

# Kensworth History

## The Palaeolithic (pre 10'000 bc)

### *Worthington Smith*

The Victorian fieldworker Worthington G. Smith who published "Man The Primeval Savage" in 1894 provided much archaeological information about the Kensworth area.

Smith uncovered an "Undisturbed living and working place of primeval man in the nearby village of Caddington. It seems unlikely however that there was a permanent settlement in the area at that time.

### *Modern projects*

In 1971 a project attempted to retrace some of Worthington Smith's work. This confirmed the presence of an Acheulian flint floor that was occupied on at least two separate occasions with a short break between.

The picture on the right shows drawing of just some of the finds from the area, many of which can be found in museums throughout the UK.



## Mesolithic (10'000 to 2'000 bc)

There is little other than flints as evidence for the nomadic tribes of the Mesolithic era. As early man began to farm though, trade became more important and long distance pathways began to emerge.

One of these, The Ichniel Way, still exists north and west of Kensworth. Nowadays though, it is a mixture of roads and pathways reaching from Central Southern England to the East Anglian Coast. Probably few people travelling up the A5 past Kensworth ever give a thought to how old the route they are travelling really is.

## Bronze Age (2'000 to 43 bc)

Little evidence of Bronze or Iron Age settlement has survived other than burial mounds and round barrows, many of which were re-used by later inhabitants or damaged by development.

However, one mound that did survive intact close to what is now the Golf Club House contained a young woman and a boy, although it isn't thought they would have played golf. A representation of this mound is shown here.



## **Roman Times (43 bc to 410 ad)**

### *Road Builders*

The Romans were renowned for their ability to build high quality roads and soon after their arrival began construction of Watling Street or Via Vitelina linking the Thames with the northwest of England.

The present day A5 follows closely this Roman route taking advantage of a natural gap in the Chiltern Hills. The Roman road crossed the Ichnield Way in what is now known as Dunstable. In the Roman era, the settlement of Durocobrivis was established on the major crossroads.

### *Evidence of Occupation*

Bits and pieces of Roman jewellery and pottery have been found at various times around Kensworth. The best evidence for a Roman settlement comes once again from Worthington Smith's work. He found evidence of "waste pits", burials, tiles and coins on the common.

## **Anglo Saxons (410 to 1066)**

### *Post Roman Era*

After the Romans left there was a general decline in population throughout Britain. Around Kensworth much of the land was abandoned and reverted to scrub or woodland. The earliest reference to Caegnesworde meaning Caegin's farm or estate in these times was in 975 ad. It is believed that the boundary of Caegin's farm later became the ecclesiastical boundary of the parish.

Kensworth has at times been a tempestuous place as this early document recalling events a century before the Norman invasion relates...

Bishop Athlewold (of Winchester 963-984) bought two hides at Caernesworde for 4 pounds from one of his chief retainers named Leofridge. Abbot Brithnoth gave the first part of the purchase money, that is 60 shillings to Leofridge at Hatfield in the presence of Aelward of Studham. Afterwards, when Leofridge died, the Abbot caused the remaining 20 shillings to be given and distributed to the clerks for Leofridge's soul. But Leofridge's relief (the payment due at a retainers death to his Lord), stood over and was not given to the bishop. And so the bishop bought this land, but nevertheless it was taken away from him by rapine and violence.

## **Domesday Book (1066 to 1400s)**

Carnesworde (Kensworth) has its own entry in the Domesday Book, it reads...

The Canons of London hold Carnesworde. It defends itself for 10 hides. This is land for ten ploughs. Five hides are in the demesne – there are two ploughs there and three more to be made. There are eight villiens and three bordarri. There are three servi, pasture for cattle, wood for one hundred hogs. Rend of wood – 2 shillings. The whole value is seventy shillings.

10 hides = 1,200 acres

Plough = 1 hide = 120 acres

Villien – held 30 acres

Bordarri – head cottage and three acres in open field

Servi – household thralls of the Lord of the Manor

### *After the Domesday Book*

Much of the history of Kensworth since the Norman Conquest is contained in the Parish records. These archives include many visits made to the parish by the great and the good and contain a detailed inventory of the history of St Mary's Church.

In addition, there are some interesting legal records – for example an entry of the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1424 reads... Joan Regrock of Kensworth aforesaid, for not appearing before Robert Hull and his fellows, Justices of the Bond of Henry V to answer Clement Russell touching a plea that she render £20 – Unfortunately, it doesn't tell us what the £20 was for!

### **Civil war (1600s)**

John Syddall, a father of 11 children, was the vicar of Kensworth from 1615 to 1643 and there are many accounts of his fall from grace. The following contemporary account of what happened to him gives us a glimpse into the turmoil that engulfed the country during the period of the Civil War and the Commonwealth:

The benefice of John Syddall, Vicar of the Parish of Kensworth, in the country of Herefordshire, is sequestered for that he is a frequenter of alehouses, and continually drunk, and hath several times refused to administer the Sacrament to such as would not come up to the rails to receive the same. And when the rails were taken away, he said it was the beginning of the abomination of desolation and that whoremongers and drunkards are as excusable as those who go from their own parish to hear sermons that Papists were better subjects than Puritans. And he hath neglected his care for several Lords Days without any supply and hath expressed a great indignancy against the Parliament.

After his sequestration John Syddall did offer to officiate in his church but it was not to be. He was dragged out of the church by the parishioners and later thrown out of his house. He died some two months later and it was widely thought that his suffering brought about his death. In 1645 however some recompense was paid to the vicar's family and the parishioners of Kensworth had to provide for the maintenance of John Syddall's wife and family. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a stained glass window commemorating John Syddall was installed in St. Mary's Church.

### **Enclosure Act (1798)**

The Enclosure Act (1798) changed the geography of the village bringing about the separation of Kensworth Village surrounding the church and Kensworth Common. What was "The Village" is now Kensworth Church End and consists of the church, a few houses and farms. Kensworth Common, now just "Kensworth", on the top of the Downs is where the majority of the population now lives.

Official enclosure took place in 1801 when the commons were divided by straight boundaries, the plots reallocated and former grazing land turned to arable farming. New roads were built and older pathways fell into disuse. The population of Kensworth increased with the expansion of chalk quarrying and brick-making in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A new road was built through the original Kensworth Green on the north side of what is now the Recreation Ground. Houses that used to look over the common now found themselves set well back from the road as is the case today. In order that many new roads built in the area at this time of enclosure could be maintained, the Enclosure Commissioners allotted plots to be given over to sand and gravel pits. Two of these were to the southeast of Kensworth Lynch and another two on the Downs close to the road to Dunstable. During the

19<sup>th</sup> century, the school severs new pubs, one of which survives today, and the Methodists Chapel were all built.

### **20<sup>th</sup> Century (1900 to present)**

Modern Kensworth is an eclectic mix of new and the old. Farming remains a large employer and as well as traditional trades associated with the horse world we have a pottery maker as well as more modern trades such as the kitchen and bathroom installer and a sawmill.

A common feature of many of the farms in Kensworth, even as late as 1929 was the donkey wheel. Deep wells had been sunk into the chalk to bring water up to the village. The donkeys were made to walk inside and turn a large vertical wooden drum-wheel. The drum wheel turned a winch which raised and lowered a bucket containing as much as 30 gallons of water. The Nash Farm wheel can now be seen in the Luton Museum.