

**Parish Symposium Webinar 7 November 2020 A Reflection on my Paper:
'Parish Churches in the Downland and Their Connections to the Landscape' Hàiighlèagh Winslade, University of Winchester**

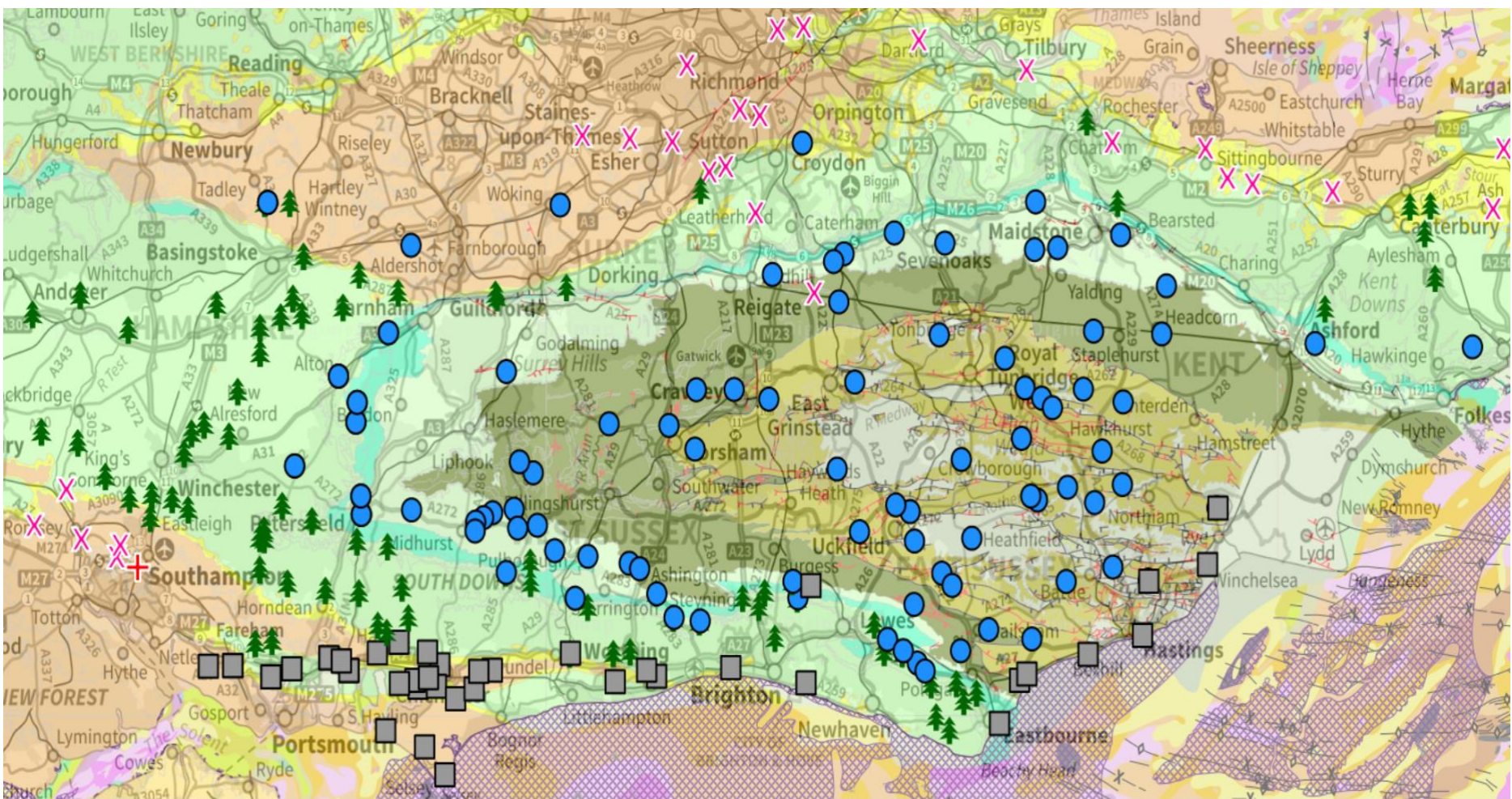
This year, due to the Coronavirus pandemic the annual parish symposium planned for May was cancelled and in its place a virtual webinar was held on the 7th November. I had originally written the abstract for my paper on *Parish Churches in the Downland and Their Connections to the Landscape* in February. When it came to the final running order for the webinar my paper was the final presentation so I made some changes. I removed Wiston and instead included Buriton another scarpfoot settlement. I also cut down on the points that I had planned to make so the opportunity to write a piece about my webinar paper gives me the space to talk about downland churches and scarpfoot settlements in some more detail.

I began with a slide of my fieldwork and some photos and selfies of me and one of my dogs, Dogtor Buster Nosselle up on the South Downs Way just west of Chantry Hill which is near to Storrington in Sussex. These photos are a nice reminder that last summer I did get out over many days and undertake fieldwork and exploration of the landscape of the Weald and Downland.



Above left: Dogtor Buster Nosselle and (at right) me, the slide was titled: 'Out in the Field: Crippled Antiquarian & Dogtor Buster Nosselle'

I then began with a brief discussion of the distribution map that I had created with the data of recusants in my database. My PhD is examining how the spatial dynamics of the Weald and Downland affected the everyday lives and worship of Catholics in the later C16th. This map shows the distribution of recusants in the Weald and Downland (the counties of Hampshire, Sussex, Kent and Surrey).



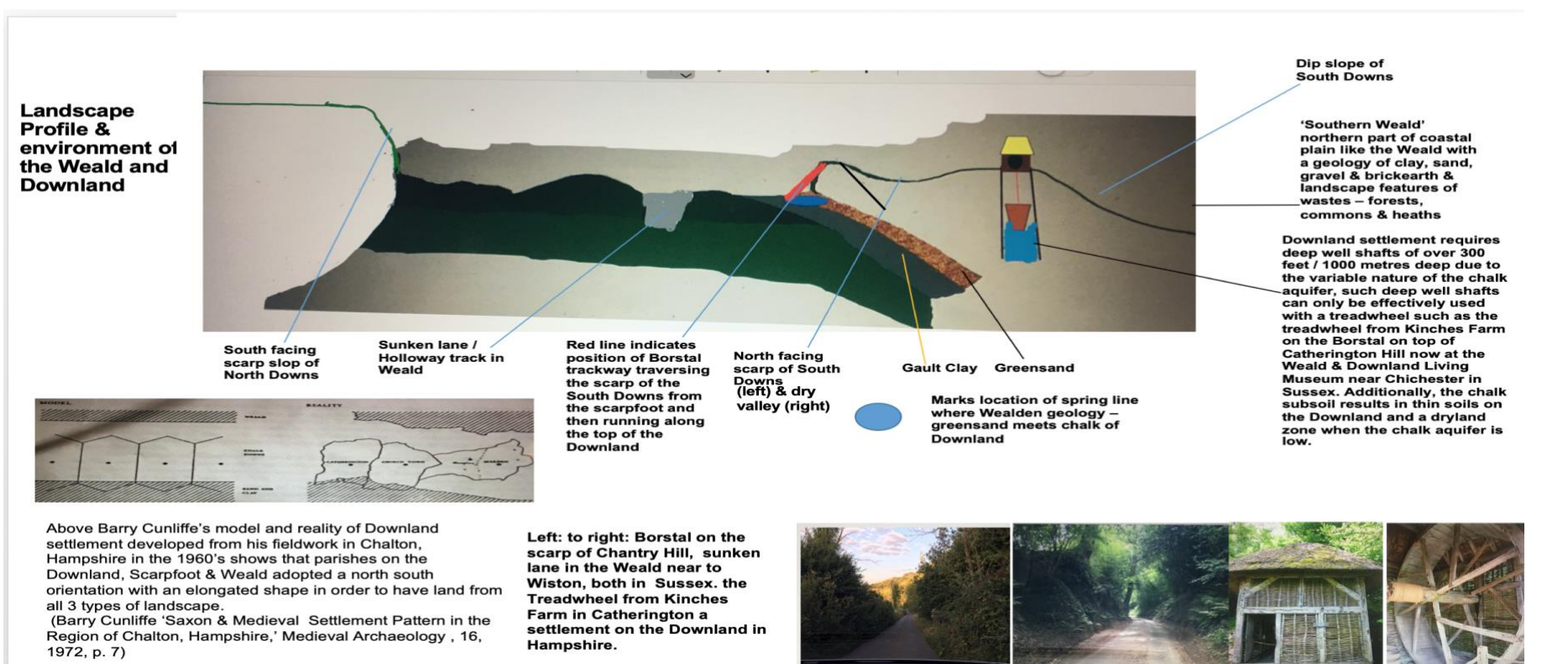
Above: slide of the distribution map of recusants in the Weald and Downland. The grey squares represent places in the coastal plain, the fir trees the Downland, the blue dots the Weald and red Xs represent recusants in Kent and Surrey that are beyond the geographical scope of the study

I then presented a slide with a smaller map showing the location of the scarpfoot settlements that I would be discussing.



Above: Buriton & its outlier settlements of Marpleurham, Nurstead and Old Ditcham are over in the west, Harting is just across the border in Sussex, Wiston which wasn't discussed is represented by the blue dot and finally Fittle is over in the east.

I then moved on to consider the profile of the Weald and Downland. How the Weald has a landscape of a variety of different geological formations of clay, sand, gravel and Greensand. The profile included a sunken lane in the Weald and a Borstal trackway leading from the scarpfoot area traversing the north facing scarp of the South Downs and then across the top of the Downland. A dot marked the point where the Gault clay and Greensand in the scarpfoot meet the chalk of the Downland scarp and this is where the spring line occurs providing easy access to water for settlements in the scarpfoot. While up on the Downland dry valleys also known as combs and 'Bottoms' are found. Due to the variable nature of the chalk aquifer, wells on the Downland had to be very deep 300 + foot / 1000 metres deep in order to access water in times of low rainfall when the level of the chalk aquifer had dropped and thus making the Downland a dryland zone during such periods. This meant the use of a treadwheel driven by a person – older child/adolescent or adult to lower and raise the bucket to collect water. The slide also includes Barry Cunliffe's diagram of his model and reality of Downland settlement from his paper on 'Saxon and Medieval Settlement Pattern in the Region of Chalton, Hampshire' (*Medieval Archaeology*, volume 16, 1972, p.7). In this Barry Cunliffe talked about how Downland settlements had a north-south alignment and in theory were hexagonal in shape and he presented the reality of his model with a drawing of how the Downland settlements of Catherington, the settlement at Church Down which was the predecessor to the Chalton, Compton and Marden all sit on the Downland. Church Down and Chalton are south of Buriton and in his model, Barry Cunliffe shows these settlements to cover the coastal plain to the south of the Downland. In the case of the scarpfoot settlements at Buriton and Harting it is the northern and eastern part of the settlements (the top part beyond the hexagon in the model) that is in the Weald. Here we can see why these settlements developed this way in order that they might include different types of landscape and geology. The Downland is required in order to grow crops because although the soil is thin the chalk drains well. In contrast the soils of the Weald are poor and heavy but this waste land can be used to graze animals on heaths and commons, and to have areas of forest.



Above Barry Cunliffe's model and reality of Downland settlement developed from his fieldwork in Chalton, Hampshire in the 1960's shows that parishes on the Downland, Scarpfoot & Weald adopted a north south orientation with an elongated shape in order to have land from all 3 types of landscape. (Barry Cunliffe 'Saxon & Medieval Settlement Pattern in the Region of Chalton, Hampshire', *Medieval Archaeology* , 16, 1972, p. 7)

Left: to right: Borstal on the scarp of Chantry Hill, sunken lane in the Weald near to Wiston, both in Sussex. the Treadwheel from Kinches Farm in Catherington a settlement on the Downland in Hampshire.



The last part of my paper looked at the three scarpfoot settlements beginning with Buriton close to the Hampshire / Sussex border.

Buriton, Hants scarpfoot settlement: Left: Aerial Photo c. 1947. Right: St Mary's Church



Above: Slide of Buriton, Hampshire. The aerial photograph (Historic England) was taken in 1947 while I took the photo of St Mary's Church.

Using the black and white aerial photograph that was taken in 1947 (Historic England) I discussed the spatial relationship of the Church of St Mary's, just left of centre with the manor house which in the photograph is the building right of centre with the Georgian façade that is facing east. This façade is the eastern façade of the re-built east range which was re-built by Edward Gibbon (grandfather of the historian) in 1719. The manor house dates from the C16th and both eastern and northern ranges contain C16th and C17th material in them (Pevsner, *Hampshire: Winchester and the North*, 2010, p. 215). The rectory is across the pond to the west of the church. I also considered Buriton's position in the scarpfoot and how the settlement and St Mary's Church is very close to the scarp of the South Downs and how this contrasts with the church of St Mary and St Gabriel in Harting. St Mary's Church in Buriton has a tower, whereas St Mary and St Gabriel in Harting has a spire. I suggested that this is because St Mary and St Gabriel are further out in the scarpfoot zone and as my photo that was taken from Harting Down illustrates the spire of St Mary and St Gabriel in Harting is very visible from Harting Down. The photo to the left shows not only shows how St Mary and St Gabriel stands out from the Downland due to the church's steeple but also the Weald beyond including Torberry Hill which is an Iron Age Hillfort can be seen beyond Harting and the field of wheat. While the photo to the right shows the view from Harting Down looking east out into the Weald.

Harting, Harting Down, Harting Beacon/Beacon Hill, Sussex. Left: view of Harting with Torberry Hill Iron Age Hillfort beyond. Right: view across the Weald from Harting Down



Due to the Coronavirus pandemic I have not been able to undertake any fieldwork this year. My planned fieldwork before the pandemic included a visit to Harting Beacon/Beacon Hill to the east of Harting Down, but sadly this did not happen. I put out an appeal on the Facebook page of Sussex Archaeological Society for some photos of Harting Beacon/Beacon Hill and of Chanctonbury Ring (see below). This photo below was taken by Sally Ward in January this year from the top of Harting Beacon/Beacon Hill. It shows Bramshott Bottom below which is a dry valley between Harting Down and Harting Beacon/Beacon Hill. Archaeological evidence of a Roman settlement has been found in Bramshott Bottom and there is a trackway that connects the dry valley to the scarpfoot and Weald below. This begins as a Holloway and becomes a Borstal. In considering Downland churches in the landscape it is important to recognise that in many cases settlements were relocated to the scarpfoot from the Downland and Harting represents such a settlement being relocated in the early medieval period from the settlement in the dry valley of Bramshott Bottom. As already discussed living on the Downland required the use of deep wells and the Roman settlement in Bramshott Bottom would have needed a deep well with a treadwheel in order to reach the water in the chalk aquifer below. Relocation of the settlement to the scarpfoot would have given the inhabitants easier access to water along the spring line where the chalk and Wealden soils meet. The development of a church built of stone added permanence to the settlement and its place in the landscape is clearly marked through the use of a spire which stands out in an area that is some way from the scarp of the South Downs and which is very visible from the Downland immediately to the south of the settlement. In considering the 3 scarpfoot settlements of Buriton, Harting and Firle it is clear to see the role that the scarp of the South Downs played not only in providing shelter from prevailing winds but also as a means of communication along the scarp to other settlements in the scarp rather than deal with the poor roads out in the Weald.

In the week following my paper I attended a virtual lecture organised by Sussex Archaeological Society in which Professor Martin Bell, President of Sussex Archaeological Society talked about trackways in Sussex. This included discussion of the Underhill Way a trackway below the scarp of the South Downs which linked the settlements of Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Ditchling and is now the B2116 road. Professor Bell explained that it was easier to have a trackway linking these scarpfoot settlements rather than climb the scarp of the South Downs and walk along what is now the South Downs Way. However, when we look at scarpfoot settlements further west like Harting and Buriton we find that there is no ancient trackway running along the bottom of the scarp connecting them. An examination of the OS map reveals the reason. In the east near Hurstpierpoint, Hassocks and Ditchling the scarp is fairly straight with few 'meanders,' but in the west just to the west of Harting is Hemner Hill which sticks out of the scarp and opposite Hemner Hill is Torberry Hill. This topography means that the trackway has to run between the two hills. West of Hemner Hill and Torberry Hill the OS map shows a stream, as I have already noted the geology of the scarpfoot area being impermeable Greensand and Gault Clay abutting the permeable chalk of the South Downs caused the water in the chalk aquifer of the Downs to the surface creating a spring line of water rising to the surface. It is therefore easy to understand why no trackway would skirt the foot of the scarp here it would be too wet and boggy. Therefore, the trackway would have to run further north out in the Weald and as the OS map shows it results in a longer route between Buriton and Harting. The road runs through Nursted Rock and is on the Greensand Terrace above the river valley of the River Rother.¹ The Landscape Character Assessment for Ditchling shows that it also lies on the Greensand and Gault Clay,² but the topography of the scarp along with the lack of any other hills which would helm a trackway in, has resulted in the Underhill Road forming which links Ditchling with Hurstpierpoint and Hassocks. The landscape at the scarpfoot being where the chalk and Greensand / Gault Clay met would have at times been very wet but nevertheless it was possible to build a trackway here. To the east of Ditchling just before the B2116 meets the A275 road, the road runs just a few metres from the steep scarp of the South Downs.

Harting Beacon/Beacon Hill, Sussex view from Harting Beacon of Bramshott Bottom in the near ground and north across the Weald - Harting is in the middle distance (photo courtesy of Sally Ward taken January 2020)



Finally, my presentation looked at Firle a scarpfoot settlement in the east of Sussex near Lewes. I have been studying Firle for a number of years. Like Buriton, there is a very close relationship spatially between the church and the manor house. And also like Buriton the settlement at Firle is located close the scarp of the South Downs in this case Firle Beacon. A proximity which also provided a permanence to the settlement. As with Buriton and other scarpfoot settlements such as Ditchling the area between the settlement and the foot of the scarp of the South Downs is an area of spring line. Firle has a tower and like Buriton it is much closer to the scarp than Harting. But like Harting the church is very visible from the top of the South Downs. There seems to be a correlation of the location of the church and its distance from the scarp as to whether a tower or a spire was built. One church that I did not discuss in my presentation All Saints, Catherington, is a Downland church in a hill top settlement

¹ East Hampshire Landscape Character Assessment, Landscape Type 6: Greensand Terrace' (Petersfield, East Hampshire District Council, <https://www.easthants.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LandscapeType6GreensandTerrace.pdf> accessed on 25/11/20)p.139

²Roland Harris, 'Ditchling Historic Character Assessment Report June 2005' (Chichester, West Sussex County Council, 2005) p.11

and the church is visible from the trackway now road that runs through Idsworth Common and Havant Thicket (Havant Chase in the C16th) part of the Forest of Bere and out in the 'Southern Weald.' It seems that churches in the Downland were more prominent in their landscape if they had a tower rather than a spire. While churches either on the northern edge of the scarpfoot – the scarpfoot/Weald boundary such as Harting and out in the Weald such as Billingshurst and which were not in such topographically prominent locations as the Downland (both scarpfoot and hilltop) were built with a spire. However, this 'rule of thumb' is not inclusive there are examples where a tower was built or it was a blended form such as Tillington near Petworth in the Weald which has a tower with a crown shape spire on top. More research needs to be undertaken in to this in order to determine more clearly how the topography of the Weald and Downland influence how a church was built to make itself visible in the landscape in which it was located.



Above left: the view of St Peter's Church and Firlle from Firlle Beacon



Above right: aerial view of Firlle in Google Earth St Peter's Church is centre left and its proximity to Firlle Place (centre left) the home of the recusant Gage family is very clear



Above: Google earth street view from Firlle Bostal (Bostal is a corruption of Borstal) of Firlle Beacon

One scarpfoot settlement which sadly I did not have time to talk about was Wiston. Wiston lies just north of Chanctonbury Ring, but unlike Buriton, Harting and Firlle all that remains is the Church St Mary's and Wiston House as the settlement here fell victim to decline and eventual removal in the Nineteenth Century by the Goring family who had acquired Wiston House. As an example of an abandoned settlement, Wiston shows that not all scarpfoot settlements to the north of the South Downs became permanent even if there was a close spatial relationship between the church and the manor house. I visited Wiston House and St Mary's Church in July last year and this year I was planning to visit Chanctonbury Ring but unfortunately the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic prevented that from happening. Several members of Sussex Archaeological Society kindly gave me some photos of Chanctonbury Ring. Furthermore, David Rudling's study of Chanctonbury Ring has shown that there was a prehistoric enclosure and 2 Romano-British Temples on the top of Chanctonbury Ring. At some point the settlement, like at Harting was re-located to the scarpfoot. The same premise applies to Chanctonbury as with Harting, that any settlement on top of the Downland would require very deep well shafts and therefore treadwheel technology to access the variable water table of the chalk aquifer. While Wiston like Buriton and Firlle is a scarpfoot settlement with a tower rather than a spire on the church. When Stuart Chatfield posted his photograph (see below) he remarked that it was just possible to make out the church in the neighbouring parish of Buncton. This highlights the need for parish churches to be visible in their landscape, and as is evident from Stuart's photo, Buncton is another scarpfoot settlement. However, Buncton does not have a tower or a spire, but rather a bellcote built during the restoration in 1906.³ Buncton was built by Sele Priory in the C11th as a chapel of ease and it was probably considered unnecessary to make the church stand out in its landscape and this is evident from Stuart Chatfield's photograph. It is also an example of why further research into Downland churches with a tower and Wealden churches with a spire requires further study.



Above left: Wiston House with Chanctonbury Ring in the background



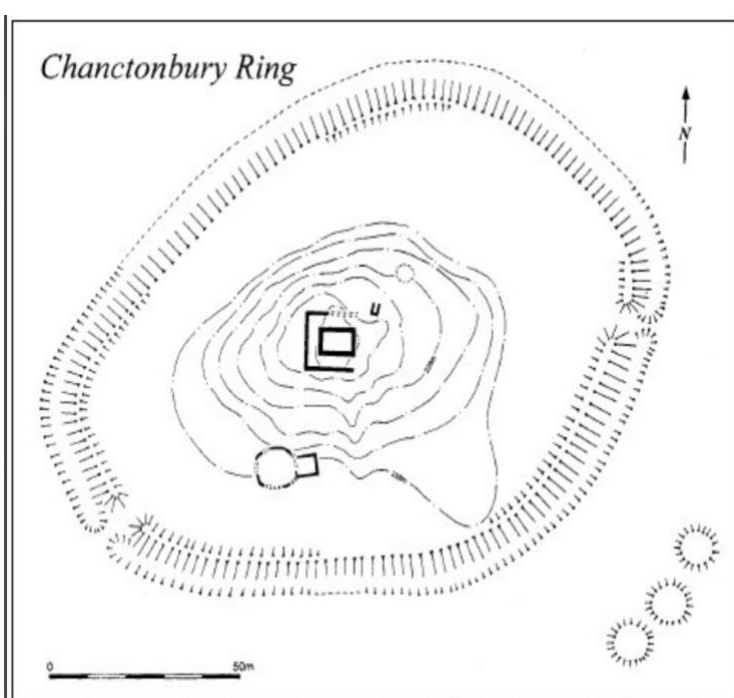
Above right: St Mary's Church



Above left: Chanctonbury Ring photo courtesy of Stuart Chatfield



Above right: Chanctonbury Ring photo courtesy of David Larkin



Above left: Plan by David Rudling of the Prehistoric enclosure and 2 Romano-British temples on Chanctonbury Hill



Above right: View looking of the Weald from Chanctonbury Ring photo courtesy of Andy Brown

³ Elizabeth Williamson et al, *The Buildings of England: Sussex West* (London, Yale University Press, 2019) p.172

Conclusion:

Looking at churches in the landscape of the Weald and Downland – in this instance four scarpfoot settlements provides an opportunity to evaluate why certain places become permanent settlements within the landscape in which they are located. However, churches and other buildings within the vicinity of the church and its settlement have in the past and especially during the C19th been vulnerable to alteration and this has affected how the church appears. The same applies to the landscape. The settlement at Wiston became deserted because during the C19th the owners of Wiston House removed the remaining settlement and they altered the landscape through the implementation of planting to create a parkland of their design. It is factors like these that change the way that Wiston as a scarpfoot settlement is perceived. While Buriton, Harting and Firlie have fallen victim to this effect. It is important to remember that buildings along with the landscapes in which they are placed are socially constructed. Further research into why Downland settlements predominantly have churches with towers and Wealden settlements churches with spires requires further research – research that acknowledges settlements and their landscapes as social constructs.

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