

## Village of Southwick

The village of Southwick nestles at the south end of the Meon Valley, tucked into the foot of the north flank of Portsdown Hill. Present day Estate holdings, even now spread out to Boarhunt, Cosham, Drayton, Fareham, Farlington, Paulsgrove, Portchester, Purbrook, Waterlooville, Widley and Wymering. It would be no exaggeration to label Southwick as a most unusual settlement which, throughout the last two millennium, has been, uniquely involved in the making of history.

Early man settled in the area and pre-Bronze Age tribes peopled the Meon Valley and Portsdown Hill. Interesting flint implements are easily found on the local farmland and a number of Portsdown Hill barrows have been investigated. These include a Long Barrow to the east of the George Inn, where the old A3 cut through the crest of the hill, excavated in 1817. This yielded 12 skeletons, one of which had an arrowhead through its skull and was attributed to the Neolithic period, which ended about 2000BC.

Other excavations have revealed Bronze (2000-1000BC) and Iron Age (1000BC-ADO) burial areas. The Bronze Age dig was alongside the large roundabout at the top of the B2177\* and the Iron Age Excavation also beside the George Inn.

Sleepy, enigmatic and secretive Southwick may have been, but its inhabitants were no strangers to conflict. The Romans' mighty war machine ploughed its way through the village in AD 43. They built a road (which they called Route 421) from Chichester in the east, via Havant, through Southwick/ where they built a staging post, and on to Wickham. There the road divided, one branch leading to their naval base of Bitterne, the other to the major Roman city of Winchester. The pattern of thoroughfares included a link with their fort at modern-day Portchester. The Romans were followed by the battling/ tribal Jutes and Meonwares. Incidentally, in 1066 the savage Normans probably used the very same Roman road in their conquest of Britain.

The need for fortifications was not a strange concept to Southwick. Prior to the Norman invasion, the Saxons raised a number of earthwork forts around the village. These were probably part of a defensive network radiating out from Portchester Castle, which they had appropriated. Some 1,000 years later, as a result of the French invasion scares of the 1850/60s, a Southwick Lord of the Manor, Thomas Thistlethwayte (the younger), sold 900 acres of portsdown Hill to the Government, in 1862. The price was the then enormous sum of £95,200. Admittedly this princely sum took in the right to dear-fell the wooded hillsides in order to give an unimpeded field of fire. This explains the bare slopes. The land was required to construct a ring of hill-top defences. These included the Forts of Nelson, Purbrook, Southwick and Widley as well as the Spithead Forts. They were nicknamed Palmerston's Follies, after the Prime Minister who pioneered the plan. The sobriquet Folly is not surprising as the feared invasion by the French did not materialise and never a shot was fired in anger!

Invasion forces and their scheming generals were no stranger to Southwick. The Priory the grounds and possessions, which were later to form the nucleus of Southwick Estate, played host to Edward III in the 1340s. That was when he launched his son.

The Black Prince and his troops on their initial forays into France, during the 100 Years War.

Billeted soldiers were no stranger to Southwick. In the 1640s the Lord of Southwick Estates was the Parliamentarian 'Idle Dick' Norton. The 'idle' was reputedly due to his disinclination to settle down to one task at a time. Be that as it may he based his foot and horse troops, 'The Hambledon Boys', at Southwick during the Civil War battles, that tore England apart.

Royalty were no strangers to Southwick, as the village had played host to seven Kings of the Realm up until 1943.

Keeping secrets and being secretive was no strange experience for Southwick. These characteristics dated from the establishment of the all-powerful, wealthy Southwick Priory in about 1148. This medieval religious order controlled the area for some 400 years. The Priors and Canons were followed by a dynastic, influential, if reserved and taciturn family who took over many of the Priory's holdings. They were to remain at the helm, as private and self-contained as ever, until the outbreak of the Second World War (and on to this very day). From 1940 secrecy was the nation's watchword - 'Careless Talk Costs Lives'. But whatever was happening up at Southwick House, in the dark days of 1944, was the best kept secret of all. A rigid curtain of mystery was pulled tight around the building and its grounds - and no wonder. The family mansion had been chosen as the headquarters for the planning and execution of the greatest seaborne invasion the World had ever seen - the D-Day landings. From what had been the library the Supreme Allied Commander was to issue the momentous order that triggered deployment of the massive forces which were to breach the Germans' Atlantic sea-wall defences, bring about the collapse of the once all-conquering Third Reich and end in the destruction of Hitler's Nazi war machine, in the bomb-torn bunkers of Berlin. That secretive and unique!

\*(Incidentally, the Wickham-Southwick-Cosham road numbering varies. Sometimes it is A333, sometimes B2177 - it all depends if the local authorities and or highway chappies wish to duck spending money on its upkeep. No funds and it becomes a 'B' road. money spare and suddenly it is an 'A' thoroughfare!).

Abridged from: Jeffrey O'Connell's – Southwick the D-Day Village that Went to War