

◆ Charles Dawson's rare essay on the hermitage at Buxted

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The Sussex antiquarian Charles Dawson, notorious for his involvement in the Piltdown Man fraud, wrote an essay on the rock hermitage at Buxted which has yet to figure in direct discussion of Dawson's life, work and forgeries. The essay was printed in limited numbers early in the twentieth century as the introduction to photograph albums commissioned by Cecil De M. Caulfeild Pratt of High Hurstwood, Buxted. Particularly in context with the photographs, Dawson's essay throws further light on his interests, motivations, scholarly methods and on previously unrecorded social and professional contacts. Internal evidence from Dawson's essay, together with the present author's family history, is used to suggest a window of dating for the essay and for the photographs (by Towner of Uckfield). It is further suggested how one of Dawson's footnotes to the essay relates to the forging of inscribed Roman tiles allegedly found at Pevensey Castle. Dawson's essay is then reproduced as an appendix, with some annotations.

As stemming from the prime suspect in the Piltdown Man fraud, the uncollected writings of Charles Dawson continue to command interest as evidence of his connections, interests, scholarly abilities and motivations.



Fig. 1. Charles Dawson in 1896/7.¹

Such manuscript and printed writings range over subjects as diverse as the occurrence of natural gas in the Weald and Dawson's reported sighting of a giant sea serpent in the English Channel. However, presumably on account of its rarity and private circulation, one particular printed text has never figured directly in accounts of the activities of the Sussex solicitor and antiquarian, up to and including Miles Russell's

Piltdown Man: the Secret Life of Charles Dawson (2003).² This is Dawson's essay 'The History of the Hermitage at Buxted, Sussex'.

The essay was commissioned by, and according to the title page 'kindly written and compiled for', Cecil De M. Caulfeild Pratt, Esq., owner of the house and estate known as the Hermitage, at High Hurstwood near Buxted in Sussex, just two or three miles from Dawson's home and office in Uckfield. Dawson's name appears on the title page as 'Charles Dawson, Esq., F.S.A., F.G.S., &c.'

In 1901 Cecil De M. Caulfeild Pratt was a 44-year-old bachelor living on his own means with an establishment consisting of housekeeper, cook, groom-coachman and gardener. As a bachelor, despite the level of his domestic support, Pratt liked to describe himself as the latter-day 'hermit' of the estate, and at some point instituted a project of having photographs taken celebrating the idyll of his house, its grounds and his lifestyle. There were probably two separate commissions. The photographs presented Pratt in various poses and locations, his favourite horses and pets (his dogs and Freda the donkey) and also the adjacent rock formations containing a series of supposedly anciently worked and connected caves that gave the house its name. The photographs were then mounted and finely bound in order to create albums. Prefacing each album that I have encountered is Charles Dawson's essay on the rock hermitage, on double-sided sheets, each leaf of the essay being bound separately into the volume. (I have come across no evidence of the essay ever having been bound for circulation in its own right, but only in association with the photographs.) There were, at the very least, two editions of the essay, and indeed of the albums. One edition (here termed Edition A) is larger in size and scope, with 16 photographs, approximately 8" × 5.5" including a reproduction of an image of the rock hermitage (see Fig. 2) by way of introduction. While uncaptioned in the album, this is in fact a



Fig. 2. Outside of the Vineyard Rock. (Source: Photograph no. 1, *The Hermitage*, Edition A (n.p.).)

version of Samuel Hieronymus Grimm's 'Outside of the Vineyard Rock, in Buxted Parish, taken 1785'.³ The smaller edition (here termed Edition B), while lacking the drawing, has 14 photographs, each approximately 6.5" × 4.5". The photographs in each edition duplicate some subjects, but each edition is composed of entirely different photographs. While the smaller edition (Edition B) is fully bound in morocco, decorated and lettered in gilt ('The Hermitage Buxted'), the larger (Edition A) is bound in green cloth and vellum, lettered in gilt ('The Hermitage'), and also includes Pratt's full name on the upper board. In Edition B the photographs are titled on the mounts in gilt with the name of the photographer, 'G[eorge] B[ingham] Towner' of Uckfield, in silver. In Edition A the photographs are untitled and the photography is not attributed. It thus seems likely that Bingham Towner — a postman who was initially an amateur photographer — was only responsible for the photography in Edition B.⁴ The jocular tone of the titles of the photographs in the latter edition strongly suggests that they represent Pratt's own phrasing (e.g. 'The Hermit and his Poms').

Dawson's essay appears in the two editions set differently by two local jobbing printer-publishers and bookbinders. The essay in Edition

A was printed by Harcourt Smith of 'The Library', Uckfield, and in Edition B by J. Brooker and Son, also of the High Street, Uckfield.⁵ Each printer used his own particular headpiece and decorative initial for the first word of the text. Brooker's version, however, includes a ground plan of the caves (see Fig. 10) and an attractive tailpiece in the form of an engraving of the Buxted rock hermitage (see Fig. 11), while Harcourt Smith's printing lacks these features. The ground plan, in particular, has more than a decorative function since the plan's lettering of the separate rooms in the caves keys into the description of the caves in the text (see p. 204–5 *this article*) and the Harcourt Smith text is consequently difficult to follow without that ground plan. Both the ground plan and the engraving had first appeared in the Rev. Edward Turner's account of the caves in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* in 1859 and his subsequent publication *Uckfield, Past and Present* (1860).⁶ The ground plan also appeared in the description of Buxted (with a text that has obvious and unacknowledged debts to Turner) in John Brooker's *Guide and Directory for Uckfield and District* (1888). This was presented by Brooker as a revised and enlarged edition of Whiting's *Uckfield's Visitor's Guide* of 1869 and Brooker remarked in his preface:



Fig. 3. The Hermit and his poms. (Source: Photograph no. 2, *The Hermitage Buxted*, Edition B (n.p.))

'As a protection against unwarrantable "scissoring", the copyright of the former work [Whiting's] has been purchased, and the present one entered at Stationers' Hall'. Now it is hard to imagine that Pratt would have commissioned a new edition of Dawson's essay specifically omitting those two illustrations, and it follows that their absence from the Harcourt Smith printing indicates that Brooker's edition was the later one — particularly as Brooker had some claim (if a questionable one) on the copyright of the ground plan. There are slight variants between the two printings that also suggest this sequence: the word 'draughtsmen' (Edition A, p. 4) is corrected to 'draughtsman' (Edition B, p. 4); a comma is correctly omitted after the word 'Collections' in the Brooker printing (Edition B, p. 5); the phrases 'the old days' and 'out of the rocks' (Edition A, pp. 3 & 9) appear in the Brooker printing as 'old days' and 'out of rocks' (Edition B, pp. 3 & 9) and are doubtless errors of omission between the two printings, resulting in

a loss of idiomatic expression. The scenario that opens is of Pratt having commissioned one set of photographs, together with Dawson's essay, for the larger edition (Edition A), but of his then having become dissatisfied with the intelligibility of the text in the Harcourt Smith printing. Hence the Brooker printing (Edition B), with its addition of the illustrations that had originally accompanied Edward Turner's studies — and to which Brooker maintained some copyright claim — and the opportunity for further improvements, including the new set of Towner photographs, titled on the mounts.

No date of production is specified in either edition, but a broad timeframe for Dawson's composition of the essay, and for Towner's photographs, can be proposed. The latest date mentioned in the essay itself is 22 April 1899, a reference by Dawson to the death of the well-known Uckfield and Crowborough doctor, registrar, antiquarian, astronomer and meteorologist,



Fig. 4. George Miles from a Towner photograph. (Detail of 'George and Nob'. Source: Photograph no. 4, *The Hermitage Buxted*, Edition B (n.p.))

Charles Leeson Prince, and so the essay self-evidently postdates that event. Two of the albums in question, one of each edition as described above, are owned by my family. This is in consequence of my grandfather George Miles (married to Alice Thomas in 1899), having worked for Pratt at the Hermitage, probably from the late 1890s into the new century.⁷ In 1891 George was a teenager working at the Rocks Estate in Uckfield, but by the time of the 1901 census he was installed with his wife at the Hermitage. George Miles was the groom and coachman in Pratt's employ, and a number of photographs in Edition B of the albums feature George parading his employer's horses, each in turn for display before Towner's camera. It can reasonably be assumed that these copies of the albums were presented to George and Alice Miles as mementos of their stay at the Hermitage, for some time before 1907 the couple moved to Barrowby, near Grantham, in Lincolnshire (where my father, George Bertram Miles, is registered as having been born on 1 January 1907). As a consequence, Dawson's essay must have been first printed

after April 1899 and the Towner photographs must have been taken before, at least, the end of 1906. Gauging my grandfather's age in the photographs is not particularly easy, although he is probably in his mid-twenties: since he was born in 1876, that estimate of his age would further confirm that Towner's photographs of the Hermitage were taken in the first few years of the twentieth century.

Internal evidence from the essay confirms the likelihood of its having been written in that broad period, and probably in the earlier or middle part of it. For example, the catalogue of the exhibition of Sussex ironwork and pottery that Dawson organized in Lewes from 1901 included a photograph of an Elizabethan iron fireback and brand irons from 'The Rocks, Buxted' that in 1903 Dawson can be found describing as being in his own possession.⁸ 'The Rocks' is less a specific address than a location connoting the area around Rocks Lane, High Hurstwood, which

included the Rocks Farm, Rocks Cottages and the Hermitage itself (thought to be Elizabethan in origin), the latter standing on land that was once part of the Rocks Farm. Clearly, then, there is a possibility that Dawson's relationship with Pratt was well enough established by 1903, perhaps on the back of the essay project itself, for him to have obtained the fireback from the High Hurstwood 'hermit'. Certainly Dawson had been scouting the Buxted area in general for exhibits. In the exhibition he displayed a photograph of an iron gate *in situ* at Newhouse Farm and also 'an iron mortar from the Hogg House, Buxted'. He also apparently persuaded Alfred Eade, retired village blacksmith (and my great, great grandfather), to become an exhibitor and contribute 'the fore portion of an Iron Cannon, supposed to have been cast by Ralph Hogge at his forge at Buxted [.] burst above the trunions [.] dug up on the site of an old forge near the Buxted Bridge'.⁹ Moreover, while it is by no means entirely out of place that Dawson's essay on the Hermitage should have commenced with references to the forest of Andred, to the history of the iron and glass industry

of the area and present a fair amount of detail about nearby Hogge House before beginning to say anything about the Hermitage, such an introduction also seems more than consonant with the mind of a man preoccupied with his exhibition. Indeed, in one direction or another, Dawson came close to plagiarizing himself. In the essay on the Hermitage Dawson wrote:

Nowadays the forest in the neighbourhood of the Hermitage, locally called the Ashdown Forest, is a forest merely in name. Instead of the forest realm of lost Anderida, resonant with the clang of iron forges, we now see the bright and peaceful pastures and listen to the soft, sweet bell of the distant fold. (p. 10)

In his catalogue of the Lewes exhibition he wrote:

Now, in spite of warnings and legislation, the forest has gone — root, stub, and branch, and in place of the noble mast resounding with the clang of iron hammers, we are left with green sunny pastures and the sweet note of the sheep-bell. (p. 27)

Certainly, this chiming is consonant with the proposition that Dawson's composition of the essays on the Hermitage and on 'Sussex iron work and pottery' virtually overlapped one another.

A further clue to the date of the essay, and one that has some bearing on a particularly notorious episode in Dawson's career, appears in the unassuming form of the first footnote to the first page of Dawson's essay. Here Dawson glosses his phrase 'The Roman station of Anderida' with the words 'the site of the town is still a matter of dispute: it was probably Pevensey Castle' (p. 10). In fact, by 1907 Dawson had ostensibly put an end to any such dispute as there was on the matter by faking a number of inscribed 'Roman' bricks. This would have been no great difficulty in Sussex, and particularly not in Uckfield with the presence of, for example, Benjamin Ware's brick-works and Ware's local army of labourers. (Owen French, husband of Dawson's landlady in Uckfield, has been described as having been a 'brickmoulder' by trade — though so were many others.¹⁰) One thread that emerges from all Dawson's shenanigans is not just his easy cross-class movement, his happy mingling with both Sussex working people and the social and intellectual elite of the day, but also his exploitation of those working people in his methods of acquiring, manufacturing, declaring

or concealing the sources of his 'finds', confident of his ruses being protected by what in general was the gap in communication between classes in late Victorian and Edwardian England.

As Russell relates the affair of the Pevensey bricks (pp. 97–107), early in 1907 Dawson told the London Society of Antiquaries that he had found the inscribed bricks in Pevensey Castle back in 1902. Meanwhile, Louis Salzman, in an independent excavation at Pevensey during 1906–7, innocently discovered a planted example of the bricks, this time with the inscription apparently half-eroded. Dawson's principal example of the tiles was clearly inscribed 'HON AVG ANDRIA'. Russell observes:

Although the HON AVG part of the inscription was easy enough to translate ['Honorius Augustus'], the term ANDRIA was more tricky. Dawson, however, confidently asserted that it 'suggests *Anderida*, *Anderesium* or *Andredes-ceaster*, names already identified with the *Castra* of Pevensey [']. The brick therefore provided, in three short abbreviated words, an approximate date, an imperial sponsor and a name for the fort. There was no doubt about it: the bricks that Dawson had found at Pevensey were a major find, probably the most important ever found from within Roman Britain. (p. 98)

No doubt, that is, until the 1970s when scientific methods dated the tiles to the period 1900–1940 — or, in historical context, one can say, 1900–1906 — and, as a matter of suspicion, 1900–1902.

Dawson's footnote to the essay on the Hermitage thus confirms that the essay dates from earlier than 1907; otherwise that footnote would doubtless have referred to his own address on his discovery of the Pevensey bricks and its reporting in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*. Certainly he would not have referred to the historical location of Anderida as 'still a matter of dispute', for his report on the bricks was quickly accepted as proving the matter.¹¹ It is the case, of course, that even a little exposure to Charles Dawson leaves one like Dickens's lawyer in *Bleak House* — acquiring 'a distrust of one's own mother and a contempt for one's own kind'. So it does have to be asked whether Dawson salted this footnote on Anderida into the essay on the Hermitage because his plans to forge the Pevensey bricks were already in mind, in progress or achieved as he wrote — thus

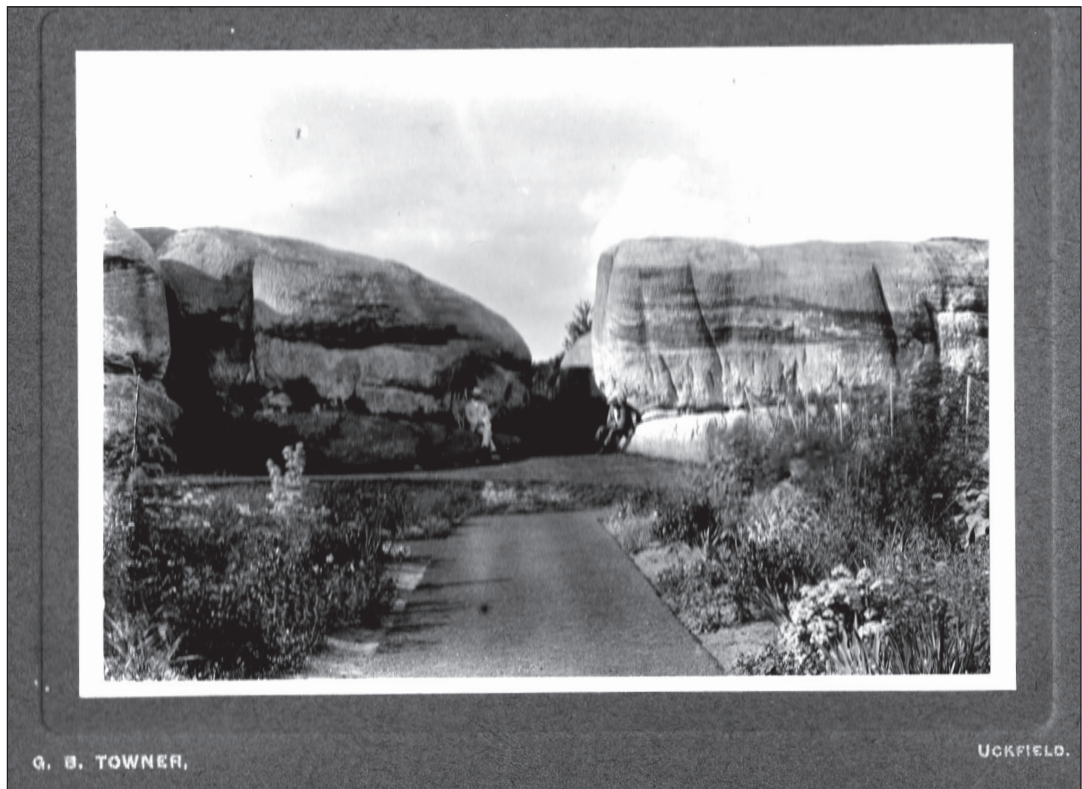


Fig. 5. Herbaceous garden and rocks. (Source: Photograph no. 7, *The Hermitage Buxted*, Edition B (n.p.))

giving him the latitude eventually to claim, if he wished, not just the kudos of having discovered the first and best example of the bricks, but the astuteness of a prior statement in print apparently later confirmed by that very discovery: 'it was probably Pevensey Castle'. And should anyone have doubted the claimed date of 1902 for the discovery of the bricks, Dawson would have been able to point back to the footnote as a trace of his contemporaneous thinking on the subject. If any defenders of Dawson still exist, they might argue that the footnote merely indicates that Dawson had, in good faith, by the time he was writing the footnote, found the brick forged by a malicious third party and was continuing to mull over its significance in a cautious manner. Needless to say, the balance of probabilities is against it, particularly as the observation concerning the location of Anderida is one of Dawson's fairly rare authorial contributions amidst the widespread 'scissoring' that constitutes his essay. For my purposes,

however, Dawson's footnote principally serves to make a date of 1900–03 for the Hermitage essay increasingly likely, though certainly no later than 1906 and still most probably a few years earlier than that. Carolyn Baird has indeed dated one of Towner's 'earliest efforts' in photography to 1903.¹² If that is the case, Towner's photographs of the Hermitage must also have been among them.

How many copies of the albums — and of Dawson's essay — were produced is anybody's guess. In effect, the size and even the composition of the editions was an open-ended matter between Pratt and his bookbinders. At the turn of the twenty-first century a third copy of such a volume was in the possession of Mr and Mrs Carroll, owners of the Hermitage.¹³ East Sussex Record Office holds a copy, making a fourth.¹⁴ Other copies may remain in private hands but so far I have come across none in institutional libraries. The interest of the volumes at first appears to lie in the sheer fact of the existence of Dawson's essay, although — as the

title page effectively warns — it is as much (indeed, far more) a compilation as an original essay, relying very heavily, if innocently and transparently, though somewhat redundantly, on the earlier work on the Buxted caves by the Rev. Edward Turner. Miles Russell's recent study, consolidating some earlier findings of mine, emphasizes the looseness of the boundary between compilation and scholarship that characterizes much of Dawson's writing.

One corner of particular interest does emerge from the photographs themselves. The only obvious human figures in the Towner photographs are Pratt himself in various poses and George Miles in his role as groom. One wide-angle photograph, however, entitled 'Herbaceous Garden and Rocks' (see Fig. 5), contains two small figures on each side of a gateway, their presence enabling the rock formations to be gauged against a human scale. Under scanning, at extreme magnification, the left-hand figure unsurprisingly turns out to be the relaxed and elegantly dressed Pratt (see Fig. 6), though rather more surprisingly not only accompanied by a live dog, but comfortably posed by what appears to be his shrine in the rocks for a collection of toy (in the sense of model — one trusts not *stuffed*) dogs. The right-hand figure, seemingly less comfortable in his pose, is probably the photographer Towner (see Fig. 7), using a timer on his exposure. Just possibly it is a young Charles Dawson himself. Both men affected boater hats: in Towner's case, as in a photograph reproduced by Carolyn Baird (see Note 4 below) and in Dawson's, as in Piltdown excavation photographs about a decade later (see Fig. 8). To my eye, however, Towner has the better claim.

'Herbaceous Garden and Rocks' thus presents itself as the record of a fine day at the Hermitage when Pratt invited Towner, and possibly Dawson, to High Hurstwood from Uckfield in order to make progress with the new set of photographs. Dawson himself was demonstrably 'a highly competent



Fig. 6. Herbaceous garden detail.

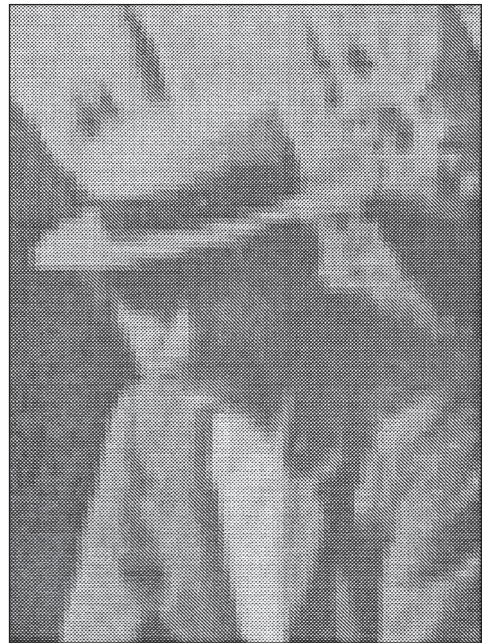


Fig. 7. Herbaceous garden further detail.

photographer' and no doubt this is what had brought him into contact with Towner in the first place.¹⁵ However, photography was not Dawson's



Fig. 8. Dawson in a boater at Piltdown.

principal avocation and it seems that he was happy to defer to young Towner for the production of that particular element of Pratt's vanity albums.

Yet for all its vanity function, Dawson's essay, beyond the particular light that it sheds on the affair of his supposed proof that Pevensey Castle was the site of Anderida, is significant because it testifies to his previously unnoticed relationship with Pratt and to another thread in Dawson's hunt for early human traces in the years up to Piltdown. In particular, at this distance it stands out that the essay laments the disappearance of the skeleton of the original supposed hermit of the Hermitage: 'It is to be regretted that the bones were not suffered to rest where they were found, but this was not so' (p. 10), though whether or not Dawson himself would have permitted them to rest longer, had they proved available, is quite another question. Ironically enough, more recent research — as Parish points out — has at least proposed a mesolithic site [5000–7000 BC] in association with the Buxted rock formations. The essay further augments one's sense

of Dawson's interest in dene holes, tunnels, cave dwellings and the like, such as he had previously shown in connection with the Lavant Caves and Hastings Castle. Meanwhile, Pratt's volumes afforded Dawson the opportunity to write the 'authorized' essay on the hermitage of the rocks and thus take intellectual ownership of a local site of both geological and archaeological interest. It provided him with a platform from which he could assert his authority by gently correcting the recently deceased Charles Leeson Prince on a matter of detail and reiterate his scholarly correction of a contemporaneous contributor to *Sussex Archaeological Collections*. He was also able to take issue on a matter of fact concerning caves at Hastings not just with Edward Turner, but with 'Moss, the Historian of Hastings'.¹⁶ (However, it was only by the time of his own *History of Hastings Castle* [1909] that Dawson came to understand that the text of Moss's *History* had been written by another hand or hands and, as he noted in his own volumes on the castle -- perhaps with a touch of self-righteous irritation, remembering how he had taken 'Moss' to task in 'The History of the Hermitage at Buxted' -- 'without acknowledgment by the ostensible writer'.)¹⁷ In terms of a broader model of cultural history, the essay and the episode also constitute further brushstrokes in a picture of what Sir Arthur Keith, in his obituary of Dawson, called 'that great class of men [...] the thinking, observant amateur', their friends among the gentry and that whole milieu of extraordinarily disparate discovery, actual and scholarly as well as synthetic and fraudulent, that so characterized the intellectual life of Sussex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸ And in the short term, the project at the Hermitage provided Dawson, at a particularly busy period in his life, with a physically impressive publication to weigh down his desk for relatively little effort, for doubtless he also became an owner of one of Pratt's vanity albums.

As a coda, it might be noted that the day at the Hermitage ended with some humour. This is revealed by another of Towner's photographs of George Miles, this time in charge of Pratt's trap with the pony 'Nob' in harness, doubtless ready to drive Pratt's visitor or visitors back to Uckfield (see Fig. 9). In all Towner's other photographs featuring the groom (as in a family photo of George Miles quite distinct from those in Pratt's



Fig. 9. George and Nob. (Source: Photograph no. 9, *The Hermitage Buxted*, Edition B (n.p.))

albums), George faithfully wears his cloth cap as a matter of the domestic servant's uniform. But in this photograph the groom has become a swell, less the servant than a master with his own vehicle, sporting his holiday boater hat. So, as the novelist Marcel Proust confirms, would matters have appeared to any observer with a lived sense of Edwardian society:

the lift-boy, having removed what I should have called his livery and he called his tunic, appeared wearing a straw hat, carrying a cane, holding himself stiffly erect, for his mother had warned him never to adopt the 'working-class' or 'pageboy' style. Just as, thanks to books, all knowledge is open to a working man, who ceases to be such when he has finished his work, so, thanks to a 'boater' hat and a pair of gloves, elegance became accessible to the lift-boy who, having ceased

for the evening to take the visitors upstairs, imagined himself [...] a typical young man about town.¹⁹

While I have no wish to deny my grandfather a boater hat out of hours, in the case of this photograph, the boater has plainly appeared from no other place than the head of the right-hand figure in 'Herbaceous Garden and Rocks' (see Fig. 7). If George doesn't look too sure about the pantomime, it may be because he sensed that the joke was as much at his employer's expense as his own. The picture of George in the boater nevertheless found its way into Pratt's albums, suggesting that Pratt either missed the joke entirely or was perfectly happy to share in it. The chances are that it was Bingham Towner's joke – a photographer's joke. Or perhaps it was Charles Dawson's. But with the Pevensey tiles in mind, Charles Dawson had a bigger joke in store.

APPENDIX: THE HISTORY OF THE
HERMITAGE AT BUXTED, SUSSEX
by Charles Dawson

[3]²⁰ In primeval days the sandstone rocks, in which are cut the Buxted Hermitage, were situate in the midst of the great forest of Andred, which according to the Saxon Chronicle extended across a great portion of the County of Sussex. This forest, from which the Roman station of Anderida* took its name, has long since been destroyed, having been mostly cut down for the purpose of making charcoal wherewith to smelt the iron ore which abounds in the neighbourhood, or for the making of glass, which was also an old Sussex industry.

† Buxted was from Roman times down to the last century almost the centre of the iron smelting trade of the Weald. It was in the year 1543 that it obtained immortal fame by the making of the first *cast* cannon by one Ralph Hogge and John Johnson his man. The Iron-Master Hogge lived in the Elizabethan house at the corner of the road leading from Buxted Park to the Hermitage on the way from Buxted Railway Station. It was in a field to the west of this house in which the village traditionary distich says:

“I, Ralph Hogge and my man John
At Buckstede cast the first cannon.”

Over the front porch of the house is the *rebus* of Ralph Hogge, being the image of a hog in iron cast in *bas relief* and bearing the date between its legs of 1581.

* The site of the town is still a matter of dispute: it was probably Pevensey Castle.

† Spelt in old days “Buckstede.”

[4] Nowadays the forest in the neighbourhood of the Hermitage, locally called the Ashdown Forest, is a forest merely in name. Instead of the forest realm of lost Anderida, resonant with the clang of iron forges, we now see the bright and peaceful pastures and listen to the soft, sweet bell of the distant fold—

“O'er waving fields
And pastures green.”²¹

The bold grey sandstone rocks to be seen at the Hermitage belong, geologically speaking, to the lower Tunbridge Wells Sands, and it is to these Sands that we owe so much picturesque scenery in the neighbourhood of Uckfield and Tunbridge Wells.

According to the ancient village traditions a hermit in times of yore dwelt and died in the rooms cut in the grey sandstone rock.

While building operations were being carried out to erect the modern house by Mr E.W. Streeter, a former owner, a large grave was discovered, cut into the sand on top of the rock, by the workmen engaged, and in which a human skeleton was then discovered. It is to be regretted that the bones were not suffered to rest where they were found, but this was not so. The outline of the grave may still be traced.

It is conjectured that this grave was that of the hermit who carved the habitation.

The caves are situate on what was once part of the Charity Farm at Buxted, belonging to Dr. Saunders, who founded the Grammar School at Uckfield in the year 1718. There are two drawings of this habitation among Gough's *Topographical Collections*, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which were taken May 28th, 1785. They are in pencil and “wash:” the first view shows the “Rocks in Buxted,” in Sussex, called “The Vineyard,” there being formerly a plantation of vines here, which, according to the draughtsman, “throve well, being sheltered from the winds, and open to the meridian sun. The rock which makes the foreground is hollowed out for a habitation;” the second view shews the “Outside of the rock habitation of the Vineyard Rocks, near Buxted, in Sussex; it is decidedly of great antiquity. Traces of its having been a vineyard still remain.”²²

There are also some drawings (pencil and “wash”) in the Burrell Collection, in the British Museum, of the Rocks in the 18th century,

[5] which are very interesting. The Rev. Edward Turner, formerly Rector of Maresfield, writing (1859), in the *Sussex Archæological Collections* (vol. xii., page 13), says:

“With regard to this habitation and its arrangements, it appears to have consisted of three principal rooms, marked A, B, and E on the ground plan, two only of which now remain in a perfect state, A and B; a portion of the third, E, having been cut away to admit of an oast-house being built upon a portion of it. These rooms are connected with each other by means of passages. That they were originally a habitation, as Gough calls them, of

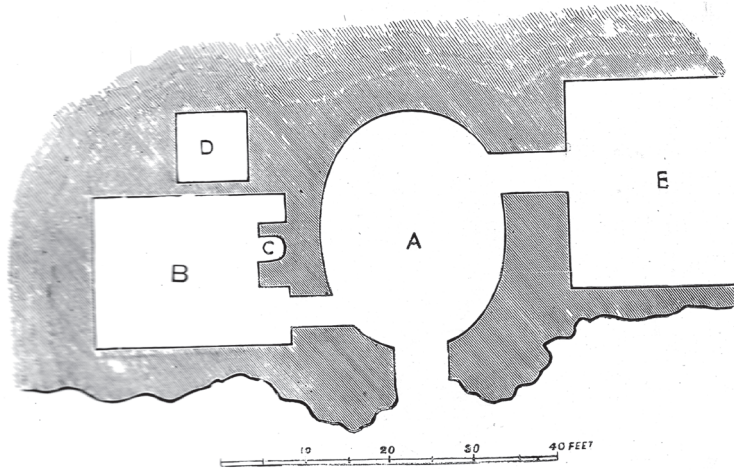


Fig. 10. Ground plan of the Buxted hermitage.

some kind, there can be no doubt; the easternmost of the three, B, which was evidently the principal living room, having a raised projecting platform of about three feet square, C., left on the entrance side, which has evidently been used as a fireplace and over which is a round hole, cut through the solid rock, which forms a flue, for the smoke to pass away. Out of this is a small recess, D, cut farther into the rock, of about five or six feet square. How this room was approached it would be difficult now to say; and we are equally in the dark as to the use for which it was designed. The most plausible conjecture is, that it was intended for a *cubiculum*; in which case the occupant would have had to climb up between two and three feet to obtain admission into it, and

[6] down again about the same distance to reach the floor; for, though at the South East corner of Room B there are a few rude steps which appear to have led to a narrow platform communicating with this small room, still the doorway is the distance, which I have just mentioned, above this platform, and the floor nearly or quite upon a level with it. This room appears to have been lighted by a round hole made through the partition wall between it and room B, to the right of the doorway, and close up under the roof this hole still remains. The doorway being considerably broken away at the bottom, seems to favour my hypothesis of the only access to it being by means of climbing; this

doorway is tolerably well proportioned. The only outward entrance into this habitation is into the middle room A by a pointed arch doorway, formed between two projecting points of the rock, the proportions of which have been much spoiled by their having been enlarged to admit of the rooms being used by the tenant of the farm, as a receptacle for his lesser agricultural implements not in daily employ, with which they are generally pretty well filled. The eastern room, B, is now open on the North side; but that it was originally closed in may be plainly seen by portions of the rock remaining at each end of the opening, the greater part having been cut away to facilitate the access into it, and to make it more generally useful; about the middle, too, of the open space, the top of a narrow lancet window is still visible. The ground floor of this room has been lowered about two feet below its original level; its dimensions are eighteen feet wide by twenty four feet long; and the other two rooms are about the same size. If there be any material difference it is in the middle room, which is two feet narrower, but three feet longer; its shape too is oval, while the others are angular. The thickness of solid rock between rooms A and B is about 5 feet, and between A and E about ten feet; the roof of B is about 12 feet, and of A about nine feet from the floor."

"The formation of this dwelling place must have been a work of great labour and difficulty; and various have been the conjectures advanced as to the class of person for whose occupation

it was intended. Tradition connects it with the illegal transactions of former days. Some have imagined it to be a hiding place for smugglers; others a covert for banditti and forest marauders; and many a tale is told of scenes of rapine and bloodshed, which are supposed to have been enacted here. Caves of

[7] this kind usually inspire a feeling of awe and dread on the uncultivated and superstitious minds of those who live in their immediate locality. But these excavations are far too ancient to be connected with contraband doings. They have every appearance of having been in existence for some centuries. Their antiquity seems to me to be unquestionable. The habitation is sometimes spoken of as a hermitage, and as such I am disposed to consider it. The life of a hermit is supposed to have had its origin in a desire to practise the austerities to which John the Baptist devoted himself during his residence in the wilderness of Judæa, and this spot would be well adapted to the doing so. The huge mass of rock out of which this hermitage is hewn, stands by itself at the upper end of a field facing the north, and its situation is so elevated as to command a view of the whole range of rocks by which the field is bounded on the west side. A more secluded spot, or one approaching nearer in resemblance to the scene of the Baptist's ministrations, at the time this residence was formed, cannot well be conceived. I know nothing in the County at all resembling these Buxted Caverns, except a cave in what is called a Minnis Rock at Hastings,* which consists of one room only, of much smaller dimensions than either of the three Buxted Caves, and the area of which embraces a few yards only. Like the eastern of the Buxted Caves, it has a fireplace cleft in the solid rock to the right as you enter, over which is an aperture the thickness of the rock above, for the smoke to pass away. Within the memory of the persons now living there is said to have been (Moss, the Historian of Hastings, tells us) a cross, about the centre of this cave, cut out in the rock opposite to the entrance, by the side of which was a niche, designed doubtless for the reception of the image of some saint. These would seem to indicate that, in ancient times, this cave also was the abode of some devout hermit. If I am right then in my supposition, these rock habitations are the only specimens of hermitages to be found in the County. The Buxted

caverns are interesting to the botanist as well as the archæologist, from the variety of lichens

* This, however, is the description of a cave which was formerly the entrance to the "St. Clement's Cave," on the West Hill at Hastings, and not those in the "Minnis Rock," on the East Hill, which are comparatively speaking of modern origin. This mistake of Moss has led others astray, notably Mr Byng Gatty (see vol. xxxviii., p.129, "Sussex Archaeological Collections.") I exposed the mistake in vol. xxxix. of the Collection, p. 222 (1895). C.D.

[8] and ferns with which their damp and creviced walls and roofs are partially covered."

Mr C. L. Prince, who was formerly a surgeon practising many years at Uckfield, and who died at Crowborough 22nd April, 1899, aged 78, wrote (1896) in the "Sussex Archæological Collection," vol. xl., p.265:—

"Soon after the commencement of the present century my father entered into practice with Mr Fuller, of Uckfield, whose family, for at least three generations, had been resident medical practitioners there."

"The history of these caves had been handed down by them from one generation to another, and thence to my father, with the information that they had been used as a Pest House, into which many poor wretches were thrust who had become the victims of any infectious disease; and herein they were compelled to remain until they either died (which was too frequently the case), or recovered.

"Having had knowledge of these facts from my father, many years since, I have thought it proper to place them on record."

"The beautiful range of rocks which almost faces the entrance to the caves was formerly called 'The Vineyard,' and I can just remember being shown the vines, as they grew over them, by the then occupier of the adjoining farm."

We think that Mr Prince, in his notice goes on to use a false argument when he speculates that the caves had their origin in this use. This was probably a mere secondary use. It was quite common in times of plague and other pests to use similar caves and habitation as "Isolation Hospitals."

We learn from Mosheim, Fosbrooke, the compilers of the *Monasticon Anglicanum*, and other writers on monastic subjects, that the Religious

Order of Anchorites was one of very great antiquity; and that it had reference in the early primitive church to monks, who were so called from their habit of withdrawing themselves from Society for the better performance of some of the severer religious duties, and from their living in private cells, apart from the world.²³ Belonging to this order were the first founders of Monachism in Egypt and Palestine; some of whom lived in

[9] caves hollowed out of rocks, such as those which have been described at Buxted. Of this kind, St. Chrisostom tells us, were the monks of Mount Casius, near Antioch; while others lived in little tents and huts of the rudest structure. These were called Hermits. Others were shut up in small cells, and they were called Anchorites, or Recluses. The former order were of much greater antiquity than the latter.

This order of Hermits, which was very prevalent in the days of the Venerable Bede, was one distinguished for the great severity of its observances. At its first establishment, they who professed it were driven to frequent the wildest and most inaccessible deserts, often to avoid some impending persecution, where they debarred themselves the use of a covering of any kind; from which circumstance they derived their name. Shelter, either by night or day, was not consistent with the strictness of their rule; and for nourishment, they depended entirely upon roots and herbs, and other spontaneous productions of the earth. They were seldom stationary, their life being spent in wandering about from place to place, without having any fixed abode, reposing at night wherever the darkness might happen to overtake them, and spending their time in fasting, meditation, and prayer. Such was the life of a hermit previous to the Norman Conquest. But after the introduction of the Norman rule, the severity of their discipline was much relaxed, and we find them, instead of avoiding, drawing near to towns,

probably for the sake of the alms and benefactions which they were thus enabled the more readily to obtain. Hermitages were often near to the gates or posterns of cities and towns. There was a hermitage at Chichester near to the western gate or postern of that city, which was called the Hermitage of St. Cyriac. A subterraneous passage running from this postern for some distance under the city walls is supposed to have been connected with this cell. The hermit occupying it is mentioned in the Register of Bishop Robert Rede, as having had granted to him by this bishop, in 1304, the privilege of selling an indulgence of forty days to such benefactors as might contribute towards the repairs of his chapel oratory. Hermits were divided into nine different sub-orders, each of which was designated after the rule the professors of it followed; as the Hermits of St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Cyriac, St. Paul, &c.

The mode of life practised by the order of Anachorites, or as they

[10] are now more commonly called Anchorites or Recluses, was in many respects very similar to that observed by Hermits, though they were a totally distinct class from them and were guided by wholly different rules and regulations. Their principal difference lay in this, that while Hermits avoided the abodes of men, Anchorites lived in chambers or cells usually attached to some part of a church, or in a separate building in a churchyard. Hermits, too, wandered about, whilst Anchorites passed their whole life in cells, which they never left.

The neighbourhood of the Sussex Hermitage is now much robbed of its desolate features, but it still retains its original beauty, and although pilgrims to the Hermitage may no longer be comforted with "Indulgences," as in medieval days, they may still meet with an old English welcome from the hospitable owner of the Modern Hermitage, and in whose beautiful grounds may still be seen "The Vineyard" and the Rock Hermitage of Buxted.

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Fig. 11. Tailpiece.

NOTES

- ¹ At the time of the Piltdown excavations the Uckfield photographer John Frisby published this portrait of Dawson (see Fig. 1) as a vignette in postcards presenting a view of work in progress. The portrait came from a larger photograph of Uckfield Town Council in 1896/7. The latter photograph is reproduced in Barbara Fuller and Betty Turner, eds, *Bygone Uckfield* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1988), illustration no. 85 (n.p).
- ² Miles Russell, *Piltdown Man: the Secret Life of Charles Dawson and the World's Greatest Archaeological Hoax* (Port Stroud: Tempus, 2003).
- ³ Grimm's image (Add.MS 5671, f. 105, no. 200) can be viewed via the British Library website at: <http://www.collectbritain.co.uk> (22 August 2005). The Sussex Archaeological Society itself holds two images of the Rocks (3397 and 3398) which are 'after' the original field sketches by Grimm in the Bodleian Library and which Dawson may have known.
- ⁴ See Carolyn Baird, 'The Bingham Towner Family', *Hindsight: Journal of the Uckfield and District Preservation Society*, 6 (Summer 2000), 81–4, p. 82.
- ⁵ Harcourt Smith's shop 'The Library', emblazoned with large adverts for cheap printing and bookbinding is shown in Fuller and Turner, illustration no.12.
- ⁶ An on-line version of Edward Turner, *Uckfield: Past and Present* (Sussex Archaeological Society, 1860) is available via the website of 'The Weald of Kent, Surrey and Sussex': <http://thesussexweald.org> (22 August 2005).
- ⁷ George Miles, son of Thomas and Mildred Miles (née Edwards), originated from Hartfield and was a member of the family discussed by Elizabeth Gardiner in 'The Miles family of Hartfield', *Sussex Family Historian* (December 2004), 154–7. The family also figures significantly in Brian Short's *The Ashdown Forest Dispute* (Sussex Record Society, 1994), a case known to lawyers as *De La Warr vs Miles*. Short's study is also available on-line at the website of 'The Weald of Kent, Surrey and Sussex': see Note 6 above. I am grateful to John Miles of Ringles Cross, a grandson of George Miles, for making the albums available for this study.
- ⁸ Charles Dawson, 'Sussex iron work and pottery', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 46 (1903), 1–62, plate 8L.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34 & 36.
- ¹⁰ Simon Wright, 'Charles Dawson 1864–1916', *Hindsight: Journal of the Uckfield and District Preservation Society*, 6 (Summer 2000), 4–18, p. 5. The 1901 census lists Owen French as 'Foreman Brickyard'.
- ¹¹ Charles Dawson, 'Note on some inscribed bricks from Pevensley', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, 21 (1907), 411–13.
- ¹² Baird, p. 82.
- ¹³ R. B. Parish, 'The wishing well and rock hermitage at High Hurstwood', *Living Spring Journal*, 11 (November 2002). <http://www.bath.ac.uk/lispring/journal/issue2> (10 August 2005). Parish's article, while interesting — and constituting what seems a unique mention of Dawson's essay — contains some errors and inconsistencies.
- ¹⁴ Volume of photographs of The Hermitage Buxted, ESRO ACC6734.
- ¹⁵ Frank Spencer, 'Charles Dawson', rev. Mark Pottle, *Oxford DNB* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 15, 550–51, p. 550.
- ¹⁶ *The History and Antiquities of the Town and Port of Hastings, Illustrated by a Series of Engravings from Original Drawings*

(London: Moss, 1824).

¹⁷ Charles Dawson, *The History of Hastings Castle*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1909), I, vi. Also see Peter Miles, 'The Piltdown Man and the Norman Conquest: working volumes and printer's copy for Charles Dawson's *History of Hastings Castle*', *Studies in Bibliography* (University of Virginia), 46 (1993), 357–70.

¹⁸ Cited by Russell, 92.

¹⁹ Marcel Proust, *The Cities of the Plain, Part 1*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, (1921: London: Chatto, 1968), 266–7.

²⁰ Pagination and page-division follows Brooker's Edition B printing.

²¹ From Sir Walter Scott's 'The Lady of the Lake', Canto 5: Far to the south and east, where lay,

Extended in succession gay,
Deep waving fields and pastures green,
With gentle slopes and groves between. (ll.145–8)

²² This paragraph is paraphrased and, from 'There are two drawings' onwards, taken almost verbatim from Edward Turner, *Uckfield Past and Present*, p.13. Dawson plays fast and loose with Turner's quotation marks, resulting in some of the artist's words being presented as Dawson's, and some of Turner's words as the artist's.

²³ Johann Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History* (1755); Thomas Dudley Fosbrooke, *British Monachism; Or Manners and Customs of the Monks and Nuns of England* (1802); William Dugdale and Roger Dodsworth, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655–7).

