

◆ William Sabatier (1753–1826)

CHICHESTER'S FIRST FIELD ARCHAEOLOGIST

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William Sabatier's 1798 Description of the Roman military works in the neighbourhood of Chichester has a strong claim to be one of the first proper archaeological landscape studies. Although not by any means the first to describe or survey the entrenchments and Roman roads in the vicinity of Chichester, Sabatier was the first to undertake field survey and to describe the results in detail, and the first to illustrate them on a large-scale map. His identity, however, has remained something of a mystery. How could such a gifted fieldworker have proved to be otherwise so anonymous? Where did he develop his skills, and what was his connection with Chichester? Surely 'Sabatier' must be a pseudonym! This paper identifies the man and reveals the family connections and the career that led him to a five-week 'exploremment' of the archaeology around Chichester in September and October 1797.

INTRODUCTION

One of the first archaeological excavators of Chichester was cathedral surveyor G. M. Hills (1886), who in 1885 investigated the Residentiary Bastion, a projecting tower on the south-west stretch of the city walls, but the first local fieldworker, William Sabatier, had been active almost a century earlier, mapping Roman roads and the earthworks of various periods now collectively known as the Chichester Entrenchments. Subsequent surveys of the earthworks have referred back to his pioneering work, but virtually nothing is known about the man himself. He was not the first to describe or indeed to illustrate the earthworks — John Aubrey has that distinction (in c. 1670, McCann 1997, 12) — but his seems to have been the first comprehensive description based on personal inspection.

Sabatier's work survives as a manuscript in the National Library of Wales (Ms 5105). It had formerly been part of the collection of F. W. Bourdillon of Buddington, Easebourne, West Sussex (Bourdillon Ms 105). The title page contains a dedication to the President, Council and other members of the Antiquary Society (presumably the Society of Antiquaries of London is meant) and is dated 'London May 29th 1798'. The title of the work is *A Description of the Roman military works, in the neighbourhood of Chichester in Sussex* and it consists of 32 smallish pages and a map. It was not published until 1963, when Francis Steer

(1963) produced it as a pamphlet, no. 41 in the *Chichester Papers* series. He sought to preface it with a note about Sabatier himself, but in his foreword could do no more than cite sources where he had looked in vain to discover something about the author. Steer not unreasonably assumed that William Sabatier normally resided in Britain but, as we shall see, this was not so. He was not on any clergy or university lists, was neither a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries nor a contributor to *Archaeologia*. The text itself could have been written by any educated gentleman of the period (although it has more insights than many contemporary antiquaries show) but it gives no clues to the author's identity, even now that it is known. A note in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1816, Part II, 19 about the Entrenchments is signed 'S', but is not apparently written by Sabatier. The author is, so far, unidentified.

THE FAMILY BACKGROUND IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND

The distinctive surname, of French origin, is a dialect variant of *sabotier*, clog-maker; a saboteur was originally one who maliciously wrecked machinery etc. by kicking it to pieces with his clogs. The word is today associated with chefs' knives, but in the 18th century and earlier it was found among the French Calvinist Protestants styled Huguenots (Hargreaves 1997). Their recruitment of sufficient numbers from all classes at home had provoked Catholic repression, and the first few

had fled to Protestant countries in the early 16th century. Following the St Bartholomew's Massacre in 1572, the pace of emigration quickened. Under the Edict of Nantes (1598) they were given religious freedom at home, but this was gradually eroded and its revocation in 1685 caused a further wave of emigration. Estimates of the total number in England have varied from 40,000 (Hargreaves 1997) to twice that number. On arrival, they tended initially to work and marry within their own communities and worship in their own churches, of which they had 28 in London, nine in Spitalfields.

Surprisingly, most later conformed to the Church of England doctrine of the period. Jean Fontaine, the son of an immigrant, who married into the Sabatier family, had two brothers, Peter and James, who were both Anglican clergymen in Virginia, although his father Jacques/James had practised as a Calvinist minister in Cork, Ireland (Ressiger 2001). They looked after their own people diligently through the foundation of charitable bodies such as 'The Soup', otherwise La Maison de Charité de Spittlefields, and La Providence, the French Hospital near Old Street. Many were involved with the silk industry, engaged in the production of 'the New Draperies', lighter-weight cloths made from combinations of linen, cotton and silk, and Spitalfields became the English centre of the industry. Not all Huguenots were silk weavers; others worked as sailors, clockmakers, bakers, hatters, merchants, turners and surgeons (Molleson and Cox 1993, 96–7).

William Sabatier has now been identified by reference to his will and those of others of the same surname. The National Archives (TNA) holds the wills of his grandfather, father, mother and sister as well as his own, and bequests to family members in these wills allow us to draw up an incomplete family tree. William made his will when he was in Devonport near Plymouth in 1824 (TNA PROB 11/1718), and in it describes himself as being of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Whether this means he intended to return to British North America is uncertain, but in fact he died in Devonport two years later. Among the family members mentioned in the will are his sisters Susanna and Elizabeth. The latter, resident in Chichester, had drawn up a will in 1822 (TNA PROB 11/1706) that included bequests to her sister Susanna and her brother William and his wife, thereby confirming that she was a sibling

of William. Elizabeth's ancestry may then be traced back through her mother Susannah's will, made in 1798 (TNA PROB 11/1310), and the 1779 will of her father (TNA PROB 11/1062). Both wills were made in Chichester, although the latter describes himself as formerly a weaver of the parish of Christ Church, Middlesex. These wills, taken together, give a context for William Sabatier's presence in Chichester where, displaying what we now know to be his usual restlessness, he surveyed the Roman roads and entrenchments to occupy his time.

The great-grandfather of William Sabatier was French-born Jean Sabatier. The family was from Montpellier in Languedoc, famous as a centre for both French Protestants and silk weavers, but he had settled in London by about 1687 (Fergusson 1975, 204).

His son Jean, born in Montpellier *c.* 1680, received the sacrament in January 1699 according to the usage of the Church of England at the parish church of the Savoy. He styled himself John in England, but is here given his forename in French to distinguish him from his son, also John, and a third kinsman of the same name to whom he bequeathed a small amount. Yet another of the same name was John Sabatier of Summergrove Mount Mellick, Queens Co (now Co Laos), Ireland (Parliamentary Archives HL/PO/JO/10/512/1371). In his will of 1745 he described himself as a master silk weaver in the parish of Christ Church, Spittlefield Middlesex. He and his wife Anne had two children. His daughter Mary Magdalene married another Huguenot, Jean Fontaine, in 1728. Jean Fontaine had already led a colourful life, having sailed as an ensign in 1710 with Lord Shaw's regiment to Ireland and thence to Spain, returning home in 1713. In 1714 he had sailed to Virginia, explored beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains and written a journal about it, bought a plantation in King William's County, and remained there for four years before sailing to Dublin in 1719. He then removed himself to London, studied watch and clock making, and in 1722 was in business for himself before taking up his father-in-law's occupation of silk weaver (www.juch.org/fontaine/pafg10.asp).

Jean Sabatier's son, also John, was born in 1712/13 (McConnell 2004; Rothstein 2001). Apprenticed to his father in 1719, he took his freedom in the Weavers' Company, of which he became a liveryman in 1743. In 1745, in the face

of the Jacobite threat, he offered to take up arms against the Young Pretender. Until the time of his father's death they probably traded together. For much of the 1750s he was in partnership with fellow Huguenot David Delavau. Between them they had around 100 looms, each operated by four men, and in the mid 1700s supplied most of the leading London merchants with Garthwaite-designed silks, and exported to Ireland as well (Schoeser 2008). Anna Maria Garthwaite, daughter of an East Midlands clergyman, lived at 2 Princelet Street Spitalfields from 1728 to 1763. Her silk designs (there were more than 1000) featured vividly realistic flowers. British North America was an important export market for Spitalfield silks, because the Navigation Act prohibited trade directly with France, and her patterns may be seen in colonial portraits of the period. Many of her watercolour designs, surviving in the Victoria and Albert Museum, are dated, annotated with weaving instructions and bearing the names of the weavers who bought them.

John, too, married within the Huguenot community, in 1736, and he and his wife Susanne Pouget had four children who survived to adulthood, John, William, Susanna and Elizabeth. In the year of his marriage he was living at 16 Princelet Street on the Wood-Mitchell estate west of Brick Lane in Spitalfields, and by 1750 he occupied the adjacent no. 14 also (Sheppard 1957, 188–9). Like his father, he was active in community affairs, being, for example, an elder of the French Church in Threadneedle Street and a director of La Providence Hospital. In about 1777 he retired with his wife and daughters to Chichester, where he leased a house from the Revd William Wareing, curate of St Olave's (www.theclergydatabase.org.uk) on the north side of East Street, and on his death in 1780 was buried in The Litten cemetery. Katherine Slay of West Sussex Record Office has pointed out that the vestry and churchwardens' minute book for St Pancras parish records a 'Mr Sabaterr' in March 1774 in a house formerly owned by Mr Rosier that appears second on the list. She speculates that this was the second house along from East Walls, a property subsequently demolished to make way for the Shippams factory (Slay 2010, 17–18). He left assets worth around £3000. His widow Susanne, now a wealthy woman, stayed in Chichester. She had moved to a house in the parish of St Peter the Less at the top end of

North Street by the time of her death, which is recorded in the register of that parish. Her dwelling and contents were insured for £400 (Thomas 2000). She was looked after by her daughters until her death in 1798, aged 80, when she was buried with her husband. They were commemorated by a splendid memorial befitting such a wealthy family, some of which survives *ex situ* today (2009) in the remains of The Litten. The epitaph is now very hard to make out. The top two lines are illegible, and at least one line (here restored within curved brackets) is below ground. What can now be read is as follows.

**the Remains of
JOH[N SABA]TIER
Died Jan [30] 178[0]
Aged 67 years
**** of his Wife
[SUSAN]NA POUGET
died July 1 1798 [ag]ed 80 [years]
were both children of Refug[ees]
**** driven to England by the
*****ions in France at the
(Revocation of the Edict of Nantes)**

The letters within square brackets are assumed. The bottom line is from an earlier summary of the inscription, which reads:

JOHN SABATIER died January 30th 1780, aged 67. SUSANNA POUGET died July 1st 1798, aged 80. They were both children of refugees who were driven from FRANCE by the persecutions in France at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

The opposite face of the monument is identical but has apparently never borne an inscription. Of the daughters, Elizabeth remained unmarried and was still in Chichester at the time of her death in 1825. No record has been found of her sister Susanna's death. She may have married late in life and taken her husband's name.

THE EARLY CAREER OF WILLIAM SABATIER

There is a hint that some people at least came to pronounce the name 'Saboteer'. John Sabatier is recorded as 'Mr. Sabateer' in the vestry and churchwardens' minute book for St Pancras in March 1774 (Slay 2010, 17–18). In 1802 a Nova

Scotian source spoke of Mr Sabotiere, ‘a favourite of Fortunes who lives on the interest of Money...’ (Fergusson 1975, 209). Whether this was welcomed as proof of Anglicisation, a matter of indifference or indeed of resentment is unknown. It may be no more than a spelling error.

William (or Guillaume), the younger son of John Sabatier, was baptised in London on 10 May 1753 and probably born no more than a few days earlier. He was infected with a wanderlust similar to that of his uncle, Jean Fontaine. Nothing is known of his upbringing, but he was later regarded as an English gentleman and had presumably received an appropriate education. He set out as a teenager to make his fortune by whatever means in the colonies of British North America on the eve of the War of American Independence, and it is his frequent absence from Britain that has made him hard to trace. It is possible that his avowed intention to emigrate triggered his father to make a will in 1779. William eventually settled in what became the province of Nova Scotia in Canada, and the *Dictionary of Canadian biography online* is the source for much of his American career outlined below.

His first home had been in Maryland, where he combined trade with commercial farming, but as a loyalist he moved to New York following the outbreak of the American Revolution, obtaining a post with the British commissariat in 1780. Official duties brought him to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the early 1780s, and he returned in 1785 as a dealer in whale oil, marrying in October of that year Margaret (Peggy) Hutchinson, the 19-year-old daughter of a former high administrator of colonial Massachusetts. It was an odd coincidence that both Sabatier and his bride had grandfathers from Languedoc, the bride’s grandfather Paul Mascarene having been the administrator of the government of Nova Scotia from 1740 to 1749 (Fergusson 1975, 206).

William was again on his travels, accompanied by his wife, in the 1790s, not only in North America, where he spent a few months in New York, but also in England. His father had died more than a decade earlier at his retirement home in Chichester, where his widow and her two daughters remained, and one of his first objectives may have been to introduce his American wife to the family. We know he was in Chichester in the autumn of 1797 when he made his archaeological

survey, but that need not have been either his first or last visit. His mother may have been quite frail by February 1798, when she made her will, feeling that she had not long to live, and in fact she died in that summer. The will made further provision for her two unmarried daughters and appointed her two sons executors. The children had, of course, between them already inherited the bulk of their father’s estate. In that same year William was granted a patent for a kind of crate that compressed cotton and certain other items to make them less bulky to transport (*The Repertory of Arts and Manufactures* 8 (1798), 7), and in autumn 1799 he was in Clifton near Bristol, whence he wrote to the Home Office about the appointment of his brother-in-law, Foster Hutchinson, to a legal office in Nova Scotia (Fergusson 1975, 208). He and his wife returned to Halifax in the summer of 1800 on board the *Canadian*.

WILLIAM SABATIER’S SURVEY OF THE CHICHESTER ENTRENCHMENTS

He made his inspection of the Chichester Entrenchments over five weeks in September and October 1797, with a clerical friend. The friend is nowhere named, but a possible candidate is the Revd William Walker, Rector of St Pancras Chichester from 1785 to 1840, whose interest in local history is evinced by his erection of the plaque on the ‘Leper Cottage’ in Westhampnett Road commemorating the former leprosarium of St James and St Mary Magdalene. William Sabatier’s father had been one of his parishioners.

William had three aids to interpretation denied to most of his contemporaries. Having come into contact with native American tribes, specifically the Mi’kmaq people of Nova Scotia, he would have had first-hand knowledge of tribal society of the type envisaged for ‘Ancient Britons’, although the Mi’kmaq were technically a Stone Age people and the ‘Ancient Britons’ at the time of the Roman invasion a good deal more sophisticated than imagined in the late 18th century. The linear earthworks he considered to be of Roman military origin, but The Trundle is marked as a ‘Danish Camp’ on the map (Fig. 1). Second, he would have been familiar, through observing them in North American forts, with the effectiveness of earth and timber defences, and therefore would not have under-rated the

accurate county map as a base, almost anyone should have been able to sketch in the archaeological data. One of his subsequent responsibilities in Nova Scotia was the appointment of surveyors to map the Province, specifically with propagation of hemp in mind, and it may have been because of some technical knowledge that Sabatier was made one of two commissioners entrusted with hiring suitable surveyors. His Chichester map contains two measured profiles, of a Roman road and of an entrenchment, and their inclusion perhaps points to someone familiar with survey conventions, although it would have been helpful if their locations had been recorded.

This is not the place for a detailed critique of Sabatier's work, but it may be pertinent to note that his intention may have been to write a longer discussion than was eventually produced. What he actually wrote about Roman roads amounts to little when the potential for description and discussion is considered, and an impression is gained that the author ran out of time (or perhaps interest) before the task as originally conceived could be completed.

HIS RETURN TO NOVA SCOTIA AND THE PROPOSED HISTORIES

After his return, William set about accumulating land, both through purchase and by petitioning the Crown for grants, and in 1802 he acquired a country residence at Sackville Halifax. Sackville is a river-name. The location meant by Sabatier is now called Fort Sackville, and lies near the head of the Bedford Basin. The Nova Scotian town was named after the Earl of Halifax, made President of the Board of Trade in 1748, described as 'the Father of the Colonies' and in later life owner of Stansted House near Chichester, which he inherited through his mother, the eldest daughter of the 1st Earl of Scarborough, in 1766 (Bessborough and Aslett 1984). He died in 1771. The house, originally built about 1771, was still standing in 1975 (Fergusson 1975, 209).

William seems to have delighted in collecting public offices — or, to be more charitable, he carried on a family tradition of serving the community begun by his grandfather in Spitalfields — and was prominent in the Halifax Committee of Trade, which he chaired. This essentially lobbied for the local mercantile classes in promoting

exploitation of natural resources and removal of barriers to trade, except when they favoured the Nova Scotians. In 1817 he was described by Lord Dalhousie, then Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, as:

very intelligent, inquisitive and instructing on the history and commerce of this part of the New World. Here he is considered a meddling 'Busy Body' in all concerns whether public or private.

He was in appearance a 'tall, rather coarse featured, and deeply pock-marked individual'. No painting of him is known.

Details of his business deals, his experiments in farming and his role as propagandist for the colony are fascinating, but shed no real light on Sabatier as gentleman archaeologist, the subject of this note. There was, however, one project, never realised, that was perhaps inspired by his work at Chichester. At about the time of William's return to Halifax, an English artist and historian, George Isham Parkyns, arrived at Halifax from Philadelphia. The pair were soon proposing a history of the British provinces in North America, to be illustrated with maps and engravings. A prospectus for a complete history of Nova Scotia was issued on 1 January 1801. It was to be dedicated to the Duke of Kent and approved by His Excellency Sir John Wentworth. Part of its purpose was explicitly propagandist; the country was 'too much depreciated, by many who, never having lost sight of the Atlantic, have given that description of the whole, which attaches to a very small part.'

Another prospectus, for a history of Prince Edward Isle, was issued on 4 June 1801. The only practical outcome was four sketches of Halifax and its vicinity by Parkyns (Fergusson 1975).

THE RETURN TO BRITAIN

William returned to England with his wife in 1818 and in April 1819 he was at 23 Cecil Street in The Strand, London, from which address he wrote to the Earl of Bathurst requesting an interview to discuss the whale fishery. A year later, he and his wife were at Launceston in Cornwall and were taking steps to sell the Sackville estate. He eventually settled for good, as it turned out, at Devonport near Plymouth. Although his official connection with the Halifax Committee of Trade was severed, Sabatier continued to promote its



Fig. 2. The Sabatier tomb.

interests through a 75-page pamphlet entitled *A letter to the Right Honourable Frederick J Robinson... on the subject of the proposed duties on colonial timber*, published privately in London in 1821. He had earlier published *A treatise on poverty, its consequences and the remedy* (London, 1797) and has been suggested as the anonymous author of *Hints toward promoting the health and cleanliness of the city of New-York* (New York, 1802).

His sister Elizabeth, who died in 1825, made her will in 1822 (TNA PROB 11/1706), leaving most of her personal belongings to her sister Susannah and her sister-in-law Margaret, and appointing Susannah and William her executors. Among her cash bequests were two to Christian charities, one aimed specifically at converting Jews. Her concern was perhaps more local than anxiety for the spiritual welfare of fellow exiles. In 1804 Lewis Way, 'the Wandering Jew', had bought Stansted House about eight miles west of Chichester with money from an unrelated benefactor who shared his distinctive surname. John Way, former agent

of the Earl of Mansfield, died leaving £300,000, which Lewis spent on buying the estate, intending to set up a college to convert Jews to Christianity and resettle them in Israel. A physical expression of these ideals survives in the curious iconography of the Judaeo-Christian chapel at Stansted, but the college was never realised. He died in 1826 (Bessborough and Aslett 1984). Her other bequest was to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, founded in 1699, which had a long tradition of giving relief to foreign Protestants (Nishikawa 2001). As her brother John does not figure in the will, he was probably dead by 1822. The latest record that I have come across is a Deed of Covenant made in 1789 between John Sabatier of Spitalfields, Middlesex and Thomas Leigh of Warmsworth near Doncaster, assuming this to be John, brother of William S.

William Sabatier and his wife had no children. In his will of 1824 (TNA PROB 11/1718) he left most of his property to his wife, with small amounts to his two sisters, but added a codicil that left money

outside the family. He died on 22 September 1826, the year after his sister Elizabeth (Fig. 2). A specific request in his will was that his wife should ‘select from my books and manuscripts such as she may deem worth preserving and useful to the public and deposit them in some place of safety.’ It is presumably thanks to her discrimination that the Chichester manuscript and map survive. She herself died only a few months after William.

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