



THE HISTORY OF BONFIRES IN SUSSEX AND KENT

Derek Legg

September 2011

Bonfires are pre-Christian and were all part of the pagan propitiation of the gods. As such, they were suppressed by the Church who nevertheless felt the need to placate superstition by linking the practice to the Christian calendar.

Thus there were the Lenten fires on the first Sunday in Lent, when religious observance was accompanied by blazing torches and, in Hastings, by Jack in the Green with his associate John Barleycorn and fires are lit still in Eastbourne and Beltane Fires, on the 1st May, in the Central Highlands of Scotland. There are midsummer fires to recognise the solstice and Halloween fires to acknowledge the start of the Celtic New Year. Yule fires have lost the symbolism whereby a charred log, kept within the house, ensured good fortune; nowadays the “log” is eaten!

In Lerwick, on 30th January, Uphellia is celebrated when men in fearsome Viking costumes carry blazing torches and set fire to a longship. But these pagan rituals were subtly transformed into political and anti-Catholic ones by the Marian persecutions of the 1550s when 300 Protestants were put to death. Seventeen Sussex martyrs were burned on 22 June 1557, ten of them in Lewes. Seventeen crosses are carried in commemoration by the “Lewes Boyes” on the 5th November.

This was the practice when, in 1605, Guy Fawkes, a renegade Protestant who had converted to Catholicism, became involved in a plot to assassinate James I and his Parliament. The legend is well known and the failure of the plot celebrated, but less known is the fact that a plague delayed the Opening of Parliament and led the conspirators to involve other plotters, one of whom, Francis Tresham betrayed the plot to his cousin Lord Mounteagle. James I managed to disappoint both Catholics and Protestants in equal measure: he refused to repeal anti-Catholic laws but later banished all Catholic priests; this was enough to inspire the plot against his life. It failed and Fawkes was hanged, drawn and quartered; his aristocratic co-plotters were allowed the privilege of mere hanging.





Burning Guy Fawkes effigy, Windsor, 1776

A prayer service to commemorate the King's deliverance was observed until as late as 1859, but the more popular commemoration was the mass of bonfire celebrations that continue to the present. East Sussex has over thirty societies; West Sussex many fewer; Taunton, Minehead and Bridgwater still observe the date and Ottery St Mary in Devon remains the sole venue where burning tar barrels are run through the streets.

In the seventeenth century, church bells were rung and a public holiday was observed, but Puritan dislike of anything joyous put an end to that. One of the earliest reports of celebrations in Lewes was in 1679 when an effigy of the Pope was burned on the bonfire; but, as both Cliffe (Lewes) and Battle dispute which society is the earlier, it suggests that celebrations started almost immediately after 1605 and, interestingly, were not held in disfavour by the Church. In fact, the Protestant Church has always favoured the Societies and, although various attempts have been made to suppress them, nothing has ever done so except the two World Wars.

In 1779, the Hailsham authorities threatened to curtail the event, but a convincing threat to bum down the houses of the Councillors changed hearts and minds. It seems that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were particularly rowdy and the combination of burning the tar barrels, vicious home-made fireworks (the rousers), flaming torches and bonfires often led to the reading of the Riot Act, imprisonment of offenders and sometimes fatalities. In 1817, a police constable was killed in Brighton after riots had precipitated the calling out of the Military; even though the letting off of fireworks has always been illegal (and still is), riots often accompanied the celebrations. In 1841 the first evidence of disguises used by the marchers occurred, again illegal, and followed in 1842 by the introduction of bands. Local tradesmen have never liked the celebrations and in 1847 in Lewes, 117 were sworn in as Special Constables, but to no effect. This was the year that saw the distinctive black and white stripes and painted faces.

In 1850, the Pope re-established the Catholic hierarchy in England and this gave impetus to the religious aspect of the event, although it is emphasised that the Pope is no longer the effigy. Effigies now tend to reflect a "person in the news": in 1858, when the Treasurer of Cliffe absconded with the money boxes, his image was burned; and, in 1958, when the



irascible Gilbert Harding said that “Lewes should be dynamited”, he was given the place of honour. After a large fire in Lewes in 1904, the rousers were banned but continued. Famously, in Battle, one resident blew himself up (fatally) by foolishly heating the rouser in his oven. In 1906, East Sussex banned fireworks and bonfires and many arrests were made but they relented the following year. Whilst Societies no longer bum the Pope, Lewes still puts up a “No Popery” banner and has a serious Remembrance Service before the procession begins. Today, the event is still rowdy but is a popular tourist attraction lasting throughout East Sussex from early October to late November. Thousands of people turn up to watch the various Societies parade in their distinctive fancy dress and although the police and other authorities would like to see the whole thing banned, it still continues despite the fact that many visitors have no idea of what it means.

Lastly, an historical curiosity is that Battle has the oldest “Guy” in the country. It is brought out and paraded each bonfire night and goes home, unbumed, to rest in the Battle Museum until the next 5th November.

David Sawyer



PROCESSION OF A GUY.

Cartoon by Robert Chambers, 1864

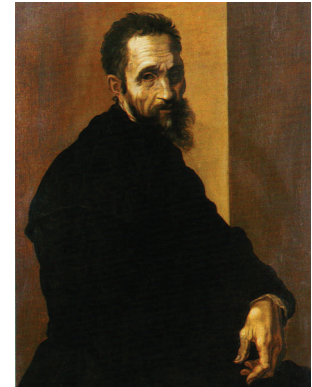


MICHELANGELO & THE POPE'S CEILING

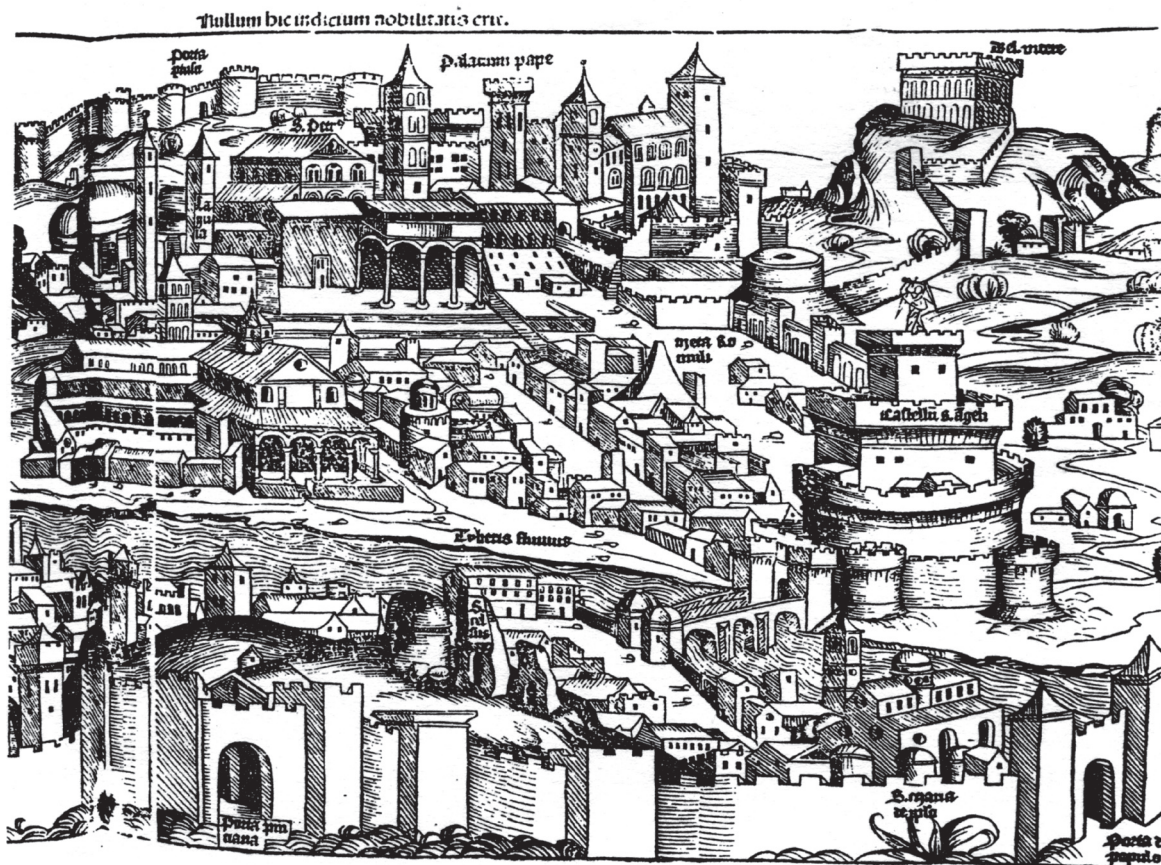
Ross King

14th October 2011

Ross King, a Canadian born in Saskatchewan, author of the internationally acclaimed *Brunelleschi's Dome* (as well as two historical novels) is exceptionally knowledgeable about the Italian Renaissance. Michelangelo's commission in 1508 from Pope Sixtus IV to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was unusual in that the artist was primarily a sculptor and had little or no experience of working in fresco.



When Sixtus was elected Pope in 1471, Rome was in a poor state surrounded by ruined Roman remains and had a population of only 50,000 – considerably fewer than either Florence or Milan. Although a new bridge had been built over the Tiber, St Peter's constructed on the site where the saint had been sacrificed in 67 AD was now in urgent need of rebuilding. The Conclave for the election of the Pope had formerly been held in the Old Chapel



A view of the Vatican at the end of the fifteenth century.



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

which was replaced by the Sistine Chapel. Designed in 1477 by Baccio Pontelli, a military designer from Florence, its proportions matched exactly those of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Built like a fortress with three metre thick walls and a high level walkway for sentinels it provided security for the Popes. Inside, the chapel walls were decorated in fresco by a team of painters led by Pietro Perugino and depicted scenes from the lives of both Moses and Christ. Higher up between the windows were portraits of thirty-two Popes. The vaulted ceiling painted by Piermatteo d'Amelia was bright blue with gold stars, a common representation of the heavenly firmament.

By 1504, cracks in the vault appeared and it had become apparent that the chapel had structural problems caused by the marshy ground on which it was sited. The architect San Gallo arranged for iron rods to be inserted in the ceiling and under the floor. Bricks were inserted into the cracks in the vault and plastered, damaging the painted ceiling. The Pope decided that the ceiling should depict Biblical scenes and decided to commission Michelangelo. Although trained as a painter, Michelangelo was primarily a sculptor and famous for his *David* in Florence. He was currently at work on a fifty-foot high Carrera marble tomb of Pope Julius was was understandably reluctant to leave Florence to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling in Rome.



The completed ceiling.

The art of fresco – painting directly onto wet plaster – was a very difficult one to master. Fresco (which means ‘fresh’) refers to a coat of wet plaster about half an inch thick, known as *intonaco* which was applied on top of a coat of dry plaster. The *intonaco* was a smooth paste made from lime and sand and provided a permeable surface for the pigments. These were diluted with water without using any bonding agent. The technique required the artist to work swiftly before the plaster set and so only a small area could be worked on a time. To make matters more difficult, the ceiling was not a flat but a vaulted surface and the design had to allow for this for the effects of foreshortening when seen from the ground.



BATTLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

First of all, the original finish to the ceiling had to be removed and timber scaffolding erected to provide access. The chapel is 130 feet long by 44 wide and a platform sixty feet above the ground had to be put up. Michelangelo had to design this himself so that it met his requirements. It has been suggested that he painted lying on his back but this is considered to be very unlikely, if not impossible. He worked with a team of four or five assistants, all fellow Florentines.

His relationship with Pope Julius II during 1503–15 was fraught with difficulties. Julius, known as *Il Papa Terrible*, was intent on extending the Papal States and waged war on his neighbours. At one stage Michelangelo fled to his home in Florence and Papal Bulls were issued ordering his return to Rome.

Michelangelo was jealous of the young Raphael whom he saw as a competitor. The latter painted scenes from the life of Christ in which he depicted Michelangelo as Jonah. Meanwhile Michelangelo painted Raphael as the beheaded prophet Jeremiah.

Michelangelo took four years 1508–1512 to complete the ceiling. He went on to develop his career as an architect and become involved in the building of the dome of St Peter's.

The illustrated lecture gave a vivid impression of the turbulence of early sixteenth-century Italy and of the interplay of politics, religion and art through the personalities involved, often difficult. The skills of artists of the time have arguably never been exceeded. Ross King's book, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* (Chatto & Windus, 2002) is highly recommended for further reading.

Ann Stocker

CHARLEMAGNE, CONQUEROR AND CULTURED KING

Imogen Corrigan

9 December 2011

The Carolingian dynasty succeeded to the Merovingian dynasty, taking its name from Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles Martel (c.688 – c.741), 'Martel' (Hammer) being a nickname given to him in the ninth century. The dynasty rose and fell in five generations. Charles, seized power in 714 and took about ten years to consolidate his position, using the power and treasure of the Church, a skill very much used later by Charlemagne. Charles was more a great soldier than a great king, fighting each of the neighbouring peoples and eventually winning his greatest victory at Poitiers, 732, against the Saracens from which he acquired his nickname. He vastly expanded his territories but divided them between his three sons, in what was to become a habit among the Carolingians and which eventually led to their fall from power. On the death of their father, Pepin the Short, the kingdom over which he ruled was divided between Charlemagne and his surviving brother, Carloman, who died soon after. Although Charlemagne was not present when his brother died at Laon, the timing of it and his subsequent actions have thrown a cloud of intrigue over the matter. Charlemagne hurried there not to comfort his sister-in-law (and his two nephews to whom their father's kingdom should have devolved), but to receive homage from his late brother's Lords; his late brother's family fleeing to Lombardy without waiting to see what Charlemagne would do next. The year was c.771 and Charlemagne thus found himself ruler of a vast empire covering most of France (with the exception of Brittany), western Germany and Bavaria.

Born circa 742, most likely at Herstal (eastern edge of modern Belgium) Charlemagne died circa 814, having reigned for approximately 46 years. He was anointed Emperor by the Pope on Christmas Day 800. Described by his friend and biographer, Einhard, as being well-built and tall, in 1861 his tomb was opened and a calculation from his skeleton suggested he was 6' 2". As his father was nicknamed 'the Short' it is likely that his mother was herself tall. Einhard gives a full, and surprisingly candid, description of Charlemagne's appearance:

'The top of his head was round, his eyes piercing and unusually large. His nose was slightly longer than normal. He had a fine head of white hair, his expression was blithe and good humoured. He always appeared masterful and dignified. His neck was short and rather thick; stomach a trifle too heavy, but the proportion of the rest of his body

prevented one from noticing these blemishes. His step was firm and he was manly in all his movements despite the fact that his voice was thin for a man of his physic. His health was good, except that he suffered from frequent attacks of fever in the last four years of his life (it is believed he died of pleuracy) and towards the end he was lame in one foot. He was a strong swimmer and loved to swim'.

Charlemagne's love of bathing led him to build a palace at Aachen where there were hot springs and where he hosted large bathing parties of 100 or more men at a time. It was at Aachen that he spent the last years of his life and died.

In the bathing parties may be seen a tradition dating back to the Roman Empire, the influence of which could be seen in much of Charlemagne's life. His chapel at Aachen was of Romanesque design, modelled on the church of San Vitalla, Ravenna. Charlemagne understood the power and order which ran in popular memory from the Romans and deliberately set about a strategy of imitating Roman culture in order to take on the reflected glory and legitimacy. He also undertook a religious fundamentalism, making it illegal to refuse baptism and failure to teach the Lord's Prayer to one's godchildren punishable by disfigurement, maiming and death. He protected and endowed churches, in turn reaping the benefits of approval and legitimising his conquests. Charlemagne saw his duty as being the protection of Christ's Church and the Pope's duty being that of giving prayer for the victory of his (Charlemagne's) armies.

Charlemagne was the first post-Roman ruler to have a permanently settled Court, which he established at Aachen. The common practice then and for many centuries to come being for rulers to keep kingdoms together by being seen and enforcing the Law in all parts of their realms. Charlemagne certainly continued to do this, however the establishment of a Court, centres of learning, etc in a single place meant that Culture could flourish even in his absence.

Although Christian, Charlemagne had several 'wives'. These were women whose children's legitimacy was recognised, but who did not hold the title of 'Queen'. It is generally accepted that he had about eighteen children (eight sons, ten daughters). Ten of these were born to Hildegard, his first wife, who died aged 25 years after twelve years of marriage. Einhard gives Charlemagne to be a family man, having all his children with him at mealtimes and when travelling, sons at his side and daughters following with hand-picked guards to

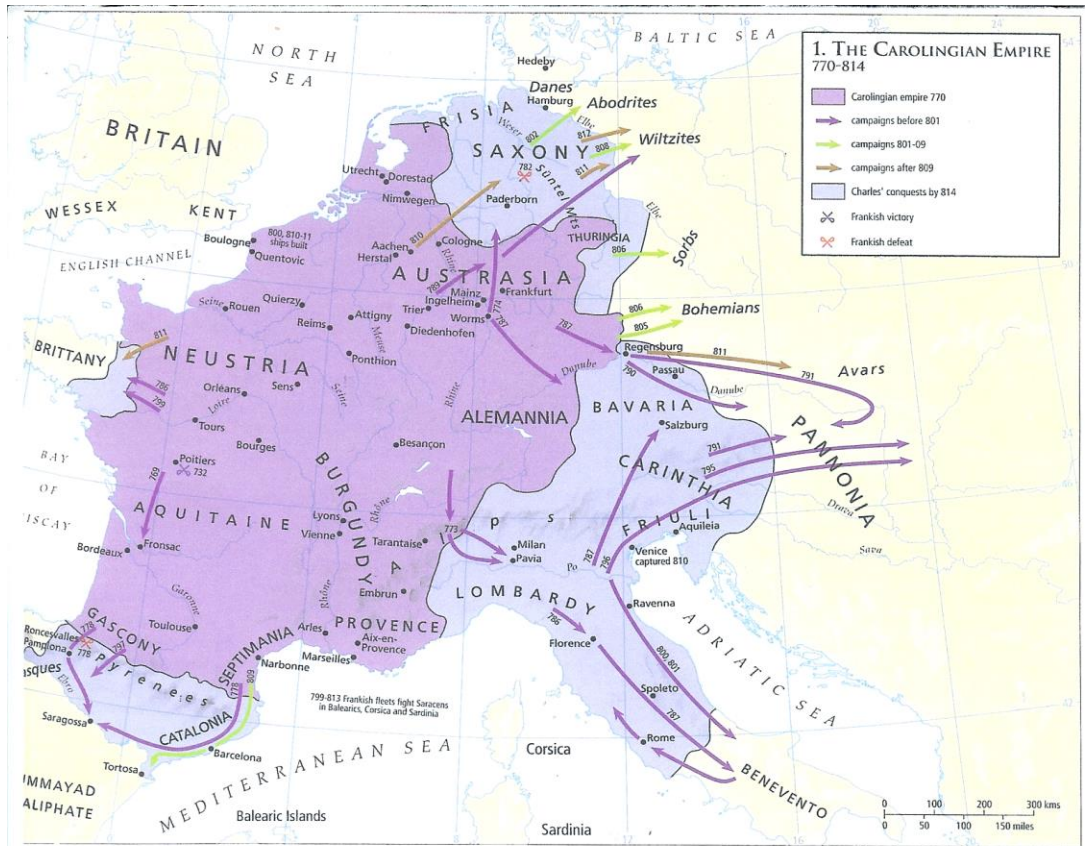
protect them. He kept his daughters with him throughout his life, not permitting them to marry and saying he could not live without them. However Charlemagne chose to overlook the fact that at least two of his daughters had several illegitimate children. The more likely and pragmatic explanation being that he did not want to risk threat to his empire through creation of cadet branches of the family. Charlemagne proposed that his second son, Charles, should marry the daughter of Offa of Mercia, however Offa refused unless his son married one of Charlemagne's daughters. Charlemagne refused and so a quarrel occurred which was to last many years.

Militarily, Charlemagne started by dealing with the unfinished campaigns of his father, culminating in a periodic war over 33 years' against the Saxons, during which he forced some 10,000 to resettle in small groups across his empire. He would not accept defeat and no ruse was beneath him. His military campaigns, particularly against the Huns, brought great wealth into his coffers. When military disaster overtook him at Renceval, 778, Charlemagne concluded that God was displeased and he called the Bishops of his empire together. The result was a decision by Charlamagne that copying of Scripture was haphazard due to variations in writing and he ordered that henceforth all script must be uniform so that people could pray correctly. He engaged scholars from England to assist with this, creating Caroline Miniscule, forerunner of Times New Roman.

Educational reforms included changes to religious chants, correction of law codes, a grammar of Old French, he changed the names of the months and even gave names to specific winds (another example of Roman influence). For all his educational reforms, Charlemagne remained illiterate.

In summary Charlemagne was an able and intelligent ruler. Brutal and single-minded of purpose he understood the importance of centralised administration and of not sharing his authority. His reputation has provided inspiration for leaders ever since, however his material legacy was to end through internecine strife among his grandsons but a few years after his death.

Neil Clephane–Cameron



Lecture by Dr Keith Hamilton

Zealots and Helots

The Slave Trade Department of the 19th century Foreign Office

10 February 2012

Dr Hamilton described the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) historians of which he was one. They were responsible primarily for publishing the official record of post-war British foreign policy but they also answered historical queries from inside and outside the Office, provided historical anecdotes for Ministers' speeches and researched the historical background to contemporary problems and events. Dr Hamilton had in this way become involved in researching the Slave Trade. 2007 was the bicentenary of the abolition of the trade within the British empire. The FCO thought that it should play a part in the bicentenary commemoration partly because its existing commitment to human rights, democracy and governance, through one of its directorates, was fully in the tradition of the old Slave Trade Department of the 19th century; and partly because of the important part played by diplomacy in following up the 1807 Act of Parliament. A booklet about the Slave Trade Department (Slavery in Diplomacy, FCO Historians, History Note No.17) was produced on which Dr Hamilton based his talk as well as a book published by the Sussex Academic Press and edited by himself and the FCO's Chief Historian.

Why should there have been a Slave Trade Department which started in the 1820s, went on until 1883 and at times was the biggest department in the Office? To find an explanation, some background was needed to the Atlantic slave trade. Britain was not the first to abolish it. Denmark had done so in 1803. The USA followed us in 1807. But it went on until the end of the 1860s. Slaves came from the bights of Benin and Biafra, from the Congo and from Cameroon. They were captured and traded by local kingdoms like Dahomey, sold to European middlemen and then shipped across the Atlantic. British ships (including American ships when America was part of the Empire) carried around 2.8 million slaves during the 17th and 18th centuries. After 1807, the trade went on but in other ships – Portuguese, Spanish, Brazilian, French and also American. Britain, motivated by moral fervour but also by economic interest, tried to stop it by diplomacy and naval action. Other countries accused us of hypocrisy; our overseas possessions were already supplied with slaves while they had not regained their colonies until after the Napoleonic wars and needed slaves for their regained or new colonial plantations.

British diplomatic activity in support of the Navy was multilateral and bilateral. Castlereagh at the Congress of Vienna persuaded governments to agree to abolish the trade but they would not set a timetable to do so. Bilaterally, treaties were concluded with Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and France so that Britain would have the right to search ships belonging to these countries and, if slaves were found, to bring the slavers before “mixed commission” courts composed of members from Britain and from the country to which the slave ship belonged. The treaties were difficult to conclude because of the lack of good will on the part of the slave trading countries and difficult to enforce because of the many ways found to cheat. There was no treaty with the USA until 1862. As a result of these difficulties, 3 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic from 1815-1860 while only 150,000 were freed in spite of more positive activity by the British Government in the 1830s and 40s when Parliament authorised the Navy to act against Portuguese and Brazilian ships. The Cuban trade went on until the 1860s when Britain signed a treaty with the USA which allowed us to stop US ships engaged in the Cuba trade.

All this diplomatic activity involved much work in the Foreign Office (FO). Castlereagh, the Foreign Secretary from 1812-1822, needed someone to supervise the various slave treaties and the management of the mixed commission courts. He chose James Bandinel, born in 1783, who had joined the FO in 1799. Bandinel was the son of an Anglican priest and related to many others in the Church ('familial links to the Almighty', as Dr Hamilton put it) but he was driven less by moral fervour than by ambition and the desire for money. He had been earlier disappointed by his slow advancement in the FO but within three years of taking the slave trade job, he was promoted to being one of the Office's four senior clerks. In 1824, Canning, who had by then become Foreign Secretary, arranged for him to have an annual salary of £500 (equivalent to £35,000 to-day) and a lump sum of £1,000 (£70,000 to-day). The volume of work soon became too much for Bandinel on his own and so he took on extra people, not as full employees of the FO but as assistants to himself, mainly as copyists, but also engaged in the publication of documents, publicity designed to show how much the FO was doing to stamp out the slave trade. This was the origin of the Slave Trade Department but although it was in terms of numbers employed the largest branch of the FO, it was not a considered part of it. It was not funded from FO vote but from the expenses voted annually by Parliament to finance the mixed commissions. Its members were badly paid, less than ordinary FO clerks, and strongly resented it. They were in effect helots; a later permanent under secretary described the Department as stamped with the mark of *helotry*. Some of them tried to better their position by taking jobs in the mixed commissions abroad, in Havana or Rio or Freetown. These were unhealthy and far from pleasant postings, but considerably better paid than in London, with retirement after 12 years plus a pension. Dr Hamilton gave a number of examples of the careers of members of the slave trade department who tried their luck abroad and who either deeply regretted that they had done so or in some cases had come to a sticky end.

Badinel himself was far from being a paragon of bureaucratic virtue. Palmerston found his spelling appalling and covered his work with and comments in red ink. Badinel was also sensitive to criticism and opposed attempts to reform the Department which he saw as slurs on his leadership as well as attacks on his perks. He was a difficult person to get on with both in his professional capacity as well as in his private life, as his wife and other women found. His resistance to reform meant that there was no change in the anomalous position of the department and its badly paid staff within the FO which caused discontent and resignations. Some of the staff ran into so much debt that they were unable to come to the office because of the creditors outside waiting to pounce. Others became involved in a scandalous case of embezzlement which led eventually to the absorption in 1854 of the Slave Trade Department into the rest of the FO.

Bandinel retired in 1845 and under a later head, Henry Wylde, the Department's focus began to change from the Atlantic trade which, since the 1850s and '60s, had been dying out, to the Arab slave trade from the East Coast of Africa into Turkey and Persia. Wylde's influence, together with the publicity which David Livingstone generated about the Arab slave trade, helped turn public attention towards this area. Another reason was the invention of photography which meant that people could see for themselves what was happening; and here Dr Hamilton showed some slides of late 19th and early 20th century photographs of recently liberated slaves on board HM ships taken off Arab dhows.

If before the 1850s there had been no change in the status of the department or its staff, there was a gradual change in its role. During the 1830s and '40s it became the FO's main source of expertise on Africa and one of the prime movers of British expansionism in Africa. Anti-slave trade organisations began to tap into the department's knowledge of Africa. There was a growing feeling that, rather than concentrating on stopping the slave trade at sea, it would be better to do so within Africa itself by winning control over the African kingdoms responsible for the trade. One of the principle reasons for the Niger expedition, for example, was to obtain undertakings from local rulers not to continue the slave trade. This activity, combined with missionary work and the search for opportunities for legitimate trade, led to the expansion of the empire in Africa. Humanitarian intervention became imperial intervention and the Slave Trade Department, after being for a short time the Consular and Slave Trade Department, was eventually re-created in 1882 as the Consular and African Department. The inherited expertise of the Slave Trade Department meant that, in the colonial scramble for Africa of the late 19th century, Britain had, in the African Department, a resource possessed by no other European power and which therefore helped to give it a dominating role in the continent.

The Fuller Family and the Wealden Iron Industry

Jeremy Hodgkinson

The speaker provided a well-illustrated account of the Wealden iron industry by reference to one of the better known iron producers of Sussex, the Fuller family of Brightling.

The Weald has been a source of iron for over 2000 years, occurring as small dense nodules of siderite (iron carbonate) and limonite (iron hydrated oxide) in narrow bands at the base of the Wadhurst clay deposits. The iron ore was mined by digging a pit 3-10 metres deep, extracting the ore, then digging a second pit next to the first, and back filling the first pit with the spoil: the remnants of such mine pits can still be seen across the Sussex countryside. The processing of the ore into iron involved heating it to a high temperature, for which a combination of a charcoal furnace and bellows was found to be ideal (wood on its own would not burn hot enough).

Although particularly well endowed with woodland, the Weald was an obvious source of trees for charcoal, but such was the demand for iron that the forests had to be managed by coppicing, whereby after cutting, the trees were able to regenerate over the next 10-15 years. Thus as one blast furnace required clearing some 180 acres a year, a total of 2000 acres in all had to set aside for coppicing. Inevitably, some woodland never recovered.

It was discovered that adding some limestone to the furnace helped separate the molten iron from the waste material that was then deposited as slag – the site of many of the smelters and older bloomeries can be detected through the presence of slag lying around on the ground. Fortunately limestone could be found close to the iron ore. Air (providing oxygen) to encourage the fire was usually provided by giant bellows powered by a waterwheel; hence most production was near rivers. To avoid problems with the water power during droughts, pen-ponds were built upstream to provide a continuous source of water power while the furnaces were running.

The ore extracted from the ground was first roasted in an open pit to convert the iron carbonate siderite to the oxide of iron, a better ore for the blast furnace. It would take four tons of ore to produce one ton of iron, and a typical output was 250 tons of iron a year (with the furnace running continuously over 7-8 months). The molten iron, which was run into shallow trenches solidified into half-ton ingots called sows, smaller ingots called pigs, or directly into moulds. This carbon-rich cast iron is a strong, but rather brittle form of the metal. To make the iron more versatile, the cast iron was remelted in a forge to burn off the carbon and then hammered into the more malleable wrought iron. Cast iron however did have its uses, as fire-backs for example (a subject upon which the speaker had addressed the Society on an earlier occasion). Cast iron was also useful for grave slabs, fire dogs and guns: now enter the Fullers.

The Fuller family, land-owners in Sussex, first got involved in the iron industry in 1650 by renting Stream Furnace in Chiddingly (near Hailsham) with a Sir Thomas Dyke. There was a big demand for iron guns for the Dutch Wars, and the Fullers saw a good business opportunity. In addition to producing iron, the Fuller enterprise became one of the larger, and certainly better-known, ordnance foundries in England. Fuller cannons adorn the Tower of London to this day and were widely deployed on ships of the Royal Navy through several wars in the 18th century.

In 1693 Major John Fuller (second John of the dynasty) expanded the iron business by building Heathfield Furnace, which he equipped as a gun foundry, and also bought Burwash Forge. He anticipated a demand for guns as the Royal Navy expanded after the Dutch Wars and for British colonial expansion. By this time the Wealden iron industry was active across the entire region and the quality of Wealden cannon was highly regarded. This was of course a major source of employment for the region, embracing many trades from mining, coppicing, charcoal production, pond-mill servicing, furnace building and maintenance, charcoal production, engineering, forging, casting, and transportation. But there were signs of trouble ahead as other areas of the country

established iron furnaces and foundries (for example, the Forest of Dean) and cheaper, iron ore was imported from Sweden. Also, some London merchants came south to invest as ironmasters.

John Fuller (the third) carried on the family ironfoundry tradition and kept many detailed accounts and records that are available to historians today. John met and married the heiress Elizabeth Rose, whose family owned large sugar plantations in Jamaica. John's uncle, Thomas Fuller, had bought Brightling House in 1696, rebuilt it during the next three years and then passed it on to John and Elizabeth when they married in 1703; they renamed it Rose Hill in 1712 (reverted to Brightling Park after the Fullers sold it later).

The next of the John Fullers (the fourth) succeeded in 1745, but was not as involved in the ironfounding as his father, although the trade was still brisk for cannons. When he died in 1755 without issue, his brother, Rose Fuller, inherited the business. Though trained as a doctor and often living in Jamaica, he returned to Sussex, but then entered politics; his younger brother Stephen essentially took control of the business. However, the business received a severe body blow when the British Government accepted a tender from Carron's of Falkirk who, with a cheaper process, were able to underbid Fullers.

After Rose died with no children, his brother Henry's son, the fifth John (known as Jack, Mad Jack, Jolly Jack) took over the business. He wasn't that interested in the ironfoundry and as mentioned earlier, the business climate for Wealden iron had turned for the worse. The high income derived from the Jamaican sugar plantations and their landed estate was more than enough to sustain the Fullers, so perhaps they felt no economic pressure to develop their cannon founding methods. The Heathfield furnace closed in 1787, but the Burwash forge continued work until 1803. When the nearby Ashburnham Furnace shut down in 1813, 270 years of Wealden iron founding came to an end. Jack Fuller was the local Squire, the local Member of Parliament and somewhat eccentric – his six Follies seen around the Brightling countryside are a true testament to English eccentricity at its best! He was however a noted philanthropist, supporting many local causes, including the purchase and restoration of Bodiam castle to save it from destruction.

As a tail-piece, the speaker displayed a beautiful picture of Heathfield Vale commissioned by Jack Fuller from a rather well-known artist at the time called Joseph Turner.



Heathfield Vale by Turner