over 200 years exerted a massive influence on the administration of the Indian subcontinent.

Trevor Devon.

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS AND THE ENSLAVEMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN: THE BEGINNING OF CHIVALRIC WARFARE

Commemoration Lecture

Professor John Gillingham
BDHS President

11 October 2012

Professor Gillingham began by showing an image from the Bayeux tapestry at the start of the Norman conquest. A soldier is setting light to a building. By the building stands a woman holding the hand of a child, apparently trying to flee. There is no sign of a husband but a subsequent slide showed dead soldiers being stripped of their armour and clothing. This was the usual fate of the men. But the awful consequences of eleventh- and early twelfth-century European warfare for women and children were rarely mentioned by the chroniclers of the period.

Detail from the Bayeux Tapestry

Nevertheless, one account of their likely fate was mentioned in the eleventh century by Guy of Amiens in which he imagined an English witness rushing to tell Harold of the Norman invasion during which women, children and cattle were taken prisoner by Duke William. There was no mention of men. What happened to the women and children? No doubt many were raped, but their ultimate fate was to be made slaves. It was difficult to imagine that they were slave raiders because there had been no slave market in Rouen since about 1020 and although the raider Vikings were slavers, the Norman-Vikings had come under new influences in Normandy. Indeed, William of Poitier, the chronicler of the deeds of William the Conqueror, made a point of saying that, unlike Julius Caesar who went back to Gaul with many British slaves, Duke William took only some noble hostages to Normandy. So those made slaves remained in England and the woman and her child from the Bayeux Tapestry would have been taken to a slave market. Thus, although the Normans did not

practise slavery in Normandy, they did so in lands conquered elsewhere as in southern Italy or Sicily in the 1060s or on the First Crusades in the 1090s and early 1100s.

The English who saw the scene of the burning house and woman and child would not have been surprised as is shown by the Domesday Book which recorded the numbers of slaves in the counties it surveyed. Although Sussex had fewer than the other southern counties, there was already a slave market in Lewes. So it was normal that the Normans, even if slavery was banned in Normandy, should do as the Romans did, so to speak, and make money out of slavery, especially as soldiers at those days were not paid and relied on plunder and the sale of slaves.

Nevertheless, there was at the same time an anti-slavery movement in England. Duke William's first Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc, an Italian by origin who had lived for some time in Normandy, campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade in England. He was helped by an English Bishop, Wulfstan, and after Lanfranc's death, his campaign was carried on by his successor, Anselm. Canon 28 of the Council of Westminster, presided over by Anselm forbade "that shameful trade" by which men were treated like beasts and in the first decades of the twelfth century, slavery disappeared from England. Lawrence of Durham, writing in the 1130s, in his life of St Bridget gave credit to the Normans, foreigners, for outlawing a practice which the English themselves had failed to do and had introduced to England a respect for human life which before 1066 had been normal in Gaul and the Rhineland.

Nevertheless, the Normans used the fact that slavery had not been outlawed in England to turn a profit from it in their early years. This was mentioned by Guy of Amiens but even more convincingly, Orderic Vitalis, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, written in the 1130s, said that one Robert harried the Welsh mercilessily and forced many into slavery. So the practice continued in Wales and when Orderic criticised Robert, he was being critical of someone who had been a great benefactor of his monastery, St Evroul and who was buried there.

Interestingly, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European historians did not like the idea that Europeans had ever been slavers. Slavery was practised, in their view, only by the Vikings in England. Prof. Gillingham showed an image of an artist's impression of 1900 of a group of Vikings offering to Arab merchants a slave, who was on his knees in front of them. He asked us to note that the slave was a man, probably a prisoner of war and then described an experiment whereby six students at Cardiff University, presumably volunteers, were chained together by replicas of actual slave chains found by University archaeologists. It was striking that the experiment involved only young men and no women; it was assumed that, as prisoners of war, they would have been men. But, Professor Gillingham asked, was this correct?

Canon 28 of the Council of Westminster had referred to *homines* which is always translated as 'men'. But in fact *homines* means 'people', not just men, as in the Magna Carta where the many mentions of the rights of *liber homo* refer to a free person not just to a free man. The same mistake has been made in the many translations into English of the Domesday Book. Of course, in English usage, reference to 'men' can equally include women but translations have always given the impression that 'man' refers only to males.

However, John of Worcester in the 1130s mentions in his chronicle a raid on the Welsh in 1136 in which some men were captured but no fewer than 10,000 women. Richard of Hexham, another chronicler of the early twelfth century, describes a raid by Scots in 1138 on the north of England in which there was a mass slaughter of babies, the old, the weak and the feeble. For a long time, historians thought this was simply anti-Scottish propaganda. But Richard went on to say that the Scots captured and took away all the young women, whether wives or virgins. Some of the Scots took pity on their captives and released them but one tribe, the Galwegians took the women home, abused them and either then kept them as slaves or sold them on in exchange for cattle. They were part of the plunder.

Of course, in the absence of any Scottish account, Richard of Hexham's word has been doubted because he, as an Englishman living near the border with Scotland, would be bound to describe the Scots as behaving like barbarians.
But there was another European example of similar behaviour by Christian Livonians in the eastern Baltic, described by Henry of Livonia (modern Latvia), an eye-witness, at around the same period when they raided pagan Lithuanians or Estonians. Henry accompanied a Christian Latvian expedition into pagan Estonia and was therefore describing the behaviour of his own side when he said that they killed all the males, captured the women and children and drove off their cattle, horses and sheep. On another occasion, they slaughtered people as they emerged from their hiding places after a raid; some they burned alive in revenge for what their enemies the Estonians had done in the past and some they tortured to make them reveal where they had buried treasure. Some historians of the early middle ages described war as a man hunt but in fact it was more a woman hunt; the men were killed so that the women and children could be captured.

Henry of Livonia never said what his side, the Rigans, did with the women and children they captured. But he described the Estonians as having violated the women they captured and then kept them as wives, each man having several wives or sold them on. The tone of Henry's description is very matter of fact. There is no censure of their behaviour when he says "we" did this or that. Between 1208 and 1221 there were 26 expeditions by the German Christians of Riga in which men were killed and women and children captured. It was the same in Wales. There was a mid-twelfth century account, written in praise of a Welsh prince, Gruffudd ap Cynan, which describes similar raids by him in which the men are killed and the women captured.

If an English historian praised an English prince for a successful raid against the Scots, this would hardly be remarkable in view of the long hostility between the two nations. But this is a case of one Welsh prince attacking another and being praised for his valour; nothing he did seemed out of the ordinary. Yet in ancient Greece, the cradle of civilisation, the city states all shared the same values and ideas as Greeks, but when they fought against each other, the victors slaughtered the men so that they could carry off the women and children as slaves. In the same way, West African slaves in the nineteenth century were captured by other Africans as children and sold on; many becoming slaves in the Americas. The Old Testament has accounts of wars when the men were slaughtered and the women, children and cattle carried off. This was how Moses made war.

Yet there was one example, the only one that Professor Gillingham had come across in early European history, of the Church intervening to try to stop these practices. This was when

the Pope sent Albrecht of Austria to mediate between the Scots and English. He succeeded in persuading the Scots, the Galwegians, to return their English captives and to promise in future to kill only the men fighting against them and to spare the women, children, the infirm and elderly. One wonders if this promise was ever kept, but this was the first example in Europe of an attempt to define non-combatants. This was the beginning of what Gillingham described as "chivalrous" warfare when the weak and helpless are spared. Nothing like this had happened before. It was a turning-point in the practice of warfare. Richard of Hexham, who described Albrecht's mission, clearly thought, like Albrecht, that it was right to spare non-combatants.

There was no other evidence besides Richard of Hexham's about the introduction of this new code of values – which is perhaps why this transition to a new code of warfare has received little or no attention in the historical literature; for example, a recent book by Stephen Pinker about the decline of violence in history made no mention of it because no one has written about it. This was one of the great changes in human history which has just not been noticed. Yet it was, Professor Gillingham argued, the start of the idea that certain people should be regarded as non-combatants in warfare and therefore should not be killed or captured.

In this Commemoration Lecture, well illustrated by slides of contemporary texts and images, Professor Gillingham gave members of the Society an understanding of a largely unremarked shift in values in Britain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a shift which was the start of a new type of rule of warfare which was eventually incorporated into the Geneva Conventions and is still upheld as an ideal.

Hugh Arbuthnott

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE DE LA WARRS: A HISTORY OF A SUSSEX FAMILY

Julian Porter 15th November 2012

Julian Porter is Curator of Bexhill Museum and expounded his subject in the context of a richly illustrated history of Bexhill-on-Sea which featured not only the De La Warrs but other famous families such as the Sackvilles, Wests and Brasseys.

Bexhill's history more or less started in 771 with the arrival of King Offa, who "defeated the men of Hastings by arms". ('Hastings' then referred to a larger area comprising probably what is today Rother District and Hastings). He then established a minster Church at what is now, heavily altered, St Peter's in Bexhill Old Town, in what was at that time a small Saxon community.

Bexhill Manor as such, owned by the Bishops of Chichester, was largely destroyed in the Norman invasion of 1066, but what was left was awarded to Robert, Count of Eu, whose grandson Robert gave it back to the Bishops in 1148. Around this time the significant Manor House or Court Lodge, cruelly demolished in 1968, was built. The ruins still survive.

In 1564 Queen Elizabeth I took possession of Bexhill Manor and gave it to her cousin Sir Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset. The Sackvilles, Earls (later Dukes) of Dorset, whose main seats were Buckhurst Place and Knole House, owned Bexhill right through until the mid-nineteenth century.

During that period Bexhill was just a small farming village uphill from the sea. However, between 1804 and 1814, soldiers of the King's (Hanoverian) German Legion were stationed in substantial barracks in the town and Martello Towers were built along the coast to repel any French invasion. The latter were also used by the Coast Blockade to combat smuggling and frequent skirmishes took place between the Blockade Men and the Smugglers, the most famous being the Battle of Sidley Green in 1828.

In 1813 Elizabeth Sackville, the youngest daughter of the Duke of Dorset, married George West, the 5th Earl De La Warr. The West/De la Warrs were/are a distinguished Sussex family whose ancestors fought at Crecy and in the 17th Century were instrumental in saving the Jamestown Settlement in America, the 12th Baron becoming Governor of Virginia. In 1845, on the the death of Elizabeth's cousin, the 5th Duke of Dorset, the dukedom became extinct and the Sackville estates, including Bexhill, passed through Elizabeth to George West who obtained a royal licence to use his wife's name in front of his own, hence the familiar name "Sackville-West".

To complete the picture of Bexhill families, Julian Porter finally brought in the Brassey family, starting with the great nineteenth-century civil engineer Thomas Brassey, who built half the world's railways! Late in life he settled in St Leonards at Beauport Park and his son, also called Thomas, became MP for Hastings and the first Earl Brassey. He completed the works planned by his father to build the great estate of Normanhurst Court where he

settled with his wife Annie, the great Victorian explorer and collector ("A Voyage in the *Sunbeam*") on whose life and work Julian Porter is a formidable expert. Their daughter Muriel Brassey married Viscount Cantelupe, later to become the 8th Earl De La Warr, in 1891 thus cementing the family's connection with Bexhill. They refurbished the old Manor House and settled there until their divorce (see later).

Reginald Windsor Sackville, 7th Earl de la Warr

It was the previous 7th Earl De La Warr, Reginald, who had decided to transform the sleepy rural village of Bexhill into an exclusive seaside resort. He contracted the builder John Webb to construct the first sea wall and to lay out the fashionable De La Warr Parade including the luxurious Sackville Hotel. Webb was given the land extending from Sea Road to the Polegrove in part payment where he developed the modern town of Bexhill. The 7th Earl died in 1896, having already transferred the running of the Bexhill estate to his son.

It was Gilbert Sackville, the 8th Earl De la Warr, who built the first entertainments hall in Bexhill at the Kursaal on the Sackville estate. He is also famous for starting the first motor races in Britain along De La Warr Parade. However, in 1901, the Earl, who was something of a cad, went off with a Miss Turner, an actress from the Kursaal and Muriel sued for divorce. She won, was given sole custody of her three children and promptly moved back to the Brassey home at Normanhurst.

Muriel De La Warr was a progressive woman, a Socialist, Suffragist and a Theosophist. Her son Herbrand largely followed in her footsteps. In 1915, at the age of 15, he inherited title of the 9th Earl De La Warr, became the first Socialist Mayor of Bexhill in 1932 and later a Labour Government Minister. It was during his mayoralty that the competition 'to design and build an entertainments hall for the people of Bexhill' was held, which resulted in the winning modernist design of Erich Mendelsohn and Serge Chermayeff for the De La Warr Pavilion, the first welded steel frame structure built in this country.

The Pavilion opened in 1935 and became a magnet for the social and cultural life of the town. The Kursaal soon became redundant and was demolished. But the Second World War put a temporary halt to the fun, Bexhill suffering significant bomb damage including the destruction of the Metropole Hotel.

Independent schools and tourism were the sources of the town's prosperity both before and immediately after the war but these sectors have suffered decline over the last 30 years or so and the town has become more residential in nature and particularly popular with the retired.

Nick Hollington

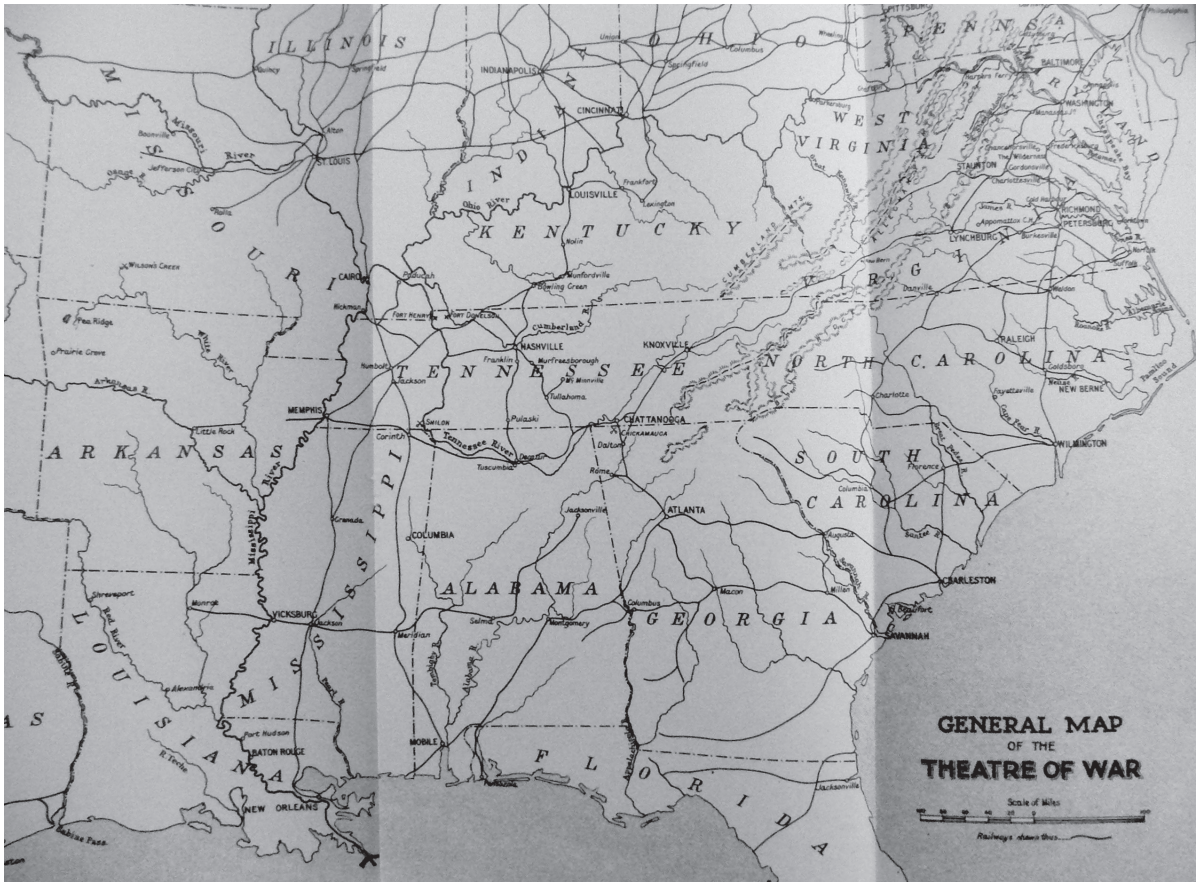
BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CAUSES OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Bob Evans 13 December 2012

Due to illness, this was a change to the advertised lecture 'The History of Medicinal Plants, Ancient and Modern'.

Coming just six weeks after a presidential election in which the 44th President was returned for a second term of office in a quietly accepted result, Mr Evans contrasted tonight's lecture with events that followed the election of the 16th President. He introduced his subject by reference to a map of the United States of America, explaining that whilst military engagements did take place over a wide area, the majority and certainly the focus of the campaigning and therefore the location of the major conflicts took place within a relatively small area from Tennessee to Virginia (see map).



In seeking to explain the causes of the war, Mr Evans first needed to dispel a myth that it was regarding the abolition of slavery – it was not! Certainly slavery *became* an issue, but it was not a *cause*. So embedded has the abolition of slavery become in the 'history' of the war that Mr Evans necessarily devoted much time to dispel this myth.

The result of the 1860 Presidential election so distressed some nine million citizens that eleven states, independently of each other, decided to leave (secede) the union which was the United Stated of America with those supporting this line being known as secessionists. The newly elected President, Abraham Lincoln, regarded the move as treason and hence the term 'rebels' coming to be used to describe the secessionists. The secessionist states found Lincoln's language deeply offensive, believing that having joined the Union of their own volition they were free to leave it of their own volition. There was nothing in the Constitution of the Union that took away the 'sovereignty' of each state, which was a deeply felt loyalty that itself was the result of the way in which the British had founded the original thirteen colonies. These had been established independent of each other, each having its own Governor who answered to the British Parliament. Following the War of Independence these former colonies became independent states, which in 1787 agreed to continue their wartime alliance into a Constitutional union. The passage of time led some (such as Lincoln) to see the union as a nation-state, whilst those with an eye to the long-view recognised it as nothing more than a 'club' and like any club, having joined voluntarily, they were free to chose whether and when to end their membership. An observation not mentioned by the speaker is that those debates and perspectives regarding the nature of sovereignty and sovereign power were keen philosophical topics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (one thinks of Hobbes and Hume among others) and which were themselves another legacy from the 'old colonial master' spilling out from the justifications and legitimisation of rebellion against the rule of Charles I in the English Civil War.)

So it was that the cause of the American Civil War was not itself a moral issue, but a constitutional crisis brought about by the political failure to explicitly express within the Constitution (the 'rules of membership of the club') the subject of sovereignty in respect of 'States' Rights'. Such failure it seems has not been subsequently addressed within the United States of America (having been overshadowed by the emancipation movement and pursuit of civil rights), and it is only the reliance upon the subsequent concept of a 'national' identity which keeps the constitutional ogre asleep. Meanwhile, Mr Evans observed, on this side of the Atlantic the current status of the European Union and the political debates around it provide uncomfortable parallels.

However, even within the secessionist States, there was division as with any civil war. For instance, at the Battle of Vicksburg the State of Missouri sent 39 regiments, 17 of which fought for the secessionists (the 'South') and 22 for the Unionists ('the North'). How, then, did abolition of slavery come to take centre stage in the popular imagination as the cause of the American Civil War?

For some eighty years prior to Abraham Lincoln's election, the abolition movement had existed within the Union as it had in many European countries, but in the United States it was generally less influential than, for example, in Britain. Slave ownership existed to significant levels throughout the Union, nor was the abolitionist movement founded upon a religious motivation:

660,000 slaves in the United States were owned by ministers of the Gospel;
5,000 Methodist ministers owned 217,000 slaves;
6,500 Baptist ministers owned 120,000 slaves;
1,400 Episcopalian ministers owned 88,000 slaves.

Many preached that slavery was ordained by God and sanctified by the Gospels. However, the abolitionist movement was growing – particularly in the North as the consequence of its being the main point of entry and settlement for immigrants from Europe, who brought with them ideas from the great liberalising movement flourishing across nineteenth-century Europe. With the election of Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency of the United States, the polarisation between the liberal-leaning North which sought not abolition but the limitation of slavery to those eleven secessionist States of the South which sought its extension into the newly settled areas west of the Mississippi. Lincoln went to war not to abolish slavery, but to preserve the Union (States' Right being secondary to the sovereignty of the Union) and to that end was willing to compromise with the 'South'. But the secessionists could see that as more states (without slavery) were formed into the Union as a result of the drive to the west, the position of the South would become unsustainable in future voting and abolition would follow with consequent economic and social ruination.

The association of emancipation of slaves with the *objectives* of the war was a strategic (some might argue cynical) political decision to attempt to reverse the militarily disastrous early years of the war. In profile the North and South were very different, the South having just one ninth of the industry of the North, whilst the smallholdings of the North could not compare with the vast farms and plantations of the South. Economically, therefore, the agrarian South was based upon the cheap labour provided by slavery whereas the North was based more upon wage labour. So it was that Lincoln adopted an economic attack aimed at weakening the ability of the South to maintain an aggressive field army due to insurrection from within. The North needed to buy time for its industrial and manufacturing might, as its population resource fitted it better to a war of attrition. So in the absence of an ability to match the South in the field, a means of disabling its fighting capacity needed to be urgently found. Lincoln conceived that inciting the slaves of the South to revolt would be the answer and so, half way into the war, he made his Declaration of Emancipation. It related solely to the slaves of the South and was intended to raise them to revolt. Although it failed in this, it did ensure politically that the liberal democracies of Europe (in particular Great Britain) would not enter the war on the side of the South. Meanwhile the North found a military commander (Grant) who was equal to those of the South and so time was bought on the battlefield that enabled the industrial capacity of the North to win the war through logistical and economic superiority.

Neil Clephane-Cameron

Abraham Lincoln in 1865

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

DROUGHTS, DELUGES AND DUST DEVILS: 300 YEARS OF WEATHER IN THE SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND

Ian Currie 17 January 2013

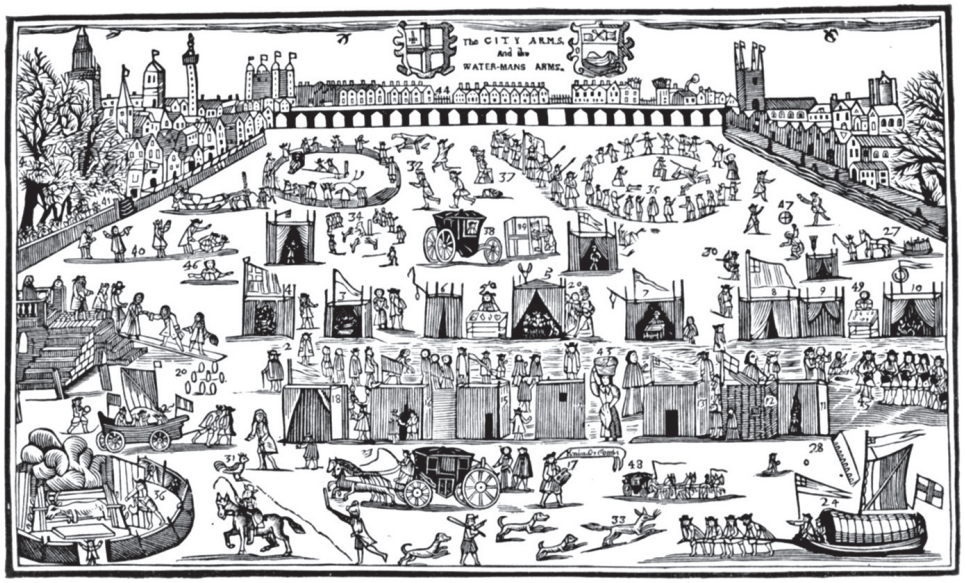
Appropriately, for a bitterly cold January evening, Ian Currie spoke to the Society on the subject of abnormal weather. Reverting to the cold outside, he commented that his weather charts were, currently, showing a marked similarity to those of January 1947, one of the coldest winters on record – hopefully not a portent.

Ian Currie had a lifelong interest in weather in all its extreme manifestations and possessed a database extending back well into the past. He also owned a vast collection of weather-related postcards, prints and relevant ephemera and was the author of several books as well as a broadcaster. His qualifications were therefore impressive.

He suggested that both the public and the media had short memories weather-wise and regarded every freakish event as "the wettest/ coldest/ hottest since records began" when, in fact, they were just an extreme reoccurrence of what had happened before – albeit centuries before. The hurricane of 1987 was well-remembered and dramatic, particularly for the devastation caused to buildings and trees. But the Great Storm of 1703 was much worse: this famous event covered a larger area and lasted much longer. There were far more fatalities and much greater damage to property and shipping. An even earlier storm, in the 1200s had caused enormous flooding and permanently diverted the course of the River Rother.

Ian did not wish to enter the Global Warming debate except to say that, historically, land and sea temperatures had risen and fallen without any apparent intervention by man's behaviour. Cold winters are common – extreme ones rare, but any man is likely to experience one or two in his lifetime. In the twentieth century, 1947 and 1963 were memorable: 1947 because of the volume of snow and its effect on a post-war austere economy; 1963 for the bitter temperatures and the length of the freeze. The coldest winter in historical terms was 1739/40 when it was estimated that sea temperatures were typically 5 degrees below today's figures. The main feature of the year was not the snow but the force of the wind and the wind-chill factor. On 31st December a reading of 26 degrees was recorded indoors and it was reported that passengers crossing the Thames by boat were frozen to death. In February, the ice on the pond in St. James' Park was 10 inches thick and London was cut off for seven weeks by ice floes in the estuary.

There was a mini-ice age in the 1690s and the decade from 1812 to 1821 was the coldest period thereafter; 1838 was a memorable year for snow with mail coaches stranded for days in deep drifts. In the period December 1853 – January 1854, the London temperature never rose above freezing.



The Frost Fair on the Thames of 1683

A romantic by-product of ice was the famous "Frost Fair" held on the Thames, the last being in 1814. The subsequent rebuilding of London Bridge and the embanking of Westminster removed the impediments to the unrestricted flow of water. Further fairs are unlikely. Whilst the fair lasted, it was a faithful reproduction of the traditional land based fair so hated by the Victorians but loved by their fathers. All Society enjoyed their boisterous rowdiness.

Floods frequently follow heavy snowfall but some flooding is exceptional. 2012 was a year when it never seemed to stop raining, but damage to property and loss of life was small. The flooding of Lynmouth in 1952 was certainly not benign: a sudden violent localised storm sent a torrent of water cascading down a narrow river bed causing immense damage and loss of life. Similarly, the East Coast floods of January 1953 saw a huge tidal surge borne inland on fierce winds, which again caused immense damage and heavy loss of life. All that is needed is a freakish concurrence of extreme conditions.

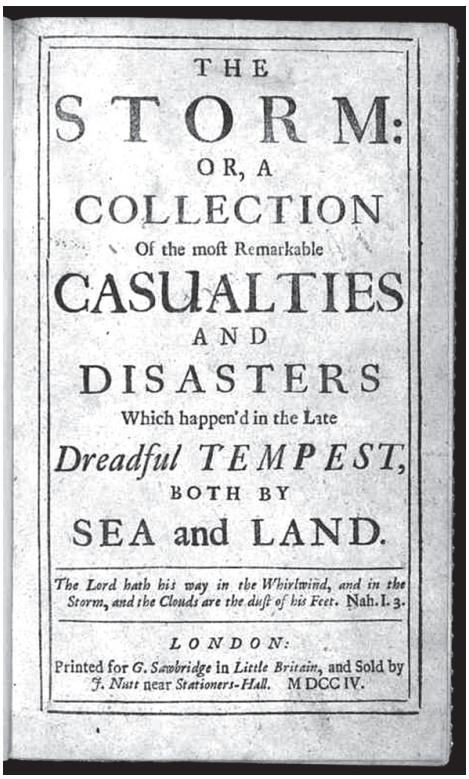
Ian made the obvious point that in the 21st century we are protected from extremes by central heating, air conditioning and double glazing but we still think our weather experiences are unique.

Finally, whilst researching this subject I happened upon a quotation from John Wesley, a man who met all extremes with great fortitude. After a torrential downpour he wrote;

> The rocks were loosened from the mountains ... several water-mills were clean swept away ... the trees were tom up by the roots and whirled away like stubble. Two women of loose character were swept away from their own door and drowned;

one was found near the place, the other was carried seven or eight miles. Hayfield churchyard was all torn up and the dead bodies were swept out of their graves. When the flood was abated they were found in several places. Some were hanging in trees; others left in meadows ... some partly eaten by dogs or wanting one or more of their members. (Thanks to Tom Fort, author of ***Under the Weather***).

David Sawyer



THE
STORM:
OR, A
COLLECTION
Of the most Remarkable
CASUALTIES
AND
DISASTERS
Which happen'd in the Late
Dreadful TEMPEST,
BOTH BY
SEA and LAND.

The Lord hath his way in the Whirlwind, and in the Storm, and the Clouds are the duſt of his Feet. Nah. I. 3.

LONDON:
Printed for *G. Sawbridge* in *Little Britain*, and Sold by *J. Nutt* near *Stationers-Hall*. M DCC IV.

Daniel Defoe's account of the Great Storm of 1703

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TOTAL WAR: FROM STALINGRAD TO BERLIN

Michael Jones 21 February 2013

On the 22nd June 1941 Operation Barbarossa was launched; the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany. The ensuing combat was on an unparalleled scale in modern warfare. More than eight million Red Army soldiers died in four years of vicious fighting. The total number of casualties of Russian soldiers and civilians has been estimated at twenty-seven million. At that time, Germany's armed forces, the Wehrmacht, was the world's most advanced, well-led, trained, equipped and motivated. The Red Army defences were breached along the entire front and by September Leningrad was besieged and German forces were only 32 kilometres from Moscow.

Michael Jones's interest in this lecture was not to follow the conventional military narrative of official histories or the memoirs of generals. Rather, his focus was on the Red Army's psychological experience of the common soldiers: their hatred of the Nazis and their bravery and suffering as they tried to make sense of the unimaginable. Drawing on the diaries kept by the participants, letters and the personal testimonies of surviving Red Army veterans whom (as he said) he was privileged to meet, Michael Jones wrote the book *Total War from Stalingrad to Berlin,* on which his talk to the Society drew. All ranks of the Red Army were strongly discouraged from keeping diaries, but some did, despite the dire consequences if discovered. With obvious emotion, Michael Jones quoted the opening lines of "Son", a poem composed by Soviet war-correspondent Pavel Antokolsky as a tribute to his son Vladimir who was killed in the battle at Stalingrad. Unusually it began with the deceased son addressing his father:

Do not call me, Father. Do not seek me,
Do not call me, do not wish me back.
We are on a route uncharted, fire and blood erase our track.
On we fly on wings of thunder, never more to sheathe our swords -
All of us in battle fallen, not to be brought back by words.

Pavel Antokolsky (left) *and his son Vladimir who was killed in action on 6 July 1942 in his first clash with the Germans*

The Soviet authorities saw the potential of the poem to reach out to the people and it was widely circulated. Stalin recognised that it was Total War and the survival of the USSR was at stake. He was astute enough to realize that the appeal of Communism on its own was not strong enough to motivate the people to the amount necessary to win the war and so evoked "Mother Russia". Heroes from Russia's history were resurrected to fight with the Red Army for Mother Russia and the war officially became the Great Patriotic War.

Over 800,000 women served in the Soviet forces, many in combat roles. When asked why they fought, they simply stated, "We were fighting for our children, if we had lost, we all would have been slaves." Typical was Nina Petrova, a female sniper on the Leningrad front who won the Order of Glory for heroism or Ida Segal who fought as a paratrooper at Stalingrad. She wrote to her family in February 1943, "I voluntarily joined the Red Army I am proud of that ... I am now a mature person holding well informed opinions. I am no longer a young brunette student of Kiev University ... rather I am a commander in the Red Army ... You would not recognise me now, I wear trousers, a military tunic, leather boots, a trench coat and I look great!"

In the first six months of the war the Red Army had lost over 2,760,000 men. The Germans did not think it possible for a country to sustain such losses, but USSR did. The weather now changed dramatically and the German advance became bogged down in the mud. With the onset of the Russian winter and temperatures falling, the Germans suffered as they had not anticipated their campaign to last into the winter; they were not equipped or clothed for the conditions. On the 6th.December 1941 with the temperature below 30 degrees Celsius the Red Army launched a general offensive along the entire front. Despite desperate resistance, by January the Germans were retreating. By early Spring 1942 with both sides exhausted. the front stabilised.

On Hitler's instruction in June, the Germans began Operation Blue with the aim to occupy Stalingrad, to cut the communications between the Don and Volga rivers and to capture the vital oil reserves in the Caucasus. (Hitler was mesmerised, Michael Jones thought, by the city that bore the name of the Soviet leader). This change of direction of the German attack had not been anticipated, resulting in heavy civilian casualties as the city had been considered a safe area and its population was swollen by evacuees from other war zones. The German panzers reached the Volga and General Paulus the commander of the Sixth Army ordered an all-out attack on the city. The situation was desperate and in July Stalin issued his Not a Step Back decree and appealed to the defending soldiers' patriotism. He appointed General Zhukov as deputy Supreme Commander. General Vasily Chuikov, the commander of the defending forces, was a tough character who understood the German intentions to pin the defenders down, to deny them supplies and reinforcements by air attacks and shelling. To counter this, Chuikov ordered his troops to engage them closely which nullified their air attacks and to make strong points from the ruined buildings, slowing the advance, and to maintain a foothold on the west bank of the Volga and by doing so, prevent the city's capture.

In the north, Leningrad faced another winter under siege, by now more than a million inhabitants had starved to death and it was vital to get supplies into the city. This was achieved by building a temporary road over the frozen Lake Ladoga. By January 1943 the siege was lifted. At Stalingrad the Sixth Army became overextended and fought to a

standstill and in November the Red Army struck back with two offensives that encircled Germans inside the city. Hitler forbade the Sixth Army to break out and retreat promising that they would be supplied by air and a relief force would be sent. Both failed and with the situation hopeless Paulus surrendered.

Time did not permit Michael Jones to enlarge upon the last major German offensive in July 1943 against the Kursk salient which was defeated. The year of 1944 saw the Red Army advance rapidly on all fronts and the expulsion of German forces from Russian soil. The advancing Russian forces liberated the death camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz. The battle- hardened soldiers of the Red Army struggled to comprehend the appalling sights they witnessed at the camps; they were shocked and disturbed and their hatred of the Nazis intensified. Many of the veterans interviewed said they still cannot forget what they saw and still suffer nightmares. The Red Army launched Operation Bagration: the offensive that led to the fall of Berlin in April 1945; as they fought their way into the Reichstag, Hitler committed suicide.

Michael Jones ended his talk with an emotional tribute to the soldiers and civilians of the USSR for, without their sacrifice ,the Allies would not have won the war against Nazi Germany. He then read an extract from a poem by an artilleryman who survived, Mikhail Borisov, “I Saw the Battle”. To comprehend fully the Russian experience I thoroughly recommend Michael Jones’s book *Total War* which sets out in depth the interviews with the veterans, their poems, diaries and letters.

Malcolm Stocker

General Vasily Chuikov

General Zhukov

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE HISTORY OF SISSINGHURST

Adam Nicolson 21 March 2013

Celebrated author and social historian Adam Nicolson spoke on "The History of Sissinghurst". He has published extensively, notably on the English gentry and their part in the development of English society; and on the making of the King James Bible.

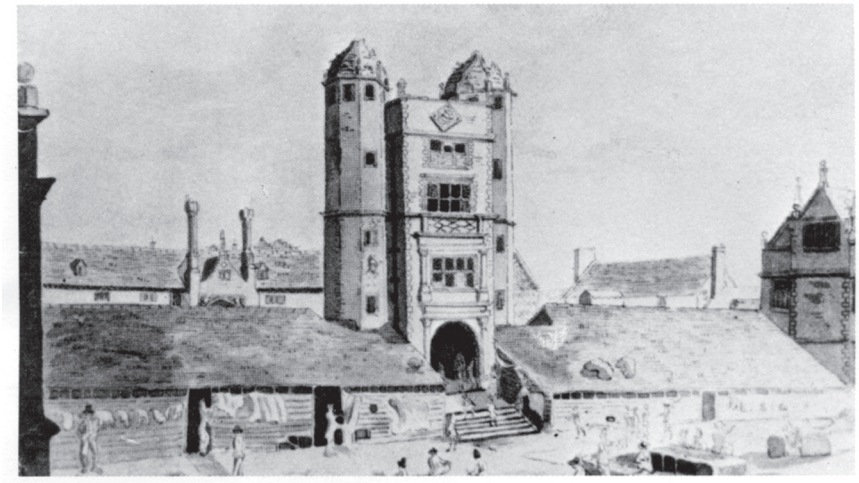
Illustrating the talk to convey a "virtual experience of the beauty at Sissinghurst", Mr Nicolson began by reviewing the broad span of the castle's history. There had been a settlement on the site since Saxon times ("Saxon hurst "perhaps). There was a self-sufficient manor by the thirteenth century and extant buildings dating from medieval times were extensively altered in the sixteenth century. Sissinghurst has had a fascinating history. Edward III was the first of several royal visitors, who have included Queen Mary I and Elizabeth I, over the last 600–700 years, It became a prisoner of war camp in the eighteenth century; then was turned into a workhouse; and at one time was used to provide accommodation for labourers. But the story of Sissinghurst did not end there.

An early important phase of Sissinghurst's history was when the estate was acquired – as part of a 15,000 acre land holding spreading across England from the Weald – in the 1530s by John Baker, secretary to Thomas Cromwell and notorious as "Butcher Baker" for a brutally rapacious approach and for the large number of heretics he condemned to be burned. Politically made of "the willow not the oak", however, John Baker was later able to host Queen Mary as a visitor to Sissinghurst. On his death in 1560, his son Richard spent the vast fortune accumulated by his father on developing the buildings into a major country house with enormous courts, enabling Sissinghurst to host Queen Elizabeth I for

The Courtyard of the Elizabethan house. All but the top right-hand corner (the South Cottage) was demolished c. 1800

three days. Richard used the "onion structure" concept to integrate the house with the surrounding countryside by creating a park area which was designed so that, from the central tower, a panoramic view could be had of the whole course of a hunt.

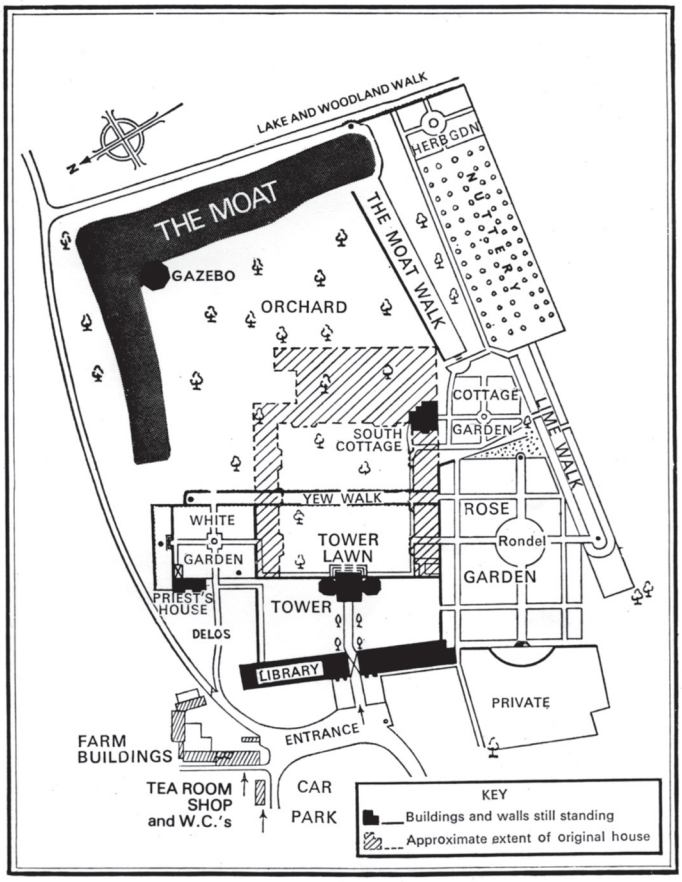
Being Royalists and suspected of being Catholics, the Bakers did not prosper in the seventeenth century, a situation made worse by producing daughters not sons. So, by the eighteenth century, Sissinghurst was neglected and debt ridden. Against this background, the house (now for the first time called "Castle") found itself being rented out to the Sick and Hurt Board who used it from 1757 to 1763 to accommodate 3,000 French prisoners captured in the Seven Years War. Sissinghurst was the Colditz of eighteenth-century England, full of violence and horror even by the standards of the time, as found by an inquiry into French complaints about random shootings and brutality. The buildings were largely wrecked due to their use as a prison, although enough was left at the end of the eighteenth century for Sissinghurst to be used as a poorhouse for Cranbrook Parish. Sissinghurst remained in a parlous state during the nineteenth century apart from the addition of a farmhouse for a gentleman farmer.



A drawing made in 1760 when French prisoners-of-war were housed at the Castle

In 1930 the castle and grounds were purchased by Adam Nicolson's grandmother, author and beauty Vita Sackville West, who had been unable to inherit her childhood home of Knole, as it was entailed in the male line. She and her husband, diplomat and politician Sir Harold Nicolson, were colourful and socially unconventional characters in their own right, but as far as Sissinghurst was concerned, what was transformative in the partnership was Vita's passion to restore the castle and add to the history of Sissinghurst by creating the now-famous gardens.

Combining extreme linearity with deliberate profusion of flowers, the classical with the romantic, the gardens, on which Vita had spent the family fortune, which had been receiving some 200,000 visitors a year in the 1970s, now has 5–6 million. Vita tried to recreate the "onion structure" by integrating the original manor with the surrounding countryside, in the "maîtresse de terroir" style which Vita and her family had considered so important.



When Vita purchased the estate in 1930, the estate agent's details referred to the farmhouse and the buildings seen today, but summarised the rest of the buildings as "ruins in the grounds". The restoration of the buildings and grounds in the profusely planted, terroir style preferred by Vita, became her passion – she was not the enthusiastic socialite many now suppose. She saw the tower as a glowing lantern of beauty and, integrated with it, the "tired ebullience" and profusion of the garden , as representing the integration of buildings and surrounding countryside that had been fundamental to Sissinghurst through the centuries. In Vita's mind this work was the great artistic expression which had eluded her as a poet.

Although Vita had strongly hoped that the buildings, garden and estate could be kept in the family, all her funds had been spent on improvements so that, on her death in 1962, disposal to the National Trust – rather than to a private buyer – became the preferred option. Negotiations lasted five years as the Trust necessarily convinced itself that in Sissinghurst there was a legacy of enduring importance to the public. In the early National Trust period, Vita's widower Sir Harold Nicolson would often sit in a hut popularly known as the Resident Donor's "display cabinet" and talk to visitors, whose numbers steadily increased. Vita's grandson Adam Nicolson has built on Vita's work by endeavouring to restore traditional Wealden agriculture on the estate. In this context, Adam Nicolson then turned to the issues consequent on the National Trust saving and running Sissinghurst. The family wanted to be true to the values underlying Vita's concept of integrating estate and house along the lines of the ring/onion structure as originally designed.

Harold and Vita Nicholson on the steps of the tower, photographed by Cecil Beaton

In developing the estate recently, the aims of the Nicolson family, rooted in Vita's approach of profusion and, above all, engagement, had to some degree diverged from those necessarily pursued by the National Trust. Adam Nicolson and his wife, Sarah Raven, would prefer to use small-scale farm methods to provide visitors with estate-grown, top-quality produce, while at the same time recovering some of the original Sissinghurst landscape. But this project, started enthusiastically, proved neither easy nor financially viable in the modern world.

The Trust, for its part, had to consider making the most financially from the estate through cost-driven, mass-scale methods of modern agriculture and buying in from overseas; they also had to take modern visitor catering preferences into account. Car parking had, of course, also to be provided although necessarily this and the formal layout of the gardens adopted in recent years, were at odds with Vita's concept for the estate. These strains were being constructively worked through by the family and the Trust following discussions during 2004–2009. From the estate farming already begun, a new profusion of insects had pleasingly arisen. Issues such as dependability of food supply and size of freezers were being addressed. Following recent developments at Sissinghurst, it is hoped a compromise range of local and bought-in foods would be seen there this summer.

Adrian Hall

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORY AND THE PEACE PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thomas Dolan 27 May 2013

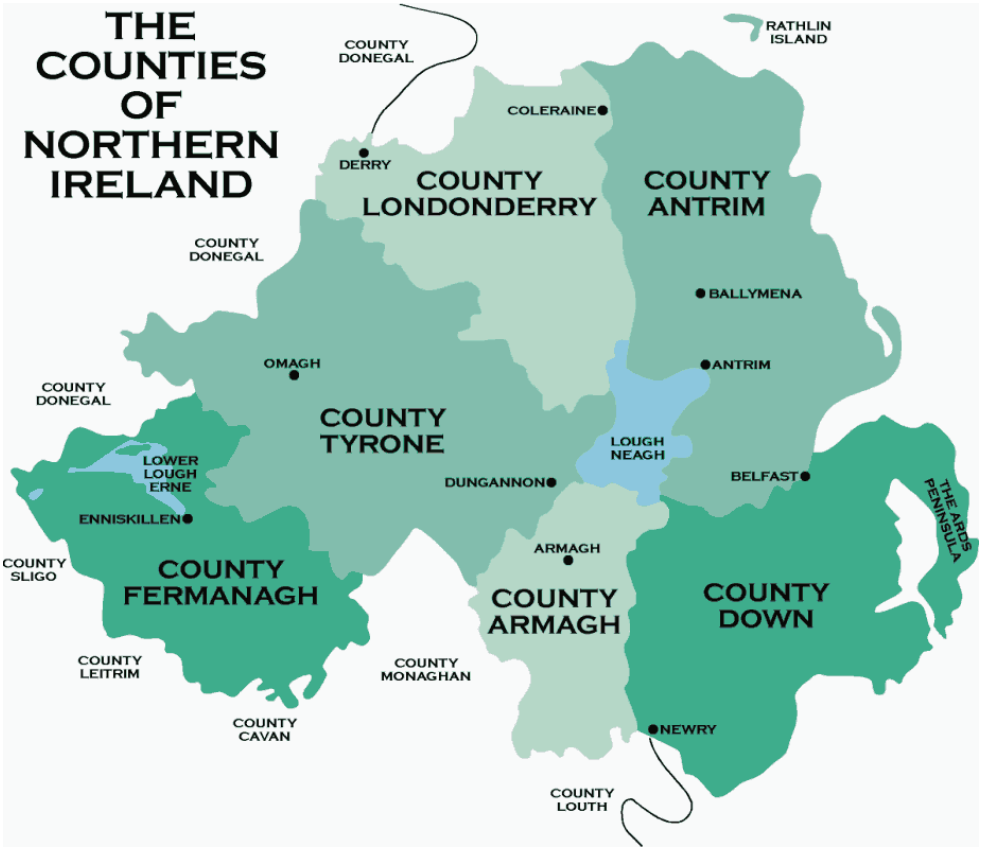
Thomas Dolan's interesting and original view on the role of history in the Northern Ireland peace process explained how the accuracy of the saying that "The Irish remember too much of their history and the English too little" did not always have the result of blocking the way to peace. In the case of the two men, John Hume and David Trimble, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts in promoting peace in Northern Ireland, and who were both keen and well-informed students of history, their knowledge contributed to their work. It helped to lead in 1998 to the Good Friday Agreement, as it is known by the Catholics and the Belfast Agreement, as it is known by the Protestants.

John Hume and David Trimble

There have been many historical studies of the violence committed by both sides in the conflict. Much less attention has been paid to peaceful developments in Northern Ireland. For John Hume, the nationalist leader of the SDLP, the awareness of how economic development in nineteenth-century Derry (as it is known to the Catholics, Londonderry to the Protestants) had changed attitudes then and could change them again. This had all the more significance for Hume because he understood that, in many ways, Derry was a microcosm of Northern Ireland, a divided city with a siege mentality. Economic expansion 150 years ago led to both communities moving out beyond the City walls from their own areas, in order to trade with the hinterland and with each other, reducing hostility between them and increasing the prosperity of both. Hume, a passionate opponent of violence, believed that this process could be repeated on a Provincial scale and so pressed for cooperation with the Irish Republic through business as well as political cooperation.

The Unionist leader, David Trimble's understanding of history led him to question the significance of some of the storied which form part of the Unionist identity. So he realised that the reconsideration of history could lead to supposedly dark deeds being seen in a more positive light.

The case of Lundy, a Protestant citizen of Londonderry during the siege of 1689, is particularly interesting. Lundy is customarily reviled by Unionists as a traitor who tried to surrender the City to its Catholic besiegers. His name is still applied to Protestants who are regarded as "unsound" on the question of maintaining the Union with Great Britain. Trimble understood that sieges in any part of Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century were seen in the lurid light of the experience of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) which had devastated Germany and other parts of central Europe. It was then the practice that if a city surrendered its population was spared, but if it was captured by force of arms, they would be put to the sword. When Magdeburg was stormed in 1631 by the army of Tilly, the commander of the forces of the Holy Roman Empire, at least 20,000 men, women and children were butchered. To Lundy, the example of Drogheda in County Louth would be ever present. There, in 1649, Oliver Cromwell, after Drogheda refused to surrender, massacred its garrison. So Trimble reasoned that, far from seeking to betray his co-religionists and fellow citizens, Lundy sought to save them from being slaughtered and deserved credit for not regarding the Unionist slogan, "No surrender" as always the only wisdom.



When the Sunningdale Conference of 1974 was convened by the British government to try to establish power-sharing in the government of Northern Ireland between Nationalist and Unionist, the British anxiety to avoid wounding the historical sensibilities of either side led to sometimes comic results. Aware that "almost any day is an anniversary in Ireland", great efforts were made to be tactful in the choice of music to accompany the social events at the Conference. It was hoped that "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" and "The Londonderry Air" passed this test.

Gerry Fitt, the then leader of the moderate Nationalists, quoted the great English champion of Home Rule for Ireland, Gladstone, in his opening remarks, but to the British politicians participating, the contemporary Troubles were the seventeenth century in modern dress.

Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Tony Blair were all ignorant of Irish history, so that when Thatcher refused to yield to the demands for political status of the IRA Hunger Strikers in the Maze Prison, she probably had no understanding of the role of the hunger strike as a weapon of modern Irish nationalism. But this insensitivity could lead her also to dismissing Unionist concerns, declaring that, as "They always said No", she disregarded their protests and negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1985 with the Irish Prime Minister, Dr Garret Fitzgerald. This conceded the right of the Irish Republic to have a voice in the affairs of Northern Ireland, an essential condition if anything like the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was to be reached.

The exploitation of Irish history of course continued and continues, notably by Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein and the Paisleyites of the Democratic Unionist Party. But the historical perceptions of Hume and Trimble introduced positive elements into the negotiations while British, more particularly English, historical ignorance did not always obstruct once they had learned the need to combine their indifference to historical issues with tact.

Richard Moore

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BATTLE ABBEY

The Springford Memorial Lecture

John Goodall 16 May 2013

Our speaker commented how lucky he was to have arrived for the meeting and seen the gatehouse of Battle Abbey glowing in the warm evening sun. It was a nostalgic return for him, as some time ago he had been asked by English Heritage to set up a display about the Battle of Hastings in their car park.

Mr Goodall started his lecture by telling us that at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Battle Abbey had been the fifteenth wealthiest in the British Isles. Much has been written about the battle but there is little information about the organisation in the Abbey.

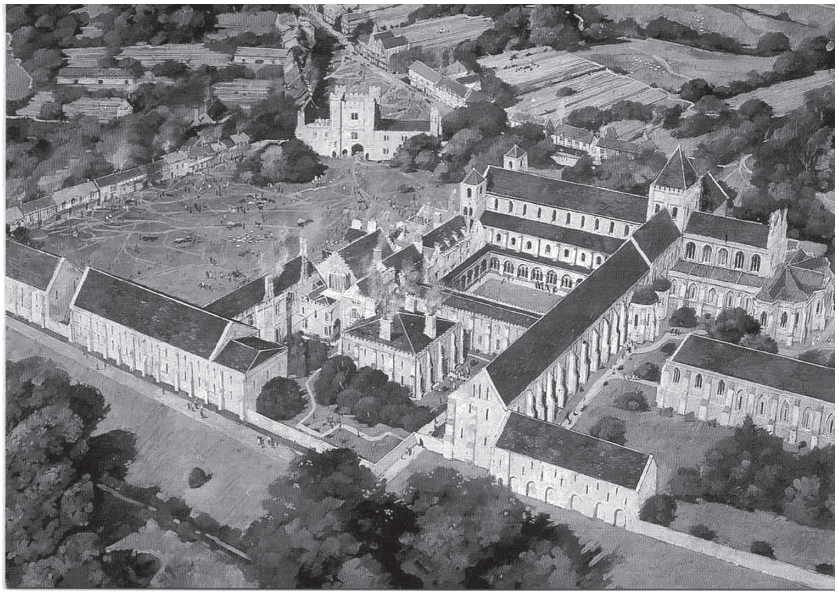
After the 'Harrowing of the North' of England in 1069, William felt he was not secure in England. He gave many of the Anglo-Saxon estates to his favoured followers, established the Rapes in the South of England, whereby he hoped they in return would protect the land from invasion and he would have an easy escape route.

Battle was always considered a very special abbey and William had decreed it should have 140 monks in the Benedictine Order. This number was never achieved and it is reported to have had only 60 monks but this number is suspect. It is believed that the High Altar of the Church had been built, at William's instruction, on the site where Harold fell. We now know that in the thirteenth century the monks moved the High Altar when the church was altered, thus according little respect for William's wishes.

The gatehouse followed the Anglo-Saxon style enclosure of properties and was very ornate. It had a cart entrance and also a pedestrian entrance which was very unusual, with two gates this meant that the inner gate could be closed and the outer gate opened in order to give alms under cover. One of the slides showed murder holes in the entrance to the upper level of the gatehouse which indicated there was something of value to protect. The Abbot was almost a prince in the Abbey, holding court and collecting rents, so there would have been money and valuables stored there. The whole site had been built to a very high standard with the latest building adornments.

At the dissolution, many of the Abbeys were given by Henry VIII to his trusted followers. Battle Abbey had previouslybeen granted a licence to crenelate the gatehouse and walls and the buildings were easily adapted to that of a very comfortable country house, especially the Abbot's House. Again slides showed how similar the buildings of Battle Abbey were to those at Cowdray and Titchfield. They all had grand chambers for entertaining.

The dormitory range had a vaulted under-croft which compensated for the fall in the ground level and enabled the full use of the entire length on the two floors above. We were



Battle Abbey then and now

told there was also a very fine latrine block with seating for 30–40 people which indicated there were set times for its use, possibly to prevent any impropriety!

In 1931 there was a great fire at Battle Abbey when much of the elaborate roof timbers were destroyed but again one slide showed a square piece in the ceiling which probably indicated a louvre similar to Cowdray and the roof timbers would have been similar to that of Henry VIII's Great Hall in Eltham Palace.

Very little is known about the Abbey Church as Anthony Browne had been instructed to raze it to the ground. What is known is that it had a grand semi-circular end behind the altar with three radiating chapels. The design was similar to Westminster Abbey which has five radiating chapels.

Mr Goodall had given us a fascinating and enthusiastic lecture and had pointed out many architectural and design similarities with other great Abbeys. He invited us to look again at the many interesting features the next time we visited Battle Abbey.

Diane Braybrooke

MANSFIELD CUMMING, THE FIRST “C” ALAN JUDD

Alan Judd was introduced to us as a writer and novelist, and particularly relevant, as the authorised biographer of Sir George Mansfield Smith-Cumming, writing a substantial book published in 1999. Alan explained that whilst he had unique access to much written material, including Mansfield Cumming’s diary from 1914 onwards, there was a dearth of material about Mansfield Cumming the man. The diary was hard work too, interpreting the handwriting was sometimes difficult, but the use of nicknames and initials added to the challenge (a copy of the 1914 diary was circulated for inspection at the meeting). The story of Mansfield Cumming is largely the story of the creation of the British Secret Intelligence Service, known now as MI6. As the first head of the Secret Service, Mansfield Cumming became known simply as “C”, which originated from his habit of signing documents with a simple “C” (in green ink).

The scene was set in 1909 with the story of Mansfield Cumming’s recruitment to a new Naval Intelligence unit. Having retired from active service in the Royal Navy in 1885, in part at least because of his chronic seasickness, Lieutenant Mansfield Smith was briefly married to Johanna Cloete, a lady from a well established South African family. Johanna died two years later of septicaemia following an operation, but he remarried within two years to Leslie Cumming, known as May, a daughter from a wealthy Scottish establishment family. The origin of the “Smith-Cumming” surname was apparently in response to the strong dynastic urge of the Cumming family. A son, Alastair, was born in late 1889, but little is known of Cumming’s activities until 1998 when he is re-engaged by the Navy to superintend the boom defences at Southampton. Back in active service, Cumming is promoted to Commander in 1906, and then in 1909 he receives an important letter from “AB” – Rear Admiral Bethell, Director of Naval Intelligence, containing an invitation to meet with him to hear about a new job opportunity – head of a new Secret Service Bureau.

Bearing in mind that at this time Mansfield Cumming was fifty years old and probably quite happy “playing with ships” and “engineering gadgets” in Southampton, but the offer was just too good to turn down and he was a man of impeccable duty. This new appointment should be seen in the context of the rising power of other nations, especially Germany, at that time: the Royal Navy was by far the strongest defence force in the world, patrolling all the oceans in support of the British Empire and its trade routes. German military and Naval expansion was being watched by many with some concern. Various types of secret services had existed in Britain from the Tudor period onwards, notably at times of war or threat: during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars British spies were active across Europe; in the 19th century, intelligence operations were run by the Foreign Office throughout India. By the late 19th century there was however no single, coherent British government intelligence organisation, which shortcoming was made apparent by the Boer war. At the beginning of the 20th century Britain was the only major country without a foreign secret service!

So in 1909, Captain Mansfield Cumming of the Royal Navy was appointed head of the Naval section of the new Secret Service Bureau, responsible for the acquisition of foreign intelligence of interest to the Admiralty. His first two assignments were to gather an assessment of the strength and development of the German Navy and to create an early warning “tripwire” system across Europe to warn of imminent hostilities. Somewhat to his surprise, and some concern, Cumming learned that alongside his appointment in this new Secret Service Bureau, a second officer, Major Vernon Kell was appointed with responsibility for home counter espionage. Rather

confusingly neither reported to the other, but were “dual heads” of the new Bureau. The two organisations were of course progenitors of MI5 and MI6. It is also amusing to note that three organisations had some interest in the Secret Service – the War Office (Vernon Kell and some existing staff), the Royal Navy (Cumming) and the Foreign Office (who did not want much to do with it, but had to pay for the Bureau!). At first Cumming found the bureaucracy unhelpful and irksome, as evident in some of his reports, correspondence and diary entries: there were also a lot of “turf” problems between his organisation and Vernon Kell’s, but he eventually learned to play the system to the his advantage, securing considerable autonomy for his organisation.

If this rather bizarre story of the creation of the Secret Service was not enough, the story of the Cumming’s first efforts at establishing an office and doing his job is the stuff of high comedy. He was assigned a small office in Victoria Street right opposite the Army & Navy Stores: Cumming objected to this location on the grounds that he kept running into old friends who would ask what he was doing there! So, at his own expense, he set up shop instead in Ashley Gardens in Vauxhall Bridge Road. He had no staff and, according to his diary, he sat in his office waiting for someone to call in; nobody did. He was advised not to make approaches or take initiatives for fear of disclosing his identity! He was also initially denied access to War Office files and existing agents, and was told to keep away from the embassies (sole province of the Foreign Office). His superiors, from whom he sought an agenda, were very busy and it took some weeks to meet with them. Bored, Cumming, took up learning German for a couple of months!

Despite this inauspicious start, Mansfield Cumming did achieve some early progress through his advocacy of “third country operations” whereby information on Germany, for example, could usefully be acquired in Belgium, Holland, Austria, France or Italy. In fact one city, Brussels, was something of a “spy capital” where semi-professional spies were readily available for hire to the highest bidder! Cumming did not however place a lot of trust in many of these paid agents, referring to them as “scallywags” and “rascals”. He preferred using businessmen who in the course of their travels could pick up useful intelligence. But some of his agents were ordinary people “trainspotters” who from their homes would observe and report on railway movements (the German Army moved on rail).

One particularly interesting story that was recounted concerned five Belgians who came forward to volunteer spying for the British. Cumming’s agent in the field was a former artillery officer, Captain Henry Landau. One of the conditions requested by the Belgians was that they were to be recruited as regular soldiers with pay, uniforms and pensions. Landau realised that the bureaucracy back in London would react far too slowly to such a demand, so he took the initiative of reassuring the Belgians that their request had been approved. This Belgian network, to become known as La Dame Blanche, expanded substantially and did sterling work for the SIS and is a story in itself. After the war, Landau had to confess his employment deception to both Cumming and the Belgians. Rather than reprimand Landau, Cumming approved the initiative and it is a mark of his sense of honour that he fought for and obtained from the War Office recognition, pensions, honours and medals for over 1000 members of the network.

In 1914, Mansfield Cumming was involved in a serious road accident in France, in which his son Alastair was killed. Legend has it that in order to escape the car wreck he was forced to amputate his own leg using a pen knife. This is typical of some of myths associated with Mansfield Cumming, as hospital records have shown that while both his legs were broken, his left foot was amputated the day after the accident. Apparently when he wished to get attention in a meeting he was known to

stab his leg with a penknife, shocking those who were unaware that it was made of wood!

It was during the war that the Secret Service Bureau two arms were named the Security Service (MI5) and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). In fulfilling his Royal Navy assignments, Mansfield Cumming had agents who were able to compile a detailed account of the German losses at the Battle of Jutland in 1916, confirming the Royal Navy's view that the damage was considerably more than the Germans had admitted. In fact the High Seas Fleet of the German Navy never ventured out into the North Sea again. The same sources obtained intelligence on submarine production and aviation developments in Germany, not just during the war, but afterwards in the 1920's when Germany started discreetly re-arming contrary to the Treaty of Versailles.

The unrest in Russia that ultimately gave rise to the Communist Revolution led SIS to running a number of agents in Russia, including the famous Sidney Reilly "Ace of Spies". Mansfield Cumming also took on responsibility for setting up a spy network in Ireland in response to the unrest there and the activities of the IRA. However a massacre of many of his agents dimmed his enthusiasm for operations in Ireland.

It was in 1919 that Mansfield Cumming received his knighthood, clear public recognition of the high esteem in which he was held. Then, quite suddenly, in 1923 Cumming suffered a fatal angina attack and it is perhaps appropriate that he died on the sofa in his office. His single-minded devotion to effecting the autonomy of the Secret Intelligence Service became his legacy to that organisation and such was the respect of his successors that the chiefs all continued to sign documents with the green ink "C" (then for "Chief"). In fiction Mansfield Cumming has lived on in Le Carre's novels as Control, and in Ian Fleming's James Bond novels as "M", where his first initial was used instead of "C".

Trevor Devon

Book Reference: "The Quest for C; Mansfield Cumming and the Founding of the Secret Service" by Alan Judd, published by Harper Collins in 1999.

Captain Sir George Mansfield Smith-Cumming

BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FISHBOURNE AND THE EARLY DAYS OF ROMAN SUSSEX

Dr Helen Poole 18 July 2013

Fishbourne, just west of Chichester, is probably the county's best-known domestic inheritance from the Roman era. Its remarkable mosaic floors and recreated garden attract many visitors. But most of us remain ignorant of how the Romans governed Sussex during their long occupation of Britain, and on one of the hottest evenings of the year we gathered to hear Dr Helen Poole give a brisk, witty,well-informed and well-illustrated talk on the subject.

As we learned at school, the first Roman invasion was by Julius Caesar; he told us so in his own book. Caesar landed in eastern Kent, probably at Richborough, and actually did so twice, in 55 and 54 BC. It is likely that his expeditions were aimed, at least in part, in interrupting the support that the Celts of Britain were giving to their relations the Gauls, against whom Caesar was waging a major war. Capturing enemies for slavery might have provided another motive, and no doubt his men were also spying out the land for possible future invasions.

Caesar would have found a remarkably civilised Celtic people in the South East, as evidenced by their surviving artefacts in the form of weapons and personal ornaments. These people lived in thatched roundhouses and were organised into tribal kingdoms whose names have come down to historians but whose boundaries and forms of governance remain largely unclear, because, unlike the Romans, they left no written records. Despite their skill in metal-working, they appear not to have used much armour in battle, preferring near-nakedness and woad. The latter is a useful coagulant in case of wounds but, as Dr Poole pointed out, this was little use against the kind of weaponry ranged against them.

At this point and for a long time afterwards the Romans were at the top of their military form. Their commanders and legionaries had learned from their enemies and outpaced them in tactics and technology. They had good armour and used it sensibly – as for example in the testudo formation, guarded by shields on all sides and above, which allowed a squad to make rapid advances without serious danger to it, having hurled their lances. They could also inflict substantial damage from a distance with the bolts from the ballista. Against these devices the Celts of Britain could rarely prevail.

It is almost certain that Caesar's Romans made no attempt to reach Sussex. They were uncomfortable with long sea passages; the county was very well-forested; their time in England was brief. The story of a battle on Mount Caburn by Lewes is likely to be untrue, and certainly no archaeological evidence has survived to support it.

Some decades later, under the emperor Caligula, a second invasion was planned but called off at the last minute and, after his murder, it was left to his uncle Claudius to carry it out in AD 43. The reasons for it are not wholly clear, but we do know that some, if not most, of the British tribes were closely related to those in Gaul and likely to have continued to supply them with help in their opposition to the Roman occupation there. To defeat and subdue

them would have been a logical aim if Gaul were to be finally pacified. A pretext was therefore found in the form of a professed invitation from this side of the Channel from a local king, Verica, who was an ally of Rome but who had been expelled from his kingdom.

In principle, Sussex would have been a prime site for an invasion. In particular, Fishbourne, at the head of Chichester Harbour, would have provided a sheltered anchorage and ample supplies for the men, but there is no actual evidence to suggest that it was used. It is unchallenged that the Romans once again chose eastern Kent as their landing-place. It was a huge invasion – perhaps by 40,000 men with all their equipment – and the shortest possible Channel crossing would have been advisable. In the event it was highly successful, and very quickly the whole south-eastern part of England fell to the invader. Claudius himself paid a brief visit and issued the customary edicts, but the Roman in charge of the operation was Vespasian (later himself emperor). Of course there was opposition, – Boudicca is, without doubt, the best-known rebel, but she struck later, in about 65 AD – but there must have been others. She took the Roman centres of St Albans, Colchester and London but was eventually defeated.

Once established, the Romans garrisoned strong points but allowed the Britons very largely to govern themselves through their existing tribal structures. There would have been no doubt that the Romans were in charge, though local Celts useful to them could petition for Roman ctizenship. The senior caste of Romanised Celts must have had an easy life.
The local tribes in Sussex were the Atrebates or the Regnenses, and the king's name that has come down to us is that of the Romanised Celt Cogidumnus or Togidubnus, who may have come originally from Silchester in Berkshire. He is mentioned by Tacitus (whether accurately or not) and there is an inscription at Chichester that hints strongly at his role. He is the most likely early occupant of Fishbourne, but whoever it was, he would have been assured of some safety because Chichester itself was a major Roman centre, big enough to have its own amphitheatre.

The building of Fishbourne was begun at about the time that Boudicca revolted. Despite its Celtic connections, the palace is a Roman rather than a Celtic building. Its layout and surviving decoration are Roman not local; and it is very large. In fact, its floor plan makes it the largest secular Roman building north of the Alps, and visitors see only a part, for a substantial part remains hidden under the houses of the village. While everything above ground level has disappeared, enough has survived beneath for archaeologists to have some confidence that it had arched colonnades and a large garden (since reconstructed) in its inner courtyard. On the south side, now still buried, would have been a portico above an entrance leading to the garden and across it to the audience chamber in the north wing. It was supported by piles driven into the mud beneath. It would have had plastered walls and the usual statuary. Rings, seals and pottery fragments – some of Aretine ware, which preceded the better-known Samian – have survived. It is most famous for its mosaics, originally in black and white but later overlaid with polychrome tesserae. We do not know whether craftsmen were imported for the purpose or recruited locally.

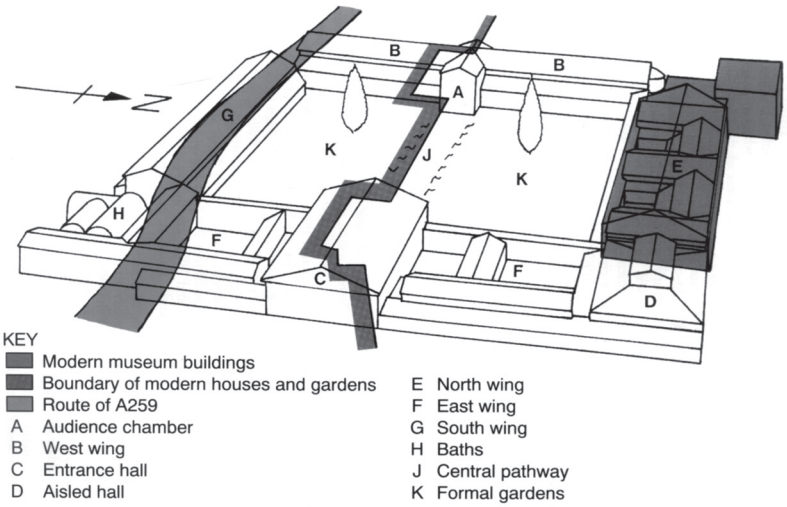
Sufficient remains have been found in the rest of Sussex to show the extent of Roman influence. The early Wealden iron industry is evidenced by bloomeries, for example at Beauport. Villas of the early period are well-known, for example at Southwick which revealed good mosaics with unusual tesserae, probably from the Near East. It now lies

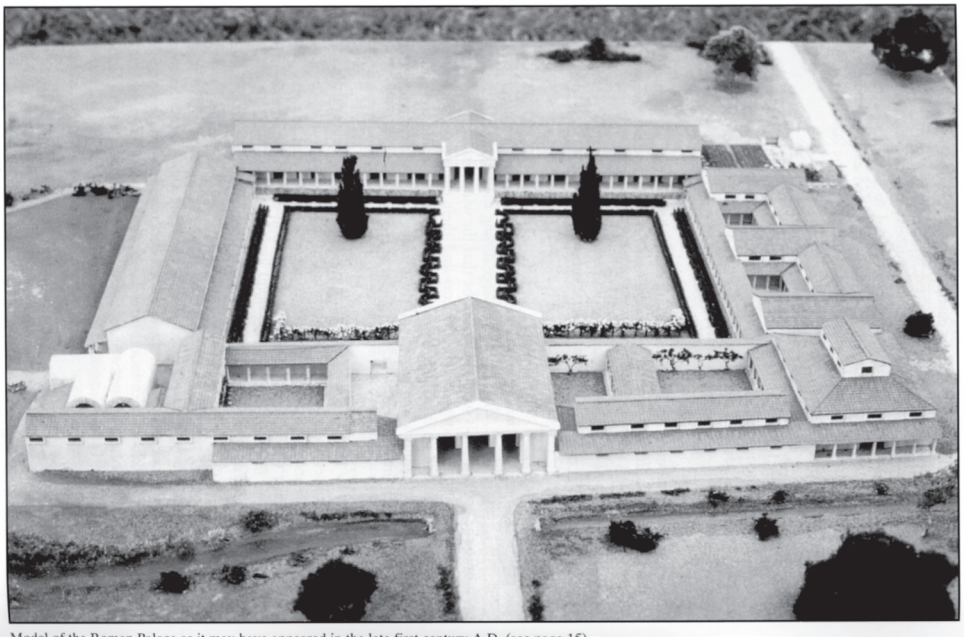
almost entirely under housing, and that at Eastbourne has been claimed by the sea. Few others have survived. Coins and ornaments abound. The Roman roads are well-known and would have been an improvement on the original need to proceed along river courses or ancient trackways, neither of which would have been very suitable for large bodies of soldiery on the move.

There were also coastal forts, though mostly established later when the Saxons became troublesome. The large castle at Pevensey, for example, probably dates from the fourth century. It was at the beginning of the fifth century when the overstretched Romans withdrew to concentrate on their continental possessions.

There must be many more reminders of Roman times still hidden from us, and continued development (such as the building of new roads) may well provide some of them. It is almost certain that we already possess all the relevant documentation about the period; what is missing is the fuller picture to be provided by further archaeology. It may be possible that modern non-invasive technology can provide it.

George Kiloh





Model of the Roman Palace as it may have appeared to the late first century AD