

Responses by Ben Dunk to items about the Lavant village, near Chichester region of West Sussex by: Andrew Berriman M.A. (Cantab); Editor of: The Chichester History Journal.

Lavant Caves.

A personal recollection.

I may be the last person alive today who entered the caves in the summer of 1939. The caves are on the West side of Chalk Pit Lane, North of East Lavant, about half way up to Seven Points, under St. Roches Hill (The Trundle).

At ten year's old I was well into my lonely excursions outside the pale of West Dean Park. One rarely saw anyone else in those days out on the South Downs.

On my way to collect lime clay for a modeling project I had in mind, from Lavant Chalk pit (IE: Chalk rock that had been saturated with water for a long time and softened to clay, there at the base of the cliff where a spring oozed out). Wandering along Chalk Pit Lane I came across a Dew Pond on the West side. These shallow round depressions in the ground about 20 feet across, were scattered throughout the South Downs and had been used since ancient times for sheep to drink from and probably humans as well. Nightly dew would condense on the cold plaster lining of the pond and gather in the middle. Sheep could easily walk to drink down the slight slope.

Just to the South of the Dew Pond, I noticed some peculiar large mounds in the grassy terrain and wondered if they were ancient Barrow burials. On the North side of the largest mound there was a freshly dug hole, not big enough for an adult but large enough for me to crawl in with my head first. A couple of feet in I felt with my outstretched hand a cold dark void and I could see nothing.

Shortly after my discovery, I returned armed with a battery torch (flashlight). On this visit I crawled in on my back and shone my light inside; I was astounded to find myself in a round cavern, about 15' to 20' in diameter, with a domed ceiling; like a large Igloo or the blunt end of an upturned egg shell. At the time, I suppose that I was about 4 feet tall and the centre of the ceiling rose to about 3 feet more above me. The floor of the cavern was raised to a flat area in the middle, with gutters around the sides. There was no evidence of the ceiling having fallen in; it was perfectly intact and smooth like plaster. It was surprisingly dry inside. Of course it was constructed of the white chalk rock, which was stained by smoke, in fact, there were remains of wood fires on the floor. There were scattered bare bones of an animal about the size of a fox. Also there were remains of burned down candles here and there. Extensive Graffiti covered the surfaces; consisting mainly of names and dates from multiple ancient periods, including the 1930s. Many people before me had been there.

On the West side of the cavern there was a tunneled hole through the supporting wall, too small for me to crawl through; I shone my light in there and revealed another smaller cavern.

I did not see any 'man-made' steps anywhere inside either cavern.

After some time inside the cavern I became very claustrophobic; with only that small hole between myself, the lonely outside world and feelings of what if I were trapped inside: no one would ever find me.

The Second World War started soon after and when I next visited the site of my cavern discovery, the entry hole had been filled in with a fresh-heavy layer of dirt and chalk. The foreign Spy paranoia was in vogue and I believe the War Government was busy blocking up potential hideaways, similar to these caverns and Brandy Hole Lane caves, closer to Chichester.

#### PERSONAL CONJECTURES FOR VARIOUS ANCIENT USES OF LAVANT CAVES BY BEN DUNK.

Item 1:

Chalk pit lane was the most direct access through East Lavant from Chichester Harbour to St. Roches Hill (The Trundle) and the Southdown Way, linking with everywhere across Southern England. What a great place these caves might have been to store smuggled Cognac and Brandy from France, prior to distribution during the 18<sup>th</sup>. and early 19<sup>th</sup>. Century.

The smuggling in reverse to France, was the highly desirable South Down hard wearing 'Crossbred' sheep wool. The British Government was not in favour of this, because of the importance of sheep wool in the manufacture of military clothing. They certainly did not like the idea of English sheep wool clothing being used against them. It seems we were always at war with France in those days.

So, why was it that sheep wools were so desirable for clothes. Their fibres are not like hair, which is smooth. It has tiny scales all over each hair, therefore its warmth pocketing potential is unequalled. Furthermore, it is reckoned by greater experts than I, that it will absorb up to 80% of its own weight, before chilling anyone.

My late friend, Mervyn Cutten, the eminent local historian; the Shayer Family and Freemasonry Records: frequently collaborated with me on a number of local history subjects and we often discussed ancient smuggling in the West Sussex region.

Smuggling was rampant and very profitable in those days and even the aristocracy was sometimes involved. ....turn your face to the wall my darling, while the gentlemen ride by.....It was easy money if one could get away with it. The aristocrats usually acted as though they were above the law.

Lord Montague-Dunk, The Earl of Halifax of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was probably associated with smuggling, Mervyn Cutten and I concluded on this point. Racton Tower on The Earl's Stansted Park Estate, was built to have a direct visible line with the harbour entrance of Hayling Island. The tower was always considered to be the Earl's Folly and he was reputed to be crazy, because he built fires on the top of his tower at night but we thought he was 'crazy like a fox'. He was signaling the safe channel to his smuggling ships on a three-point line: the ship, the harbour entrance and the Racton Tower.

Incidentally, I have no proof of the connection of my family through the name of Dunk. What happened was, Anne Dunk married The Earl; it was a money marriage. She was the only daughter of Sir William Dunk of Eastbourne, a very rich sheep owner and sheep wool merchant: 'how convenient!'. All concerned were associated with the same line of business. He settled a large dowry for the marriage, on condition that the Dunk name was added to the Montague family name. Mervyn and I travelled extensively around East Sussex, looking at tombstones and church records between Lewes and Eastbourne, where my Dunk family hailed from, but found no connections.

Since coming to live in America, I discovered that Lord Montague-Dunk was given a Land Grant in Virginia, by King George the Third, where he grew tobacco. After the American Revolution the American Government confiscated his rights to the land. He never recovered financially from this reversal.

The Earl was a gambler on horse racing and a speculative entrepreneur. When he was in funds, his most notable investment was the part funding of Captain James Cook's voyage around the World in the Endeavour and in gratitude the Captain named a large discovered island off the North East coast of Australia, Dunk Island. The Montague-Dunk's passed away without leaving an heir.

## CONJECTURE CONCERNING USE OF LAVANT CAVES.

### Item 2.

Perhaps the most likely long-term use of the Lavant Caves, was a shepherd's downland living quarters. It is possible that it was constructed at least a 2000 year's ago, when the Romans farmed the area. Sheep were grazed on the South Downs at least as long ago as that. It was in close proximity to the Dew Pond and faced the warm south side of the hill, where sheep would be comfortable, away from the more windy and cold nights on the higher ground. Perhaps there were more protective trees so long ago on these lower slopes and it could also have been a sheltered lambing area. The sheep would be driven to the higher ground for grazing during the day.

## LAVANT STONE.

Once again an excellent article by Andrew Berriman M.A. (cantab) has inspired me to write about stone, as it pertains particularly to West Dean Estate, to its buildings and other related issues.

Some flints, perhaps the most, came from Norfolk but at West Dean up Chalk Pit Lane, in the forest on the South side, there are the overgrown remains of open cast flint mines. These should not be confused with timber pit-saw pits of which many are scattered around the forests of West Dean. In the 30s and 40s I dug into these flint mines looking for large examples of flints. They could be found measuring 7" and 8" in irregular diameter, with wonderful multi coloured natural abstract protrusions; real-nature's work's of art.

Lavant Stone may be the King of local stone but Lime Stone (IE: Chalk) is the Prince or Princess of stone. Every school-child, whether they were educated in the city or country, became familiar with chalk through the medium of the chalk stick, used to write on black boards. Being old, I can remember to this day, the scraping sound on the board. Coloured chalk sticks were used by artists to draw pastel pictures.

As I touched on, in my Memoirs, 'So Many Secrets', Lime Stone was once used for many purposes on West Dean Estate. Perhaps the most interesting and unique use was to cut rectangular blocks about 5" X 9" from the solid rock and line the walls of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Century feed and grain store, that fortunately has not been demolished and in 2010 when I visited Home Farm it had been converted to an art gallery. Unfortunately, in renovation, the interesting antique chalk blocks had been painted or covered over. The Lime Stone lining of the building was intended to create sterile animal food and grain storage and deter the proliferation of insects.

Simple Lime was the product of reducing limestone to a powder, in a kiln heated to between 1000 and 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. Up to the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup>. Century there were travelling Lime Burners who would come to one's estate and produce some lime for various uses. For one thing, it was simply mixed with water, so called 'Whitewash', then sprayed or brushed on farm wood and wall surfaces for sterilization.

Milk paint, one of the earliest forms of paint, was composed of 50% Whey (Buttermilk) the left over liquid from making butter, 25% linseed oil and 25% lime. Various pigments could be added, for example, red, blue and yellow. Sussex harvest wagons were often painted red and blue with this paint. Antique furniture is often discovered with this paint applied. This paint is almost impervious to all chemicals, even modern paint strippers; the only chemical that really works is Sodium Hydroxide (Also known as Caustic Soda or Lye).

Quick Lime is Calcium Oxide and lime forms the basis for this chemical. It is used to cover the bodies of buried dead farm animals; for fast and sterile decomposition, particularly when disease strikes them. For example, when Foot and Mouth disease breaks out.

Lime is used in stuccos, cements and mortars. It is used in steel production. Historically the Romans used it as an ingredient to build roads and many other parts of their building projects.

The Midhurst Brick Company, established outside the village of Cocking, near Midhurst, mined lime stone from a nearby quarry, converted it into lime and manufactured 'white' non load bearing bricks, known as 'Midhurst Whites', that were used extensively all over the West Sussex area and beyond.

ONCE AGAIN ANDREW BERRIMAN M. A. (Cantab) HAS INSPIRED ME TO WRITE A RESPONSE TO HIS ARTICLE ENTITLED: "IF BUONAPARTE SHOULD COME" A STORY ABOUT THE LIFE AND EXPLOITS OF ARTIST AND POET: WILLIAM BLAKE AND HIS FELLOW POET FRIEND AND PATRON WILLIAM HAYLEY.

Hayley was a very rich man, who could indulge himself. He had houses in London, Chichester and Felpham. He arranged for William Blake to live near him in Felpham and carry out illustrative commissions for him.

However, I do not want to impose my writing over Andrew Berriman's excellent coverage of their lives. I just want to add some lore and legend to the story, as it applies to very local history.

When I lived at Home Farm, West Dean Park; I heard the local legend that Blake and Hayley travelled through the only public Bridle Way through West Dean Park. This went from St. Roches Hill through St. Roches West Dean Park gate down past Home Farm all the way to The Mardens. Passing along Grinch Lane westwards to Chalk Pit Lane, Colworth Farm, Staple Ash Farm, Monkton Hall and Hook's Way. I like to believe that they started at the Royal Oak public house in East Lavant and ended up at the Royal Oak Public House at Hook's Way. Not a great distance, if one is on horseback in good company and suitable refreshments could have been taken at both Pubs.

As I described in my Memoirs, in my days in West Dean Park, up to 1944, people used the only Public Bridle Way through the Park. Racehorses were walked up through the Way, during Goodwood race week. Some Stable Lads, preferred for the horse's calm state, this quiet route, compared to the main Singleton road walk. However, when I returned to West Dean Park for a visit in 2010, I noticed that the old entrance to the farm had been blocked off and there was a 'No Trespassing Beyond This Point' sign on the five bar farm gate across Pump Meadow Lane, the Bridle Path route. NB: Why Pump Meadow Lane? Because, up to the late 40s the remains of a hand operated cast iron water pump existed in the centre of adjacent Pump Meadow. The pump was disused because of the coming of piped water.

I would like mention here, the memories about 1954, that I have of The Royal Oak at Hook's Way and the former Landlord, the late Alf Ainger. His adored wife had died a few year's earlier and he ran the Pub alone, except for trusted customers allowed behind the bar, if he needed the toilet. I visited the Pub many times in my youth; usually on a Saturday night when it was most lively. I became about as friendly as any one could with this irascible character. He told me his contribution to the 2<sup>nd</sup>. World War effort, when food was in short supply, was to cultivate alone each war year, the nine acres of land adjacent to his Pub. He borrowed a horse and single furrow plough from a local farmer and ploughed it all, by himself. He then planted the field with seed potatoes, dug them up when mature, put them in bags and hauled them to the side where the bags were picked up and taken to the vegetable market. All this work with his own hands!

When the Saturday night Pub. sessions really got going; someone would play the old piano in the bar to accompany the assembled celebrants in song. Really crude, rude and dirty rugby songs were sung. If Alf thought the words were too offensive, he would come out from behind the bar and rave for the music to cease; sometimes even slamming the lid of the piano down. He let everyone know he was in charge.

So, what has all this got to do with William Blake; you might ask. Well, when Alf announced “ Last orders” and rang his hand bell; there was usually a slight pause in the singing: until, in enormous contrast to the styles and crudeness of the former songs: someone would start to sing the first lines of William Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’ .....And did those feet, in ancient times.....This would be quickly taken up by the piano and assembled company; I must say, in a stentorian manner. For good measure; the song was sometimes sung a second time. Then Alf would ring his bell for the second time to announce the Pub. closing for the night. In those days this was 11 pm. We would have gone on for another couple of hours, if Alf could stand it. The stupid-law was applied by the Government, with the support of the temperate moral populace. Recent legislation loosening open times and rules have shown how intolerable and unnecessary those old restrictions were. NB: Many other ‘singing pubs’ ended their evening’s choral efforts with Blake’s enormously popular “hymn”.

Early in the 1950s one Saturday evening when it was dusk, I drove over in my 1936 M.G. Magnette Sport’s Car to The Royal Oak, Hooks Way. I was accompanied by a charming young lady. (The car really was a ‘bird catcher’, as people would say in those far off days).

The place was very busy and all the parking spots appeared to be taken, except for one small space; I reversed my car into this opening.

A usual enjoyable evening was spent in the crowded, tobacco-smoke-filled Public Bar; quaffing Henty and Constable’s Chichester brewed ‘seven day’ mild beer: served at cellar temperature directly from Oak wood barrels and keeping my lady furnished with Port and Lemon drinks. A roaring log fire kept everyone warm. Many choral renditions of crude Rugby songs etc. ensued throughout the evening; ending with William Blake’s ‘hymn’: Jerusalem.

We then happily stepped out into the cold very dark night; there were no outside lights in those days. We found the car and got in, I started it up, put it into gear and it would not budge. The rear wheels just spun around; I looked and the car had sunk into soft ground up to the axels. By this time all the other cars and their passengers had gone. I wondered if Alf was still awake and I went and knocked on the Pub door. Alf came and I explained about the car. He seemed almost ready for me; he immediately lit a ‘Hurricane’ hand lamp and came to look. He was never one to ‘mince’ words and he exclaimed> “ You stupid bugger, you went and parked right in the middle of my ‘dung mix’!”

He went to a shed and brought some potato sacks and a shovel. This at least 70 year's old man, then dug some channels under the wheels; laid down the potato sacks and I drove out. He knew what he was doing! Alf would not take any tip for his services and seemed to enjoy the episode. I had the feeling that I was not the first 'stupid bugger' to find himself in this predicament and he would be called upon for help. He had a reputation as a practical joker and I believe to this day, he had fun at my expense.

One can imagine the foregoing incident rather spoiled my amorous plans for the rest of the evening; I had been up to my ankles in effluent and to prove it: I carried a certain unpleasant odour around with me.