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# Project introduction

The earthwork enclosure on Highdown Hill is a popular place in West Sussex, frequently visited for long walks, dog exercise, picnics, solstice celebrations or just to admire the far-reaching views along the coast. It is, however, a significant and long-standing burial and settlement site, which has had a chequered history of investigation. The first excavations, by Irving, in 1857, and then Colonel Augustus Henry Lane Fox (from 1880 named Colonel Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers), in 1867, began to illuminate the, at times baffling, complexity of the archaeology, further evidenced during the tree planting activities of the landowner Mr Edwin Henty, in the 1890s, which hit upon a dense concentration of burials, both inhumation and cremation.

It is now known that the earthwork was first constructed in the Late Bronze Age, c.4000 years ago, and was subsequently and intensively used throughout the Iron Age, the Roman and early medieval periods, and into the modern era. This project concentrates on the evidence from Highdown from the fifth and sixth centuries AD, characterised as Early Anglo-Saxon by burial with grave goods that demonstrate local and cross-channel contacts, but the project cannot escape from the intermingling of this evidence with that from earlier and later uses of the site. The archaeology of southern Britain in this period is complex and only partially understood. This post-Roman era is the period before the inception of named kingdoms as recorded in the Tribal Hidage document (an early tax record), yet there are important contemporary and wealthy cemetery communities evidenced along the south coast, although Highdown appears isolated in the landscape of West Sussex.

All Early Anglo-Saxon cemetery communities are unique, although similar in many respects. Some elicit more interest and excitement than others, and none more so than Highdown. The presence of fifth-century objects, including glass vessels, silver-inlaid ironwork and objects in the Quoit Brooch Style, has made the site name famous within research into the transition from Roman Britain to Early Anglo-Saxon England. Yet, the full research potential of this site has to date been neither fully explored nor brought into the public domain. The untimely death of Dr Martin Welch, FSA, in 2011 meant that his long-held aim to publish the full catalogue of the cemetery remained unrealised. He had, however, already accumulated a great deal of material towards this endeavour and this material forms one of the bases for the updated catalogue and discussions presented here. Since Welch had published the material held in Worthing Museum in his two-volume British Archaeological Reports British Series 112, on Early Anglo-Saxon Sussex in 1983, the subsequent excavation of the site in 1988 gave the opportunity to integrate new and unpublished material. Mark Gardiner directed that excavation and curated the field notes and photographs and had many of the plans and sections drawn. The reasons for the delay in unifying this material before 2011 were myriad and do not need to be rehearsed here, save to note that many of the post-excavation tasks, analyses and documents from the last excavation were not completed or exist only in partial and unedited form (correspondence relating to these and other issues about the site is available in the Worthing Museum archive). In any case, dispersal of the material and paper archives, the discovery of unpublished material from the late-nineteenth-century excavations and, fundamentally, the very disturbed condition of the site itself mitigated against a unified assessment of its significance without a great deal of difficulty. A key problem throughout was the lack of a drawn site map from the earlier excavations, leaving uncertainty as to where the 1988 excavations were overlapping with previously dug burials. That core aim of unifying the information from this significant burial ground has remained for this project, but with clear limitations on its outcome in terms of resolving the finer details of grave groups and the spatial relationships of the burials. Much of the earlier work is reproduced here almost verbatim (with changes made for consistency and the mechanics of style), including measurements in both imperial and metric and initial assumptions about the site. Fortunately, many visiting researchers to Worthing Museum have sought to include the Highdown grave material in synthetic and typological studies. These studies have served to update the material and bring it into sharper focus, but unfortunately were hampered by the researchers not having had an overview of all of the contextualising material. The key texts that have used the Highdown material since its earliest excavation or that have referenced the site, in chronological order, with full details in the reference list, are Baldwin Brown 1915; Leeds 1936; Harden 1951, 1956, 1959; Evison 1955, 1958, 1965; Meaney 1964; Swanton 1974; Henig 1974; Myres 1977; Ager 1985; Marzinzik 2003; and Swift 2019.

Selected objects have also been referenced by continental scholars, such as Böhner (1958) and Böhme (1974) and, more recently, Jean Soulat (2009, 2018), reflecting on the presence of Merovingian-type material in southern Britain and much influenced by Martin Welch's papers (1993, 2002 on cross-channel contacts and federate settlements. The fullest catalogue to date is the still-available BAR 112 (Welch 1983), although this is now seen to be incomplete, while over the course of time selected finds have been illustrated in

WORTHING MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS No. 1

A Guide to the

# ANGLO-SAXON COLLECTION

A description of the material from the Highdown Hill cemetery

by

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SECOND EDITION

PRICE: ONE SHILLING

**Figure 1.1. The guide to the Highdown material published by the Borough of Worthing Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery Committee, 1958–9. Image: Worthing Museum.**

# A GUIDE TO THE WORTHING MUSEUM COLLECTION OF ANGLO-SAXON MATERIAL FROM THE HIGHDOWN HILL CEMETERY

Highdown Hill, a conspicuous landmark crowned with its clump of trees, lies in the parish of Ferring between the Arundel and Littlehampton Roads. The planting of the trees in the nineteenth century within the Iron Age fort led to the discovery and excavation of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery[1]. For a number of years the finds remained at Ferring Grange, the residence of Mr. Henty, the owner of the site, but after his death Mrs. Henty presented most of them to the Worthing Museum. A number of villages with early Saxon names, Ferring, Goring, Patching, Angmering, surround the foot of the hill and the pottery, glass and jewellery found in the graves confirm that the cemetery dates back to the period of the early invasions recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

It is no longer possible to point to definitely Anglian, Saxon or Jutish areas of settlement, as recent researches into the grave goods found in 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries dating to the fifth and sixth centuries both in this country and on the continent have shown. They point to a mingling of invaders from Denmark, Schleswig and the Middle Rhine along the southern shores of the North Sea into Old Saxony and Frisia before they crossed to the east and south-east of Britain. Even before the breakdown of Roman Imperial rule in Britain there were Teutonic settlers, particularly in the coastal areas adjoining the Narrow Seas. During the disorderly period after A.D. 410, when the cities of Britain were left to organize their own defences, civil war broke out between the more Romanized citizens and tyrants such as Vortigern[2] who were seizing power. Picts from the North and Scots from Ireland took the chance to carry out deep raids into the country. When this pressure became severe, some of the Romano-British population invited Teutonic troops to help them. "And they then [A.D. 443] sent to the Angles, and made the same request of the chieftains the English"[3]. In A.D. 449 Vortigern gave them "land in the south-east of this land.... They then sent to Angeln[4], bidding them send more help"[5]. One of these chieftains, Hengist, and his followers soon quarrelled with Vortigern, demanding yet more land, and, having defeated the Picts, turned against the Romano-British. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year A.D. 477 gives the first recorded notice of the coming of the Saxons to Sussex: "Ælle and his three sons,

[1] Archaeologia LIV (1895) pp. 369-382 and LV (1896) pp. 203-214.
[2] Vortigern: a tyrant whose power centred on the upper Severn Valley.
[3] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 443. British Historical Documents, Vol. 1, p. 142.
[4] Angeln: part of modern Denmark.
[5] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 449. British Historical Documents, Vol. 1 p. 142.



**Figure 1.2. An overview of the historical context of the Highdown finds, current in the mid twentieth century, published by the Borough of Worthing Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery Committee, 1958–9. Image: Worthing Museum.**

Worthing Museum pamphlets, with various slides and colour postcards made available to the public. The local and civic pride in this important site is as evident today as it was in the mid-twentieth century. The introduction to the 1958–9 pamphlet indicates the then-current interpretation of the political, economic and social context of the fifth and sixth centuries AD, assertions that may be supported or refuted in the light of this revised excavation catalogue.

The majority of the gathered information has been included in this revised catalogue, but each publication of a discrete find is not referenced in its catalogue entry. The human skeletal remains (HSR) clearly demand an additional, dedicated research programme, as the results from samples taken in the twenty-first century and subjected to new scientific techniques already point to the diversity of the community. Similarly, the huge quantities of pottery from all periods require a more focussed study than has been achievable here. It is apparent that the Highdown earthwork enclosure was in use over long periods of time and that the early medieval (?fourth- to ?seventh-century, but more certainly fifth- and sixth-century) cemetery was one of its final phases and was dug into this much earlier burial and possible settlement material. Research into the Roman and prehistoric uses of the site and its wider landscape must therefore be left to others to take forward.

For a guide to navigating through this document, the reader is directed to Appendix 1, which is a tabulated list of all accessioned objects with their context or grave number, ordered by type of object, together with the text section where the objects are catalogued.