

FINDON

Character and Heritage

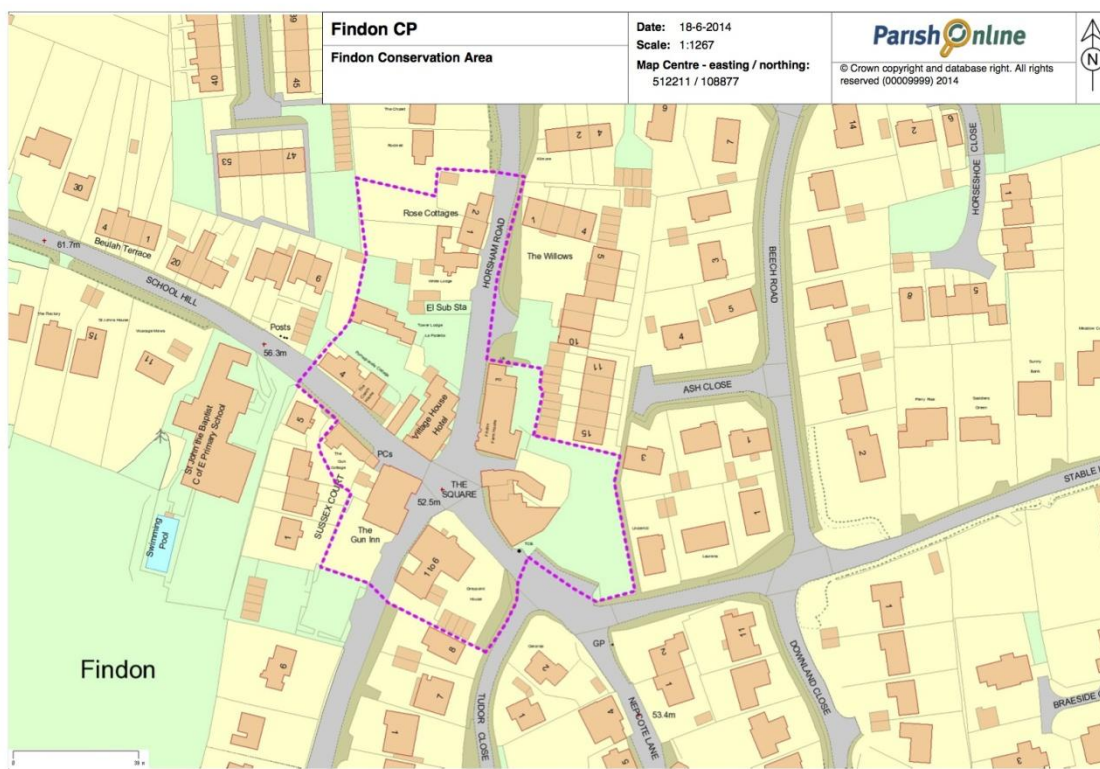
Findon is a beautiful downland village set in the South Downs National Park. Nestled into an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a designated conservation area, Findon encompasses the hamlet of Nepcote, North End and several outlying settlements.



OVERVIEW

The Parish of Findon, famous in the county for its sheep fair and for race-horse training, straddles the wind-gap in the South Downs north of Worthing. Findon ancient parish is roughly 3 miles across in each direction. In the north it follows a presumably ancient track for some way, and in the south-east it runs round the outer earthwork of Cissbury Ring¹. The parish lies entirely on the chalk, overlaid in some places by later deposits². Land use is divided between arable and pasture; much of the downland was formerly open sheepwalk, of which the only relic in 1977 was Nephote Green, the site of the sheep fair. Park-land, however, has always been an important element in the landscape since the Middle Ages. Findon Park belonging to Findon manor, in the east of the parish, existed by 1229. Creation of parkland was in progress at Findon Place in the early 18th Century³. At Muntham park, north-west of the village, Lord Montague laid out plantations⁴ and apparently fishponds⁵ in the mid 18th Century. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries much work was done on both pleasure grounds and park⁶.

The village of Findon lies in the centre of the parish. Its original site was evidently near the church and manor-house, where a number of tracks formerly converged⁷. The centre of the modern village is the Square, formed by the crossing of the two main roads. The shops on its east side occupy a 16th- or 17th-Century building, and Greypoint House on its south side is a late-18th-Century building, with a garden wing of c. 1830 to the east. Findon Farmhouse to the north was a working farm in the 19th Century⁸. Most of the older buildings of the village are of flint or brick, with some rendering. Holmcroft, south of the Square, is an early-19th-Century villa.

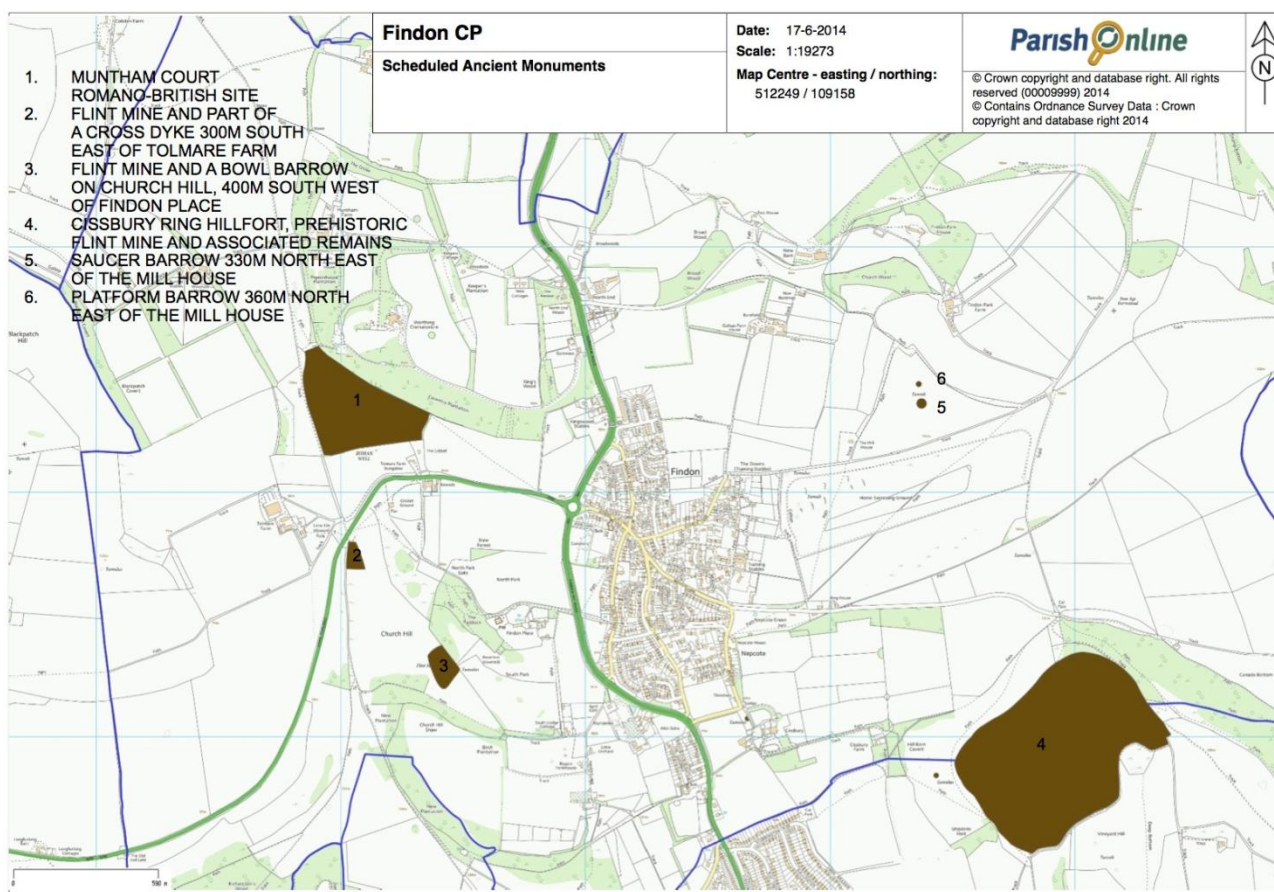


Outlying settlements have always existed in the parish besides the main village. Prehistoric and Romano-British settlement was widespread on the downs, and settlement continued south and west of Muntham House during the Middle Ages⁹. Other sites of medieval settlement in the Middle Ages were at Heregrave in the north-east part of the parish¹⁰. Sheepcombe in the south¹¹ and perhaps Palmer's Coombe in the south-west¹². The pattern of outlying farms remained in 1977.

Two hamlets which also survived in 1977 had existed for some time, having probably originated in the colonization of roadside waste. North End, c. ½ mile north of the village on the Washington road, was mentioned c. 1485¹³. The surviving buildings are of the 18th and 19th centuries, except for Ivy Cottage which is 17th-Century. About the same distance south-east of the village lay the hamlet of Nephote. The surviving buildings are of the 18th and 19th centuries, except for Threshers at the south end, which is 17th-Century with 18th-Century additions. East End in 1726 contained East End House, the forerunner of Cissbury House, and several other houses.

ARCHAEOLOGY¹⁴

The Parish of Findon contains archaeology of national and international importance.



NEOLITHIC (c. 4,400-2,200 BC)

The earliest structural evidence which lies within the parish is the group of Neolithic flint-mines on Church Hill, Findon. These form part of the larger group of flint-mines which comprises Cissbury, adjacent to the southern boundary of the parish, and Blackpatch Hill and Harrow Hill (Russell 2001) close to the western margins. The Church Hill flint-mines have been dated to 4,340-4,250 BC (Renfrew 1974) and as such may be considered one of the earliest centres of 'industrial' activity in the UK. Past and future investigations of them will provide a crucial element of research into the lifestyles of the UK's first agriculturalists.

The downland block within the parish of Findon has also produced a large quantity of the characteristic Neolithic flintwork: this vital national assemblage includes polished and unpolished axes, scraping tools, discoidal knives, awls and leaf shaped arrowheads.

EARLY BRONZE AGE (c. 2,200-1,600 BC)

The parish contains a substantial number of Early Bronze Age burial monuments. The vast majority are of the type known as 'bowl barrows' and dispersed and nucleated groups of these monuments are recorded from Church Hill and environs (Grinsell 1934), now mostly 'ploughed out'. Other examples, either extant or much degraded, are recorded across the downland block to the north and east of Findon Gallops and a number of examples also exist in the vicinity of the eastern entrance and ramparts of Cissbury Iron-Age hillfort. Environmental evidence from the sealed sub-surface ditch fills of these barrows can potentially provide information concerning habitat reconstruction of Early Bronze Age landscapes.

LATER BRONZE AGE (c. 1,600 -700 BC)

The Later Bronze Age is a period of re-organisation and transformation in the agricultural landscape. It is in this period in S. England that settlement in the form of round-houses, fields, droveways and cremation cemeteries appear in the archaeological record (Yates 2007). Greater partitioning of the landscape occurred during this period.

Close to Tolmare Pond, Findon a 'cross ridge dyke' is recorded and these linear features are generally dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and are regarded as territorial or boundary markers (Hamilton and Manley 1997). On the eastern boundary of the parish at Park Brow (Wolseley *et al* 1927) a settlement site with terraced house platforms and of great longevity dating from the Late Bronze Age, overlooks the Stump Bottom 'dry' valley. The east facing side of the valley produced a Late Bronze Age metalwork hoard: the 'Stump Bottom Hoard' which consists of arm-rings, known as 'Sussex Loops' and spearhead etc and is on view in Worthing Museum (White 1991) and at Canada Bottom adjacent to Stump Bottom a gold torc of the period is recorded (Dunkin 2000). These metalwork deposits may have had a sepulchral role and were probably the personal accoutrements of individuals living close by, eg Park Brow. Traces of the remains of prehistoric field boundaries,

lynchets, may still be seen in places across this whole block of downs to the north of Cissbury Ring. A partitioned farmscape of fields and settlement from c. 1,500 BC should therefore be envisaged.

The discovery of a Later Bronze Age pit containing pottery adjacent to Cross Lane, Findon (Bedwin 1979; Drewett *et al* 1988) provides further direct evidence of settlement for the period within the parish.

IRON AGE (c. 700 BC-43 AD)

Although there may have been a hiatus in settlement at Park Brow the evidence demonstrates a continuity of occupation at this site into the Iron Age. The context of the Iron Age period in the parish is greatly enhanced by the presence of the nationally important Cissbury Iron Age hillfort. Dated to the Middle Iron Age, c. 400-200 BC, (Curwen and Ross-Williamson 1931; Hamilton and Manley 1997) and abutting the southern boundary, this is one of the largest developed or contour Iron Age hillforts in England. Enclosing 24 hectares its original construction and maintenance would have involved considerable co-operation from the people living in the satellite settlement sites from across the downland block within the parish. Sites like Park Brow and other observed settlement focii (Con Ainsworth pers. comm) attest to the continuing presence of a farmed landscape across the area in the closing centuries of the prehistoric period.

LATE IRON AGE (c. 150 BC-43 AD)/ROMAN (43 AD-410 AD)

In the late Iron Age and early Roman period another site of national importance exists in the west of the parish. At Muntham Court a field, taken out of cultivation in the post-war period, contains a considerable number of surface anomalies, ie 'humps and bumps'. Excavations in the 1950's revealed an extensive late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement site (Holleyman and Burstow 1956), containing house structures, remnant field boundaries, sunken trackways a circular shrine/temple site and in the adjacent field to the south an associated well, 76.2 metres deep. The latter has been described as a ritual shaft (Ross 1970). The shrine and well have produced votive material and of particular importance was the retrieval from the temple site of the bronze plaque of a boar, known as the 'Muntham Boar', also on view in Worthing Museum. More recently, corroborative evidence ties this site into a much wider landscape context. In the 1990's excavations of a Romano-British settlement within the parish South East of North Farm, Washington (pers.obs) uncovered a solid bronze figurine of a boar. The rescue excavations at Chanctonbury Ring in 1990/1 following the 1987 storm recovered a considerable quantity of pig bone and teeth from the entrance portal of a polygonal early Roman shrine (Rudling 2001). All of these three sites are intervisible and this associative evidence strongly suggests a 'cult of the boar' existed in the area at this time. The figurines must be regarded as 'structured' deposits and are an important facet in the study of late prehistoric/Roman religious practices.

Early excavations at Park Brow also revealed an indigenous Romano-British settlement, with evidence of window glass and a key! (Wolseley Smith and Hawley 1927). This site with Bronze Age antecedents, see above, reflects the very long landscape history of farming in the parish. A Roman lynched field-system may be seen on the summit of Cissbury Ring and is preserved due to the early cessation of a ploughing regime within the hillfort. This location is intervisible with Park Brow.

The Heritage Environmental Record, HER, indicates a number of locations containing Roman artefactual material. In Findon Village, three sites, and in the vicinity of Tolmare Pond and adjacent to Long Furlong concentrations of Roman pottery including cinerary urns attest to the proximity of Roman settlement. Much of this evidence may be connected to the Muntham Court complex. At Findon Place the recording of Roman pottery and tile suggests a former Romanised building in the locality (Dunkin 2008). Close to the southwest margins of the parish near to Clapham and Patching a Roman pottery industry or production centre is conjectured (Dr Malcolm Lynes pers. comm).

ANGLO-SAXON (410-1066 AD)

Known archaeology for this period is notoriously elusive. St John the Baptist Church, Findon is dated to the Late Saxon period, see below, but nothing earlier is recorded. Archaeology can add nothing further at present.

Recent structural analysis of St John the Baptist Church incorporating earlier work, indicates that the north aisle had been constructed in the Late Saxon period, 10th-11th c. AD, and incorporates the original stone structure. For full discussion see Holmes 1989. Prior to the Saxo-Norman or Late Saxon period churches were thought to be timber structures and a few of these have been identified but none in the south-east (Gardiner 1988). These are of course difficult to locate, ephemeral in nature and only survive in particular environmental contexts. Findon may and indeed is likely to have earlier Saxon antecedents and this subject therefore has continuing and important research potential for both archaeologists and historians.

MEDIEVAL (1066-1500 AD)

The isolation of the parish church, St John the Baptist, and the adjacent Findon Place, thought to be the location of the original manor house, is of archaeological interest. The causes of migration or abandonment of villages in the medieval period is often argued to be due to the plague or black death in the middle decades of the 14th c. AD. There were certainly other factors which led to de-population in rural England and this includes changes in economic fortune, soil impoverishment, floods and drought (Brandon 1998). These factors waxed and waned over the centuries. However, whatever the reason(s), the village of Findon sometime prior to the 17th Century, migrated to the rising ground on the east side of the valley floor. Although The Square contains the oldest buildings in Findon Village, eg The Gun, medieval pottery was found during original groundwork construction within the Fox Lea estate (Dr David Yates pers. comm). This may have come from an earlier farm but it could also represent a domestic dwelling(s) and this could suggest that the early village community was more dispersed. This of course is mere speculation but much more work both archaeological and historical will need to be done to further the historical narrative of the village and parish.

Nevertheless, large quantities of medieval pottery and domestic waste, oyster etc, have been noted in the plough soil of the field opposite the parish church (Norman Allcorn pers. comm; pers. obs) so the focus of the original village, not unexpectedly, must lie here.

ARCHITECTURE

BUILDINGS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

The Gun Inn in the Square was mentioned in 1693¹⁵ and presumably then already belonged to William Lasseter, gunsmith, who was living there in 1701¹⁶. The building is timber-framed, and probably 17th-Century in date. It was enlarged to the south in the 18th Century, and later much refitted. A race-course was opened on the downs west of Muntham House in 1814¹⁷. Horse races are also said to have been held during the 19th Century under West Hill in the south-west part of the parish¹⁸. At the inclosure of the common downs in 1856, Nepcote Green was allotted to the parish for recreation¹⁹; it was later managed by the parish council. Findon Cricket Club was founded in 1867²⁰, and is still thriving. A notable 18th-Century resident was William Frankland of Muntham House, an amateur enthusiast of mechanics, who filled his house with working machines of all kinds²¹. In the 19th Century the Lyall family of Greypoint House, originally London merchants, produced members of parliament, church dignitaries, and Indian civil servants²².

In total there are around 26 listed properties in Findon and 32 buildings of character as defined by Arun District Council.

MANORS AND OTHER ESTATES

In 1066 the manor of *FINDON* was held by King Harold. By 1073 it belonged to William de Braose²³. Thereafter it descended with Washington until 1462, when John, duke of Norfolk (d. 1476), settled it on his wife Elizabeth for her life²⁴. Around 1484 William Berkeley, earl of Nottingham (d. 1492), sold it to Sir Richard Guildford.

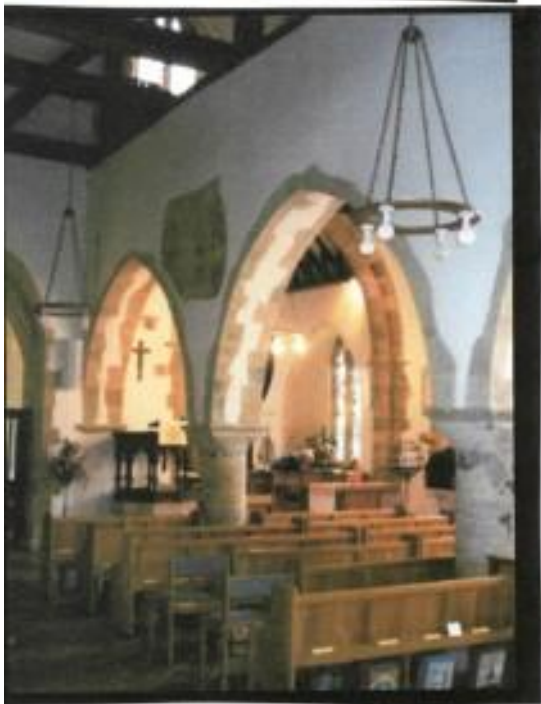
In 1534 Henry VIII granted it to Sir Christopher Hales and Sir Richard Rich the latter conveyed the manor to Thomas Cromwell, Lord Cromwell. Edward I stayed at Findon manor house in 1305²⁵. The oldest part of the present building is the east range of five bays, which is basically 17th-Century. The house was remodelled in the mid 18th Century, and c. 1788 William Richardson added a new double-pile block on the west with a five-bay pedimented front of yellow brick²⁶. The first Cissbury House, called East End House, was probably built in the early 18th Century. The manor of *MUNTHAM*, comprising lands in Findon and Itchingfield. Various inhabitants of Findon surnamed Muntham are recorded in the 13th and early 14th centuries. The last owners were the Thynne family (whose main estate is now Longleat). It was demolished in 1961.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

There was a church at Findon in 1086²⁷ and is mentioned in the Domesday Book, the current church (St. John the Baptist) is built of flint with stone dressings with 12th to 15th Century features. It stands on a wooded slope close to the Georgian manor house, it is believed this was originally the heart of the village. The view is that many changes have occurred over the years, such as where the arcade cuts into the paintings on the aisle side of the north wall and that the nave may have been where the aisle now is with a chancel on the site of the North Chapel; also that in the 14th Century the east window, with reticulated tracery, and the south window, with cusped Y-tracery, were added. Two incompatible hypotheses are first that the church was originally aisleless and second that it had a cruciform plan centred on the present nave, only excavation can prove which is correct. Considerable detail regarding the fittings confirms the historical importance of the church.²⁸

Surviving medieval fittings include sedilia (13th Century), oak seats in the north aisle, possibly of the 15th Century, and traces of 13th-Century painting on the arcade wall²⁹. The old font, probably of c. 1200, with a central pillar and four subsidiary pillars, was replaced by a replica in 1867³⁰. Other late-19th Century fittings include tiles on the east wall of the chancel designed by William Morris³¹ depicting twelve angels. The seven bells include three of the 16th Century, another of 1617, and a sanctus bell which hangs in a turret over the chancel arch³². The plate includes a silver chalice of 1618³³.

Some photographs, next page, of the church illustrate the features of note.



ECONOMIC HISTORY

AGRICULTURE

The largest farms between the 16th and 18th centuries were Findon and Muntham manors. Sheep remained important, numerous flocks being recorded. Common pasture rights on the downs were frequently mentioned between the 16th and 19th centuries³⁴.

About 1839 much of the parish belonged to four large estates: Findon and Muntham manors, Findon Park, and Cissbury with several large farms. Muntham and Cissbury farms were often kept in hand; but the three farms on the Findon Place estate, Tolmare, Roger's, and Kingswood farms, were usually tenanted.

Mills

The mill recorded at Findon manor in 1210³⁵ may have been an early windmill, for there seems no likely site for a watermill. A mill was recorded at Findon manor in 1326, and a windmill in 1425³⁶. There was a windmill at Findon park in 1630³⁷. The miller mentioned in 1788³⁸ perhaps had his mill on the downs east of the village, where a windmill flourished between 1825 and 1888³⁹. It had ceased to function by 1896⁴⁰, and partly survived in 1977 as a house.

Market and fairs

In 1261 Walter de Clifford was granted a market to be held at Findon every Tuesday⁴¹. There may have been a fair at Findon in Saxon or even earlier times⁴², a theory perhaps corroborated by the number of old tracks that converge on the site of the village⁴³. In 1790 the lord of Findon manor is said to have agreed with George Holford that the latter might hold a fair at Nephote Green on which the Wattle House, of flint with brick dressings, had been built by 1803. The fair, for the sale of Southdown stock, was being held annually on 14 September by 1814⁴⁴, and in 1835 was attended by the chief graziers of Sussex, c. 3,000 sheep being penned, besides other cattle⁴⁵. In the late 19th Century the September fair was the great village holiday of the year, and served also for the hiring of labour⁴⁶. In 1929 Findon had the eighth largest volume of sales of livestock among the fairs of southern and eastern England⁴⁷. There were still c. 10,000 sheep penned at the September fair in 1974, when both buyers and sellers came from all over England and Wales, and the fair was considered one of the best in the country⁴⁸. The pleasure fair also survived at that date.

Racing

The chief business in the parish since the mid 19th Century, however, apart from agriculture, has been race-horse training, on account of the excellent downland turf. In 1810 and the following years there was horse racing on the Downs and the site of the old Findon Racecourse is stated⁴⁹ as having been between Muntham Well House and Chantry Post and the first meeting at Findon Racecourse took place in May 1810. Race meetings were also occasionally held on the Gallops under West Hill.

At Downs Training Stables Captain H Ryan Price carries on a long tradition of training chiefly for National Hunt races. Kilmore, who won the Grand National in 1962, is one of the many winners who did their homework over the sticks on the downs behind Findon.

The link to horse racing is shown by the names of various buildings including 'Hermit Terrace'⁵⁰ who won the Derby in 1867. These same stables 'The Downs' won the Grand National two years running; in 1912 with Jerry M and in 1913 with Covert Coat.

Hunting records begin in 1715 by the then famous Charlton Pack whose kennels were a short distance to the north of Goodwood Racecourse, at a hamlet of that name and in Lord March's book 'Records of a Charlton Hunt there are many references to Findon. The Findon country was hunted by that pack up to 1737.

WAR⁵¹

Napoleonic - the Carnarvonshire Militia was based in the barracks where the Worthing High Street now stands. There is a long-standing supposition that Napoleonic troops were captured at the time of Waterloo and put to work on our agricultural land. It is also believed that numerous old flint walls within Findon were built by the French captives who were held at Soldiers' Field, a former army base.

WWI - the days of the First World War were considered to be dangerous times for Findon. Although the community lay four miles inland, it was still within sight of the sea and invasion was a genuine fear. As the war entered its third year, the drain on Findon's manpower was so great that there were hardly any men left, only the infirm and boys too young to "join up". The Great War brought about a major change in farming on the Findon downland. This was the dispersal of a very large number of the Southdown sheep flocks due to fixed pricing and mutton not graded according to its quality. The famous and familiar Southdown breed was largely abandoned and a coarser sheep superseded them.

On the south wall of the nave in St. John the Baptist Church are two tablets commemorating the dead of the war that was to end all wars — and the Second World War. There is a sombre list of thirty-six names for the appalling 1914–1918 conflict. This was a crushing

blow and a great sacrifice for a village of less than 800 inhabitants at the time. Families were decimated by the war, which had almost wiped out a generation of menfolk.

WWII – The Downs were used for training grounds and their vehicles did a good lot of damage. In 1942, in preparation for D-Day, the whole stretch of the top of the Findon Downs was requisitioned by the War Department and out of bounds to the public.

Soldiers took over the Muntham Estate and camped in most of the woods building Nissan Huts and cook houses all over the place. But the house was untouched and the Thynne family continued to live there. A home defence party was formed in the Village, commanded by Colonel Thynne. They used to patrol the Downs behind the house, watching for German parachutists. Air raids were a frequent occurrence and one of the house cellars was made into a comfortable sitting room.

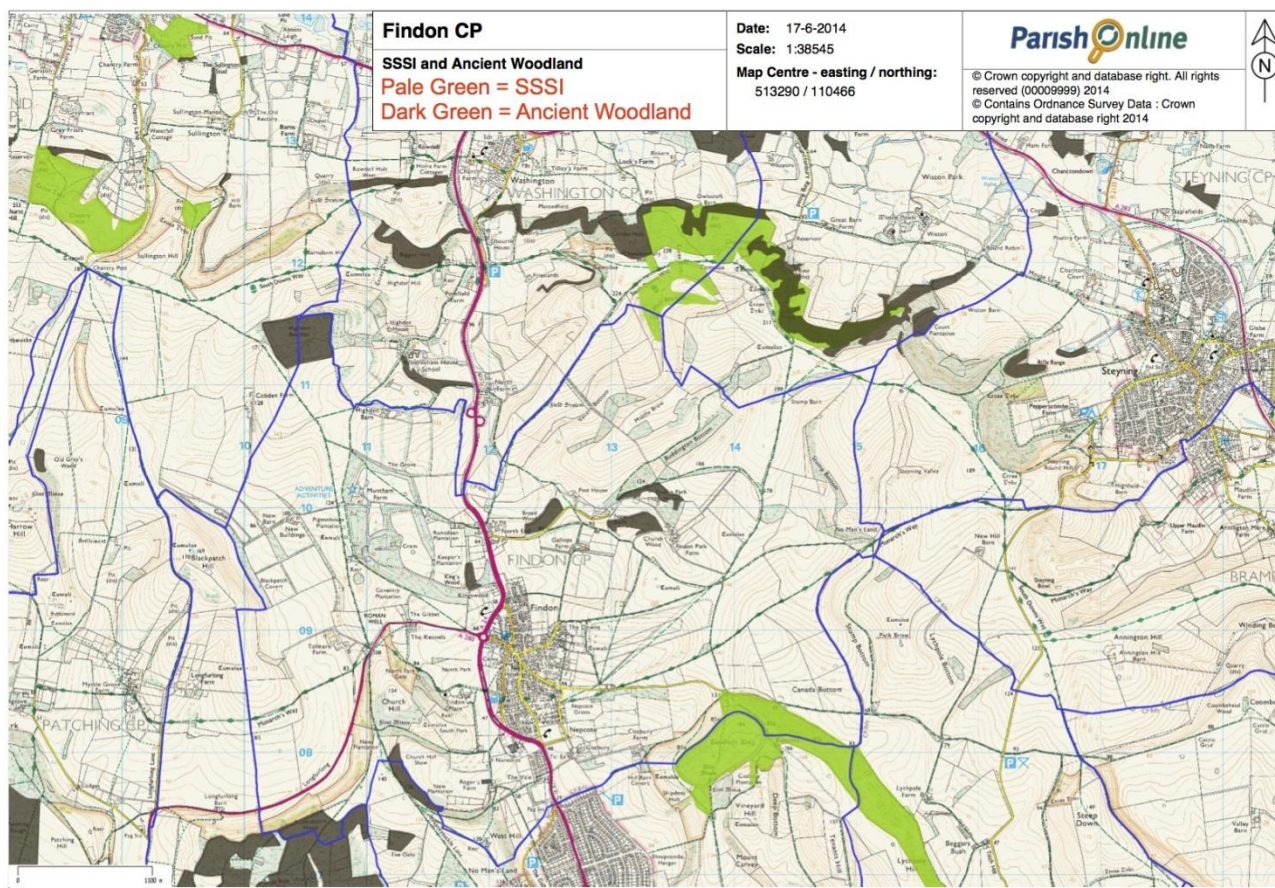
The first bombs fell on Black Patch at the rear of Muntham, smashing a greenhouse. A parachute mine which became entangled on a fence exploded when some boys threw stones at it, killing one of them.

In 1942 Canadian Troops were stationed in the Park.

EDUCATION

St. John the Baptist Primary school was built by subscription in 1829 on land given by W. W. Richardson of Findon Place. A new school was built in 1872. The building is of flint with brick dressings and tall chimneys. It is understood that historical records may be held at Worthing Museum.

Site of Special Scientific Interest and Ancient Woodland



Vintage postcards of Findon village





83. High Street, Findon.



45 NEPCOTE, FINDON.



SCHOOL HILL, FINDON, SUSSEX.

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- ³² Elphick, *Bells*, 306-7.
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- ⁴⁷ *Mkts. and Fairs in Eng. and Wales*, iv (Min. of Agric. and Fisheries, econ. ser. 23), 220.
- ⁴⁸ *W. Suss. Gaz.* 19 Sept. 1974; *Worthing Herald*, 20 Sept. 1974; see below, pl. facing p. 32.
- ⁴⁹ John Evans
- ⁵⁰ *S.C.M.* xi. 546.
- ⁵¹ Valerie Martin