



FRIENDS OF FARTHING DOWNS and HAPPY VALLEY

Marking the early history of Coulsdon through an
Exhibition and related activity on the Downs
on 2 September 2023

LIVING IN COULSDON 2000 YEARS AGO

The 75th anniversary of Hope-Taylor's work, is an opportunity to reflect not only on the light he shed on early history in this area, but perhaps too on the latest studies of Roman and Saxon history around Coulsdon, which further deepens our understanding of how significant this area was 2000 years ago. It's an opportunity also to interest today's children afresh in the ancient history of their neighbourhood – complementing the work being done on natural history that is reflected in the Friends' nature trail booklet *Exploring Happy Valley and Farthing Downs*.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The map of Ancient Britain published in 2010 cites Farthing Downs as a site of 'early mediaeval' funerary importance. Only ten other places significant in ancient history within a twenty mile radius of these Downs get a mention: five iron age defensive sites (the one at Wimbledon has the name 'Caesar's Camp', though wholly unconnected with Julius' invasion in 54BC), religious sites at Worth and Stoke D'Abernon; and the much earlier Bronze age funerary site at Greenwich. Included too on the Ancient Britain map is the roman villa at Lullingstone, a roman burial site at Keston and, of course – Londinium itself (fast emerging on the north side of the river Thames).

Given how dominant London and southeast England are these days, it perhaps comes as a surprise that only ten small locations in a national map covering everything from Neolithic to early Mediaeval history were in existence within 20 miles of Farthing Downs 2000 years ago! The picture doesn't change much even if the radius is widened to 35 miles – save along the Sussex coast where there are quite a number of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age, Roman, and early Mediaeval sites of importance.

According to Prof Fawcett, it appears that in early times, settlers avoided the lowlands "in favour of higher ground above the tree-line, and only below the tree-line where shallow soils could be worked with simple implements". He makes the point that it's only because Anglo Saxon, Jute, Celtic speaking Belgae, and Scandinavian migrants favoured river valley bottoms where oxen-yoked ploughs could cope with heavier soils, that lowland England became more populated. Domesday, and Poll Tax records of the 14C show lowland and scarpland England becoming more densely developed.

Contrast this agrarian way of life with more industrial living across the west of Upland Britain where for two centuries tin had already been traded across Europe via St. Michael's Mount. In the Forest of Dean too, iron had long been worked up into currency bars, coins of bronze being forged, and even gold being minted. With such development came hill forts as at Maiden Castle and Bredon Hill to give communities protection against raiders. All well before Farthing Downs saw its elementary field system evolve.



OS Ancient Britain showing 20 and 35 miles from Farthing Downs

ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON FARTHING DOWNS

- In 1770 One burial mound opened up at the northern cluster
- In 1871 J Wickham Flower opened up sixteen burial mounds
- In 1944 Hope-Taylor maps the droveway and the whole field system
- In 1948/9 Hope-Taylor does more mapping of burial mounds
- In 2006 Ground near the Millenium Cairn is explored
- In 2005/6 Extensive reassessment of the previous work and follow up



Above: Hope-Taylor at work in 1948
Below: Hope-Taylor and colleague 1948



THE ARCHEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AT COULSDON

Neolithic 4000 BC – 2300 BC

2 flint axes, some flint tools, and the Fairdene Road axe

Bronze Age 2300 BC – 800 BC

Pits found and some pottery

Iron Age 800 BC – 43 AD

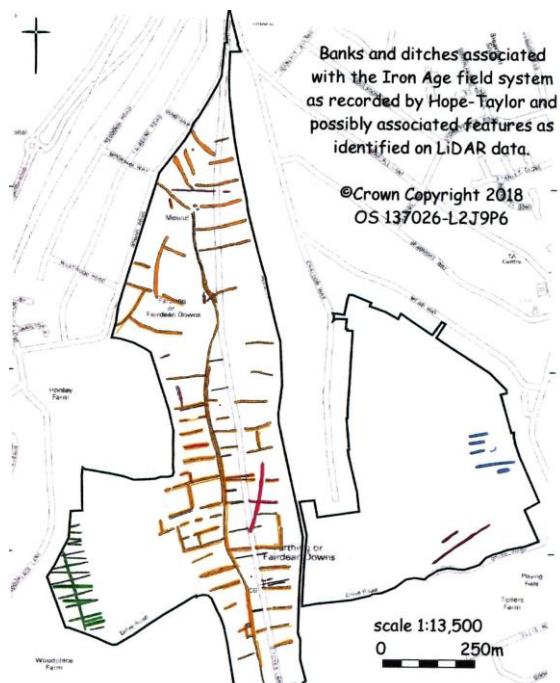
Central pathway (droveway) developed along the length of the Downs, and a system of small fields, all around 200 BC; a sword, pottery, protective gear, hair comb, and decorative beads

Roman AD 43 – 410 AD

Evidence of Saxons already living on the Downs in the Roman era, Samian ware from Gaul found

Mediaeval 410 AD – 1066 AD

Saxon burials around 650 AD in three groups on the Downs – north, central, and south, including of men, women, children; and some high status community leaders.



LIMITS OF THE EVIDENCE

Apart from the few artifacts listed above, virtually the only hard evidence we have about these early Anglo-Saxon folk on Farthing Downs is their dead bodies – some two dozen in all so far, amassed through archaeological digs about a century ago. Where they lived, how long they lived, what they ate, how they were dressed, their complexion and state of health remains largely a mystery. Historians hint that Coulsdon men lived in farmsteads near the Downs, and perhaps even in tiny dwellings within the tiny fields. But it is all speculation.

What is clear is that much of England at the turn of that millennium was entering a period of profound change as immigration from the continent grew apace, and where the dominant Celtic culture from Gaul would soon be challenged by the arrival of the Romans – people who could read and write and had great organisational skills. Paganism would give way to Christianity, though in time the heptarchy of Anglo-Saxon tribes would force the Romans out, leaving behind the walled city of London, and the period now known as the ‘dark ages’.

A POSTSCRIPT

This is not quite the end of the story however. The modern metropolis of London has thrown up two codicils about Coulsdon man in the first century AD. The development in the late 1960s of the Wates estate at Stoats Nest unearthed several burials together with Romano-British pottery and coinage dating from the first century, suggesting that the area around Coulsdon Woods was perhaps part of a larger settlement pattern around the Downs. And in 2015 two late Roman burials were discovered as the Cane Hill asylum was being redeveloped.

Finally between 2015 and 2022 major work on the car park at Lion Green exposed numerous sites from the Roman and Anglo-Saxon period. In 2015 bodies of two adults and a dog were found, together with a glass Saxon beaker. Then in 2021 twelve burials were discovered on the site, and in 2022 a further six – several of them holding knives. The Museum of London’s excellent Report runs to 54 pages with six pages of illustrations. This latest archaeological work helps transform our picture and understanding of Coulsdon man 2000 years ago; giving scope for further investigation and reappraisal of the early mediaeval history of Croydon and South London.

Graham Lomas
Chair, The Friends



Photograph of grave [505], looking south



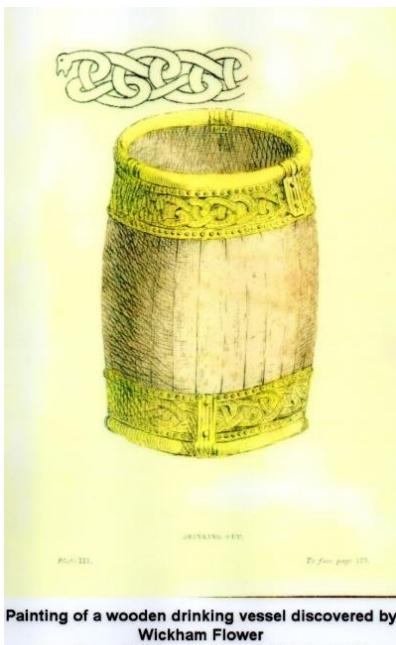
Museum of London
Archaeology
Lion Green Road
Car Park
Excavations 2021

Photograph of grave
[516], looking west

References

- British Prehistory* Prof Stuart Piggott 1948
Prehistoric Communities Prof Gordon Childe 1940 and 1956
Provinces of England Prof C B Fawcett 1960
A short History of the Anglo Saxons Giles Morgan 2018
The story of Britain Roy Strong 2018
Exploring Happy Valley and Farthing Downs The Friends 2000
The Flower of all Cities Robert Wynn Jones 2019
Coulsdon Area (Millennium Project) Reg Baker 2006
Lion Green Road Car Park Museum of London and Archaeology 2022
Coulsdon Woods Roman Cemetery David Reidy in ECRA's '*The Review*' 2019

Artifacts found on Farthing Downs by John Wickham Flower in 1871



Painting of a wooden drinking vessel discovered by Wickham Flower
(courtesy of Surrey Archaeological Society)



Painting of a shield boss discovered on Farthing Down by Wickham Flower
(courtesy of Surrey Archaeological Society)

The Friends Website



www.friendsoffarthingdowns.co.uk

Friends of Farthing Downs & Happy Valley website tells you who we are and what we do including an Events Diary.

History and Archaeology have their own tabs. Also 'Walks and Trails', 'Useful Links' and our own 'Nature Trail' – see menu on the website.

Under 'Reports' you can find write-ups of AGM presentations including this 'Archaeological Day' booklet **in colour**. Our Events Diary publicises forthcoming talks and walks which cover topics of local interest from management of Farthing Downs and Happy Valley to Fauna and Flora of varying types with annual Bird Walk and Moth night.

For more information and a membership form, please see
www.friendsoffarthingdowns.co.uk/images/Leaflet0121.pdf

The screenshot shows the homepage of the website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Home', 'About Us', 'Events Diary', 'Walks & Trails', 'Archaeology', 'Conservation', 'Donations', 'Contact Us', 'Projects', 'Lynne Charnier', 'Committee', 'Contact Us', 'Useful Links', 'Happy Valley', 'Management', 'Projects', 'Gardens', 'Conservation', 'Volunteering', 'Wildlife', 'Archaeology', 'City of London', 'Nature Trail', 'Planning', and 'Email'. Below the navigation is a banner with the title 'Friends of Farthing Downs & Happy Valley' and several small images of the landscape and animals. The main content area has sections for 'Getting here', 'Nature Trail', 'Who are we?', 'What do we do?', 'About Farthing Downs and Happy Valley', 'Why not join us?', and 'If you would like to join...'. To the right, there's a large orange graphic of a lightning bolt pointing towards the text 'PRE-HISTORY to PRESENT DAY'. This section includes images of ancient artifacts and a description of the Neolithic period. At the bottom, there's a footer with links to 'Privacy Policy', 'Terms & Conditions', and 'Feedback'.