

ORLANDO HUTCHINSON IN BRANSCOMBE ...

Branscombe Village Hall

2006.

Barbara Farquharson played Barbara

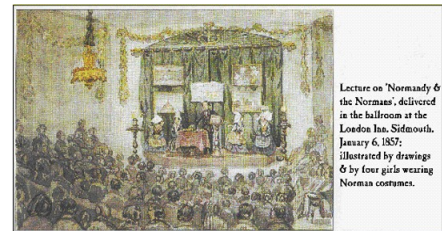
Oliver Bernard was the ghost of Orlando Hutchinson

This was the first of the Project drama-documentaries
and it's not very dramatic!

Barbara (enters from back, in lecturing mode): Hello!

– how nice to see you all ... Goodness, what a crowd!

There's no question, Orlando would have been tickled
pink to see you all it must be a bit like the times when he
gave talks in the room above the London Inn in
Sidmouth.

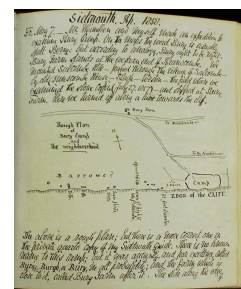


Let me explain ... Most of you will have heard of **Peter Orlando Hutchinson**. He was born 1810 and died 1897 – absolutely a man of the nineteenth century.



Some of you will know that he kept a diary ... which
ran and ran and ran ... He started it in his early
twenties and went on until just before he died.

Unfortunately, he decided that his early diaries were
'puerile' and so he burnt most of them. He **almost** did
the same with his later ones. Here's what he wrote in
1868:

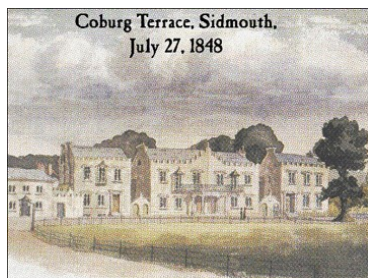


*What is the good of jotting down memorandum which I may never require
to refer to as long as I live and which nobody may care to refer to after I
am dead?*

Luckily, vanity, or some other preserving instinct, stopped him from tossing them on the fire

...

The reason for this talk is that he came over to Branscombe on several occasions and it seemed a good idea to bring these particular diary entries together and to read them to you.



In putting this talk together I drew on Jeremy Butler's beautiful publication: *Peter Orlando Hutchinson's Travels in Victorial England*, which includes a lot of reproductions. There is also a very useful booklet by Catherine Linehan. Two Project members, John Ponsford and Elsie Mayo, helped pull out more diary entries; and Phil Planel kindly showed me an interesting dissertation by Marion Baker.

There's just one other thing before I start. It's a bit embarrassing! I mean, I know that a lot of you believe in ghosts, but I've always been a bit sceptical. Until – well - the other night. You see, as many of you know I do tend to leave things to the last moment, and I was therefore fiddling around at my desk trying to get this talk together ... it was quite late at night, quite dark, and suddenly there was a knock on my study door. Now I know that I'm as deaf as a post and don't hear when people ring the door-bell – but even so, it was a bit spooky ... I mean I don't make a habit of entertaining unknown visitors late at night! Anyway, there's a knock -

(loud knock. Enter Orlando Hutchinson)

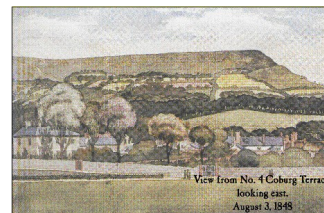
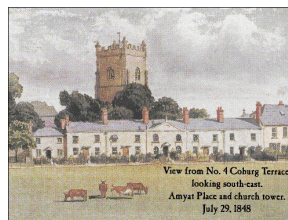
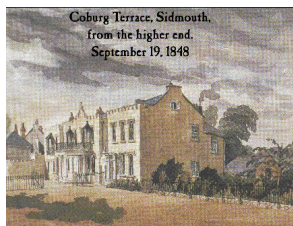
Who the hell are you?

Orlando: Excuse me! Hell has nothing to do with it. I am, or was - of course - Peter Orlando Hutchinson. **(Bows)**. Your servant. I thought that, as I was passing through the ether, I'd drop in. I do very much believe in getting things right, not being slapdash, and I thought I might just check that you - well, that you stated the facts as they are – as they were, in a correct fashion. If you don't mind, I'll just loiter for a while.

Barbara: Well, what do you do when a ghost drops by? 'Lovely to meet you' – 'Perhaps we won't shake hands'. And as you see – well, I mean, can you? – he's still hanging around ... It's all rather peculiar.

(Turns to Orlando) Mr – Peter – Orlando - Hutchinson. Born 1810 in Winchester. His father a physician at the hospital. Soon after he's born, the family moved to Tiverton, and then to Teignmouth. Finally, when he's fifteen, they settle in Sidmouth. And, though he travelled a lot, that's where he lived for the rest of his life.

The family first rented, then bought, 4 Coburg Terrace. They also bought part of the adjoining field.



Mr Hutchinson was – dare I say – a bit of a snob; he liked to let it be known that his ancestors were quite *illustrious* ...

Orlando: A snob! How very rude. No, no! I simply like to make it clear that that my ancestors on my father's side migrated to America in the seventeenth century, and that my great-grandfather, Thomas, was Governor of Massachusetts. No harm in setting the record straight. Alas, he was a Royalist – a *loyalist* – and so, in 1776, during the American Revolution, with his son, Thomas the Second, he had to flee rather abruptly back to England. Which meant that he lost most of his money and, when offered a baronetcy by George III, declined it on the grounds that he couldn't afford it. I thought that that was rather a shame.

Then again, on my mother's side, her father was Admiral Sir William Parker. Comported himself very well at the Battle of St Vincent in 1797 and made £80-90,000 in prize money. My mother inherited £9000, and I inherited 3000 ... Strange how fast inherited wealth seems to dissipate..

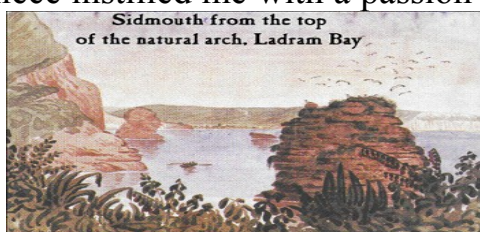
So, dear madam, I see no reason not to be proud of my forebears – nor to somewhat

Barbara: I apologise – I was being tactless! ... Anyway ... one of the reasons why the family had moved to Teignmouth was that Orlando had, as a small boy, contracted a hip infection – probably some form of tuberculosis ...

Barbara: Look, who's telling this story – you or me? And I think it *is* relevant because it meant that you were tutored at home and didn't go to university ...

[illegible]

Sidmouth and, indeed, Exeter. Then, again, at a very early age my dear mother's niece instilled me with a passion for Geology – it was only later that I came to realise



that the new findings on evolution didn't quite tie in with the biblical reading of the matter –well, I rather think that – in this instance – the bible has

to be taken with a pinch of salt. Then, too, I had some knowledge of architecture, and later I became much interested in archaeology ..

Barbara: I was coming to that!

Orlando: Please – allow me ... Ah yes! ... In addition, I was taught as a lad how to use water colours and have some small skill in this domain. And then there was carpentry, which I dearly loved, and might have pursued, if I had had to make a living. On occasion I invented a thing or two – an artillery shell, a safety valve for steam boilers, a respirator ...

Yes, a somewhat unconventional education ... perhaps it's true what they say: 'Jack of all trades, Master of none', and I have to admit that I have not been entirely happy with my written efforts. As a young man I published a foolish work on the goings-on at Gretna Green – of- course I came down *against* elopement! I published a novel called Branscombe Cliffs – quite puerile, I burnt a hundred copies!

Barbara: Gosh, I'd have liked to read that!

Orlando: I dare say! I tried my hand at a tragedy about early American history, and a comedy, and poems, several novels and five volumes on the History of Sidmouth – all of them unpublished. I would have liked to have published the History but it was too expensive and I thought it would be hard to raise sufficient subscriptions. (*sighs*) Yes, well, I did publish a lot of bits and pieces in the newspapers, but nothing of much merit. Really the only thing I published of which I am reasonably proud is a little book on the geology of Sidmouth and South-east Devon ...

Barbara: Look, I think perhaps ...

Orlando: (*waves her away*) I never married. I liked the fair sex – enjoyed their

company, but always felt that ladies were rather *costly* creatures. ... A pity really, because you can't trust servants and I did become rather lonely in my old age. Dear, oh dear (*wipes away a tear*) – this is all quite uncalled for – please forgive me ... Perhaps I might add that before I got rather old and infirm I was quite popular.

Barbara: That's very true! Goodness – Valentine's Day 1853 he had *five* valentines – mind you, he sent thirteen! 'Bless the girls,' he said, 'Why don't they put their names on them?' And the next day, he had another three! 'The lady in one of them asks me to kiss her! Why did she omit to put her name in some sly corner?' ...

Orlando: Tut-tut! Being a bachelor, I didn't do too much entertaining though I found the new habit of inviting people for tea worked rather well – not too much preparation, and not too costly.

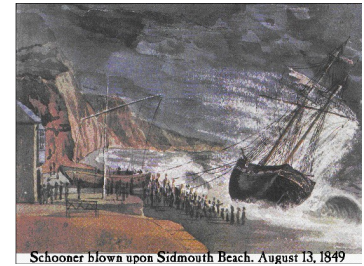
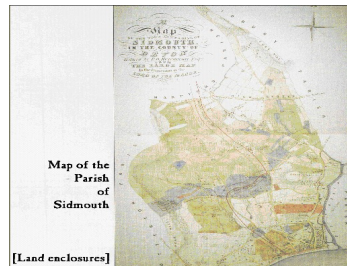
Well, yes, by and large, a pleasant life The thing I most particularly enjoyed was gadding about with my good friend Mr Heineken ... he was an excellent man. And then presenting my findings to Learned Societies. Oh yes, despite my infirmity, which actually diminished as I got older, I was nominated to the local Volunteer Corps and became a lieutenant. I suppose I was a bit of an over-grown boy sometimes – I had a canon and I liked firing salutes whenever possible, and I did enjoy running up flags from the roof of my summer house. Had flags for every occasion – Royal birthdays, Waterloo, local weddings – whatever came to hand!

Barbara: Listen, I'm sorry, we do have to move on. As I said, Mr Hutchinson kept a wonderful diary for most of his life – beautiful copperplate writing, nice pen-and-ink sketches ... (*points to board*) He's extraordinarily wide-ranging in his interests -

Orlando: Come, come, let us not exaggerate.

Barbara: (*irritated*): He's *extraordinarily* wide-ranging in his interests: coastal rock

formations, land enclosures,

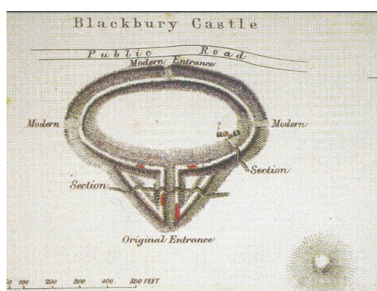
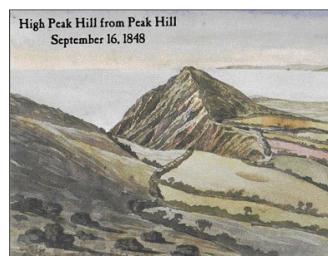
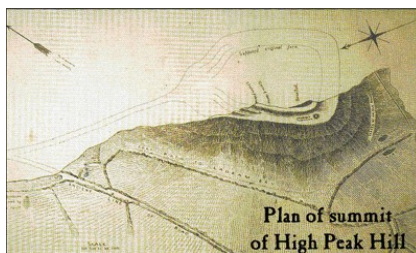


shipwrecks, bits about politics – he got very interested in the Crimean War, and things like the spread of cholera in 1849, also church fittings, folk-lore, ghosts

He was also quite interested in deformities of various sorts, and in blood and gore – a pig with eight legs, or a kitten with two faces, blood-stained swords from the Indian Mutiny. Actually he seems to have rather enjoyed a good hanging and – dare I say - he obtained the skin of a black man who had been hung in Exeter.

Orlando: Come now – this is quite needlessly ‘intimate’!

Barbara: (takes no notice) I suppose the most groundbreaking (if you’ll excuse the pun) stuff was his surveys and archaeological excavations. He had no training, but there was a sort of rigour about the way he went about things. His work on Peak Hill is exemplary:

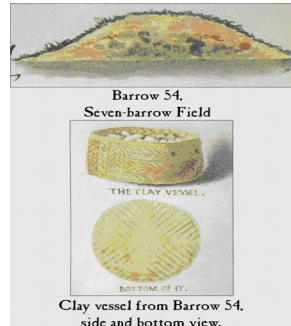
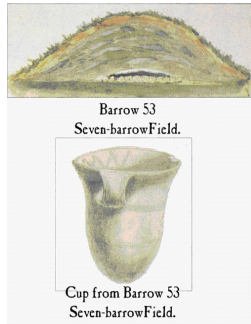


and, too, his surveys of Blackbury Camp.

OK, his excavations were a little hit and miss ... he **hit** quite a lot of pots, and **missed** quite a lot of structures, but still a good bit better than those of his contemporary, the Rev. Richard Kirwan from Gittisham.

Orlando: I should say so – the man was a charlatan! Damn it – used to tell the workmen where to dig and then go off and leave them to it! I made a habit of going

past some of his excavations of the barrows on Farway Common – near the Hare and Hound - and I found more stuff in his spoil heap than they found in the excavation! Not the thing at all - quite unscientific ...



Barbara: As I mentioned before, Mr Hutchinson unfortunately destroyed his earlier diaries

Orlando: It was childish stuff! I took in my head, when I was twenty three, to walk off my lameness!! Set off round Wales and England with nothing more than a sketch-book, a volume of Shakespeare and a flute! Walked one thousand, three hundred and forty seven miles! Later I went to America and to France. But, no, I didn't want to keep the diaries.

The ones that, for better or worse, I did keep start a little while after the death of my father in 1846. I came back from my travels and settled down in Sidmouth with my mother. Ah - maybe I should have gone to Australia with my brother and sister, but someone had to look after her, and I was fond of her ...

Barbara: Good, right, what I was hoping to do, this evening, was to read out the entries that were about Branscombe and Beer ... But I'm afraid that time's getting a little short so we won't be able to include all of them. I suppose that, since you've so kindly emanated, you might like to read some of them yourself?

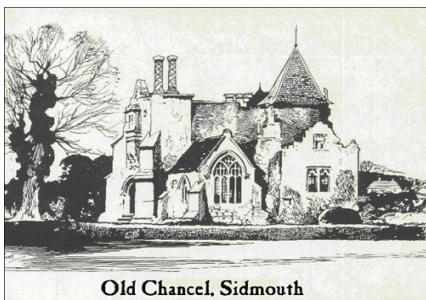
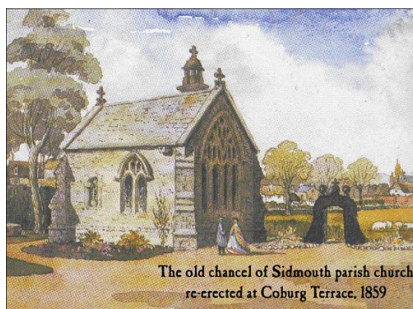
Orlando: If you insist ...

Barbara: Unfortunately, only the diaries for 1846 to 1870 have been published, so we're looking at the time between Orlando's thirty-sixth and sixtieth birthdays.

Orlando: Yes, yes, yes ... Well, let me see – a fine volume, nicely bound! My pictures

– ah yes! Well, I wasn't a bad craftsman.

By the way - I don't know if you are aware, but there was a rather heated contretemps between me and the Church authorities in Sidmouth. They were supposed to be restoring the Parish Church – this was in 1858 – and then, because people had been so generous with their donations, they decided to rebuild it! Such sacrilege, such vandalism, such Popery! In the end, I bought the old chancel for £45 and had it re-erected on the land next to my house.



And after a while I bought a transept window from Awliscombe Church – it cost five pound - and added that. Ah, ah, yes, and I bought a piece of Roman pavement and a peck of Roman tesserae probably from the villa at Uplyme - two shillings and sixpence! If I say it myself, over the years I built a rather fine house – carved all the mantel shelves and cornices myself, and created a fine heraldic ceiling. Gothic in style, of course, and some fools have said it is rather dark and lugubrious! Some people have no sense of how things

should be done!

Barbara: Look, would you mind? ...

Orlando: (takes no notice) And another thing, the Church authorities were virtual papists and even after the Church was built they were into meddling with the placement of the organ and so on ... I won't go on, but, my goodness, they even tried to embroil our dear Queen - Queen Victoria, of course. And so, quite out of character, I found myself in September of 1860 taking the coach and then the train to Southampton and then the ferry to the Isle of Wight where our dear Queen was in residence. Then, rather splendidly – I thought - arrayed in my dress uniform of the

Volunteer Artillery and bearing my sword, I walked all the way to Queen Victoria's abode at Osborne. Her dear Majesty couldn't see me, but I was treated with great respect, and assured that my petition would receive her personal attention. When I returned home I was roundly abused! But I won!! Well, at least, temporarily ...

Barbara: Look

Orlando: Of-course, forgive me. Well, well ... what a long time ago it all seems. Yes ... well, although these diaries begin in 1848, I didn't really get around to exploring Branscombe until 1855 ...

Barbara: Actually – I know I shouldn't interrupt - but I've just found such a nice description of an evening's entertainment – it's August 7 1854 -

I called at the Elphinstones and found the Captain all alone. We cut a segar [cigar] in two and each smoked half, neither of us being suckers, and even this made my nerves all of a shake. I then had a cup of coffee, which took away the effect, and then a glass of liqueur with a German name made of white brandy, syrup and caraway seed. We gossiped for **three** hours. Later I had a practise with Mr and Miss Heineken, trying over Handel's 'Mount of Olives', I taking the horn.

You did have a nice life!

Orlando: Really, whatever has all this got to do with anything? June 15, a Friday:

Started with Mr Heineken on an exploring expedition over Salcombe Hill. For the first time made use of my new leather bag with the brass clasp, just made in Sidmouth according to my own design. Never remember seeing the atmosphere clearer to the westward. The Babbicombe quarries and the whole coast towards Torbay were easily seen with the naked eye, and the glass showed the houses and every tree quite plainly.

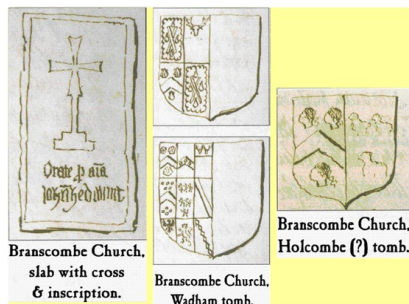
We made a long day of it ... went via Salcombe and looked at the Church, on to Thorn

farm ... and Dunscombe (no donkeys then!) ... past Slade - and so to *Weston* ... Mmm – it does go on a bit, but I daresay there'll be something for everyone. Ah yes:

We proceeded through Weston and then made an attempt to find a stone coffin lying buried in one of the fields by the roadside Having taken an iron rod, about two and a half feet long, we thrust it into the ground in many places to feel for the coffin, but not knowing the exact spot ... we gave up the search in despair. We therefore resolved to go on to **Branscombe** to see John Parrot, the sexton ...

I gather some of you have wondered where the Dean lands were –well, here you have it:

The first cluster of houses on entering Branscombe from the west, is locally called 'The Dean', some supposing that the Deans of Exeter had a residence here, but Lysons calls it the 'village of Dean'.



You see, you can learn something new every day! Well then, we get to Branscombe Church ... – goes on a bit, .. em, yes ... 'oldest inscription ... is on a slab ... in the floor of the south transept' (*gestures towards the drawing on the left*) Yes, and the Wadham monument

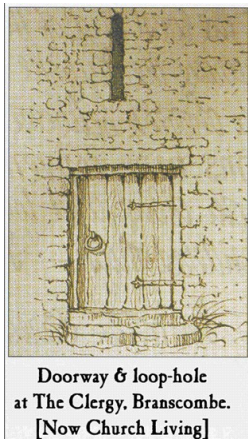
and the Holcombes of Hole ... Then we went outside we'll leave that ... I wonder, have you noticed the slab that leans against the Church on the southern side? It once belonged to a tomb and it is inscribed to 'one Joseph Braddich who died June 27, 1673'. It *is* rather touching:

Strong and in labour
Suddenly he reels,
Death came from behind him
And struck up his heels
Such sudden strokes
Surviving mortals Bid ye
Stand on your watch
And to be also ready

And, standing here as witness, I whole-heartedly concur!

Barbara: My turn! So – they cross the road to the house he calls 'The Clergy', though **we** call it Church Living, and here's what he wrote:

There is a tradition, or a superstition, that some of the priests or other clergy connected with the church before the period of the Reformation occupied this building and Mrs Somers, the chatty landlady, showed us all over it. Immediately inside the entrance a large trap door can be pushed up. The space above has no communication at present with the rest of the house but is lighted by a loophole through the wall over the door.

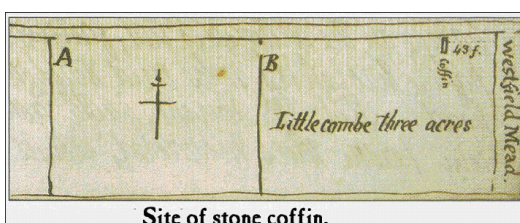


In one of the bedrooms are two bas-reliefs (there was once a third, larger, on the ceiling) of the coat of arms. The walls in some places, especially in the lower apartments, are three feet thick. **A belief exists that there is another house under this one,** and in support of this opinion, Mrs Somers stamped on the stone floor in several places to let us hear how hollow the sound was. She also added that her husband had dreamt 'a hundred times' that the entrance to this underground house is by a flight of

steps still existing beneath the soil immediately outside the dairy window. Perhaps there may be some cellars still undiscovered.

Actually, Orlando wrote a bit more about this house in a manuscript account – he said that the loophole was suitable for the shooting of arrows, and that if the trapdoor was open and 'an enemy forced his way in he might be speared from above'. He also said, with respect to the hidden chamber, that in one of the upper chambers towards the west part of the building there is a small hole in the wall down which, if a pebble is dropped, it is heard to descend a long way.

Orlando: Whose story is this? Yours or mine? I wish to return to the matter of Weston:

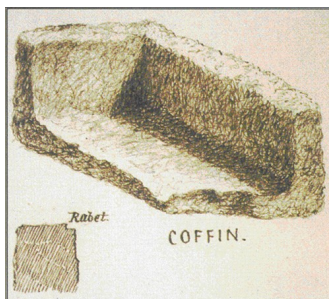


We ... left Branscombe, returning back to the field, taking the sexton John Parrot with us. It is

necessary to enter from the road by the gate A and then pass through the hedge at B to reach the coffin at the east end of the field called Littlecombe Three Acres ...

Yes, and then, yes –

We probed the ground at the place pointed out and were much deceived if we did not come down upon the object sought. ... I longed to cut up the turf at once, but John Parrott warned me to desist, as it was a grass field and the man who rented it was a 'queer customer'.



His story was this. About sixty-five or six years ago, when there was a way through by which the farmers used to convey their produce, a man was taking a cart; that on passing over this spot one of the cart wheels sunk in and made an opening; that the man who drove the cart, being attracted by this

circumstance and having examined the hole, thought he had discovered the hiding place of a 'crock of gold'; that he thrust his arm therein to secure the treasure but was much surprised when he pulled out a skull; that this skull was taken to the vicarage at Branscombe; that some years afterwards, when John Parrott himself was a boy (he told us he was now 65 ...) he took out of this coffin some finger bones, a collar bone and two or three ribs; that he put them back again; that a Mrs Chick, who then rented the field, wanted to have the coffin destroyed and offered to give it to him, but that he would have nothing to do with the matter; and that the coffin and its contents have not been disturbed since. He further told us that the common belief in the neighbourhood is that some woman was murdered at Berry Farm, was buried here and that her ghost still haunts a certain apartment in the farmhouse, appearing in the form of a woman having on an antiquated hat fastened by a long pin passing through the hair over the crown of her head. But Mr Heineken justly asked whether it is likely that any person thus murdered would have been so carefully interred in a stone coffin? And secondly, that if a body was buried here in the regular way, whether it is not likely that other coffins might not be found if searched for? It is a matter for surprise that any evidence of interment should be discovered in so remote a locality and so far from any habitation ...

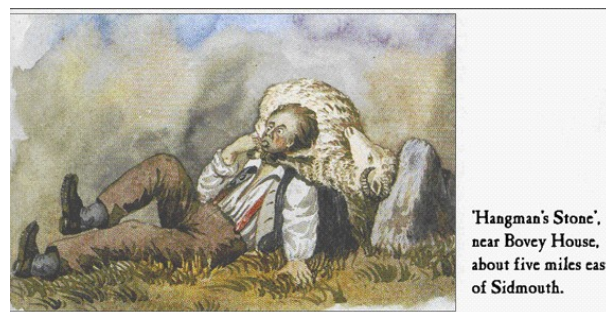
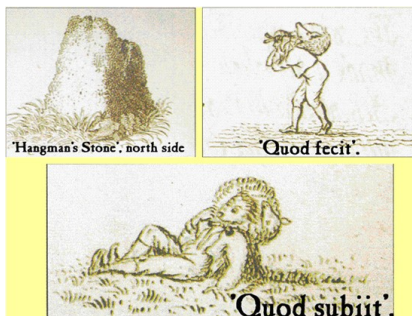
Barbara: Excellent – I like the line of deductive reasoning ... I think it's *my* turn again! Just to move things on a little! Oh, excellent! 1857– Sunday February 22nd:

There were thirty-five tubs and six flagons of French brandy seized at Woodash, near Branscombe, hidden under some straw on the premises of Farmer Bray. The magistrates fined him £630, which was reduced to £100.

I wonder how he persuaded the magistrates?

And here's one of my favourites – you know Hangman's Stone, on the main road, near the Beer turn-off? Well, here's Orlando's account from May of 1857:

According to popular belief it obtained its name from a man having been strangled or hanged against it. The story runs to the effect that a man one night stole a sheep in one of the fields near Branscombe. In order to carry it he tied the legs round in front of his forehead.

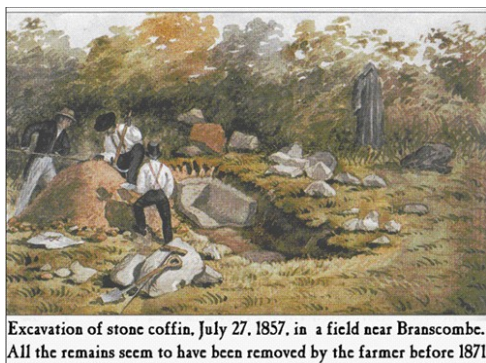


When he got to the top of the lane, feeling tired or wishing to re-adjust his burden, he sat down with his back against this stone with the sheep resting upon it. The animal now made an effort to get loose, and in its struggles shifted its legs down over the man's face and under his chin. With his back against the stone and unable to extricate himself, the weight of the sheep pressing against his throat soon served to strangle him...

It's terrific stuff!! Orlando goes on to say that maybe the name Hangman's Stone is a corruption, and that it was originally 'Hanging Stone' and that, perhaps, it was once part of a prehistoric dolmen. I rather like the idea that there might be some sort of ancient folk memory that wound itself around this place ...

Orlando: I'm glad you like it! My turn, I think! Now, I wasn't happy about that

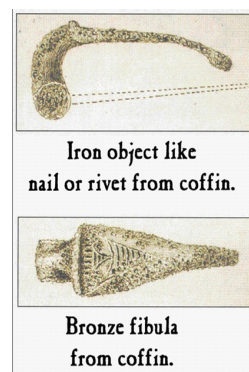
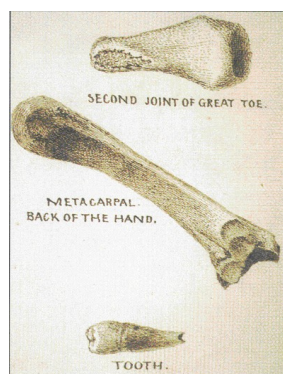
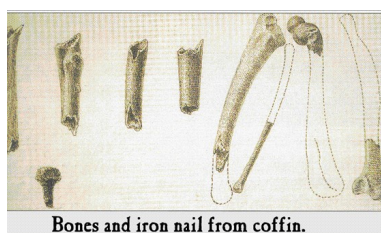
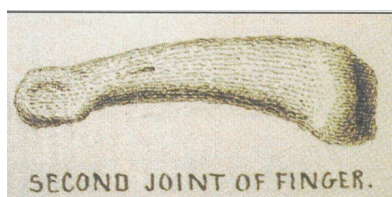
coffin in the field near Bury farm, so we went back – Monday, July 27 1857...



At last I had a dig at the stone coffin. Mr. Heineken, myself and a man went over to 'Littlecombe Three Acres'. Provided with spades, pickaxes, rakes and probing iron, we at once went to work.

On taking up the turf we found the coffin ... It lay nearly north and

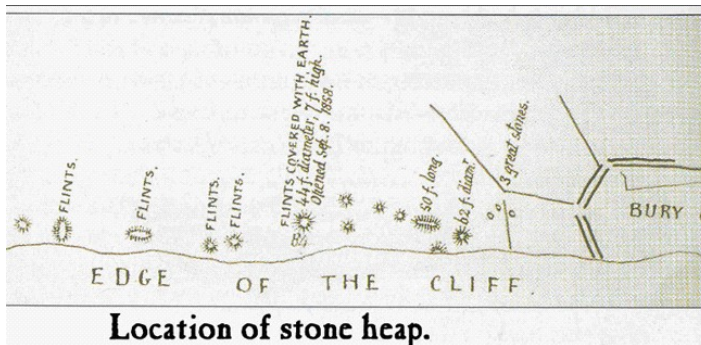
south, or to be exact, the north end (apparently the head) lay 14 degrees west of north ... The top edge of the coffin was only six inches under the surface. It was made of chalk stone from the Beer quarries and soft in texture. It was rudely hollowed out from one great block, the marks of the tool being visible. It was in great fragments except for a portion of the end near the hedge. ... We carefully examined all the earth as we took it out ... We found about thirty pieces of bone, all in small fragments except for three or four. These were two finger bones (apparently), a metacarpal, a toe bone and a tooth. Also we found an iron object like a nail or rivet, and part of a bronze fibula.



These we brought away, as well as two or three pieces of the coffin which had tool marks on them. From all these we hope to ascertain to what nation or people the corpse had belonged and at what period the interment may have taken place ...

Barbara: I wonder – he never did find out, and it is quite possible that the bronze object is in Exeter Museum – one of these days we should try and find out more ... I'll add it to the list of 'things to be done' ... **(to Orlando)** Sorry!!

Orlando: It was the following year – 1858 - that we got interested in Bury Camp. Now there's a thing – a really important earthwork and yet hardly anyone had mentioned it before we got there, and I hear they're still scratching their heads over it today – what's that – a hundred and fifty years' later! ... Friday May 7, Heineken and myself worked away as usual – here's the plan that I made for the Sidmouth Guide...



Emm, quite a lot of measurements which I shall not go into ...

... The side along the edge of the cliff measures 952 feet and the width in the middle 350. It has a vallum [that means a bank] **inside** the ditch ... and a small vallum outside Whether any of it is lost by the falling away of the cliff is impossible to say ...

Barbara: It certainly has been lost!

Orlando: Next time you go there take a look - you can see High Peak Hill, Blackbury Camp, even Musbury Camp beyond the Axe ... In conclusion I wrote:

[It is] not sufficiently regular to warrant its being considered Roman. It is sufficiently rude to make us assign it to the Britons.

I do believe that I have been proven right by time, though 'prehistoric' seems to be the word you use nowadays instead of 'Briton'. And here's something else I noted that you may well have missed:

Walking out at the end [of the Camp] in the Sidmouth direction we came to three large masses of stone almost buried in the grass. The first is of

sandstone of the Greensand Formation and the two others of chert. Tradition as usual declares that there is treasure buried under them. Pursuing our route for nearly half a mile, measuring with a pedometer [a most useful instrument!] we examined and took down a number of barrows or tumuli. I believe they have never been opened, but Mr. Ford of Branscombe has given us leave. Some of these do not bear the semblance of genuine barrows but only heaps of dry flints thrown up after clearing the land for cultivation.

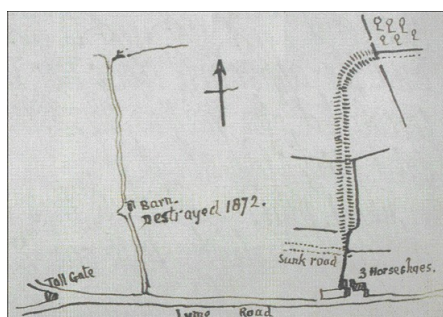
Barbara: He's quite right – it really is nearly impossible to tell the difference!

Orlando: And here is a note that may be of interest:

All along here is a beautiful undercliff, a sort of stage or platform half way down to the sea, well cultivated with corn, potatoes, etc.

Barbara: Well, well – and we used to argue about whether the cliff plats dated back beyond the 1880s – we should have read the Diaries a bit earlier!! My turn! Orlando, of course, wasn't going to let the barrows go without further investigation so three months later, on August 4th, he's back ... this description comes for a report he wrote on the Barrows in East Devon –

On the plain covered with fine grass that stretches away westwards [from Bury Camp] there lies, scattered about within fifty yards of the cliff, twelve or fourteen heaps of stones. The opening up of [number] 84 ... did **not** produce any results.



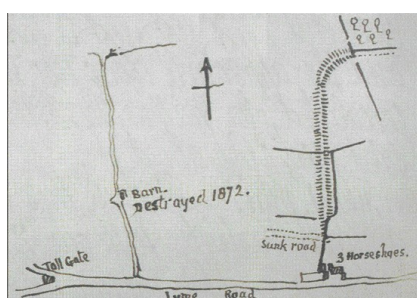
Earthwork near the Three Horseshoes.

The fine turf and the earth were removed from the top, and the labourers descended down to the ground line. The work was most difficult. All the interior was composed of loose dry flints, and as fast as any were removed the sides slipped down and threatened to bury the men. Only

standing room for one man was laid bare at the floor, although the top was completely open. Nothing but the removal of the whole heap would have proved whether it was sepulchral or not.

Not perhaps the most sophisticated of excavations – but not bad for 1858! I'd say, from the description, that this was just a field clearance heap ... After that he visited the barrow one more time in August with Mr Chick ... and that really was the end of *that* story ...

Orlando: Don't you think she rather goes on?! Ah! Here's a thing ... up by the Three Horseshoes – which I've noticed recently as I emanate around has quite ceased to be a pub ... of-course, it's not *quite* in Branscombe, but one can't be too pedantic ... Yesss - Monday September 26 1859:



Earthwork near the Three Horseshoes.

We stopped at the Three Horseshoes, rented by William Webber, one of my housekeeper's sons, the earthwork is in his field and he took us out to see it.

It was interesting enough – a bank running northwards for two to three hundred yards and then turning in a straight line for about another two to three hundred yards ... makes two sides of a square like a Roman Camp, though we couldn't trace the other two sides ... Here is what I surmised:

Supposing this to have been a Roman camp, one may imagine that it had been made there to watch Blackbury Castle, occupied by the Britons. The idea is supported by the tradition that a battle was fought here between the two and that the slain were buried in the mound [marked at] A.

That was just the beginning of the day ... then, let's see:



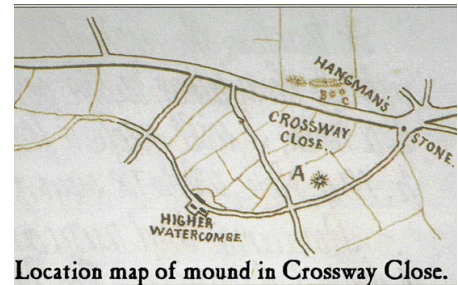
Pottery fragment
from Crossway Close

It set in a rainy day, but nevertheless we went on. We passed Bovey House, approached Beer and drew up the vehicle in the road to eat our sandwiches, for it rained so hard we scarcely knew what to do. We had heard of the finding of a vase with bones in it near Watercombe ... but as it occurred

six or seven years ago we fear we shall not recover any of the remains. - Here

is a picture of 'a rubbing of a piece of pot found in Crossway Close near Watercombe ... the pattern was impressed with twisted cord.

Barbara: It was Orlando's findings that fired us up when we found the crop-circles at Watercombe Bungalow. I bet, one day, we'll find a Bronze Age barrow cemetery somewhere round there. Orlando had something of the same idea because he came back to the mound marked A on that map ...



Location map of mound in Crossway Close.

Orlando: Mr Chick of Branscombe is a good man and in July 1860 (Wednesday July 3rd to be precise) we went back with him and dug the mound:

Mr Chick in another carriage ... took over a man with tools. Him we set to work to examine the large mound ... A hole was sunk to ten feet perpendicular to the crown, but it was nothing but fine yellow sand all the way down which, from the water marks, had evidently never been disturbed since nature deposited it there ...

Barbara: Obviously doesn't have any more luck than we do ...

Orlando: Oh, I do want to read this – though it doesn't have anything to do with Branscombe – it actually refers back to October of the previous year:

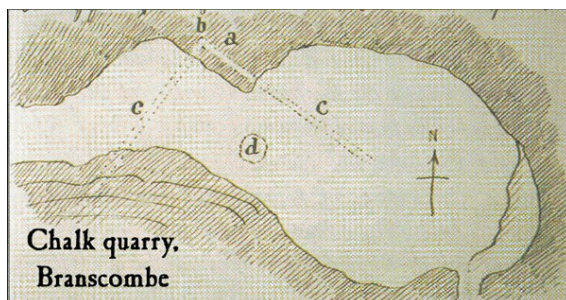


A man called Barrett, a fisherman from Budleigh Salterton, called on me with oysters. Both his hands are deformed in a very peculiar way. He has only a misshapen thumb and forefinger, not unlike the claw of a crab ... His neighbours, in order to account for the circumstance, say that his mother was frightened by a crab before he was born. It did not occur to me to ask him what he knew about

this part of the affair.

Don't you find that most interesting?

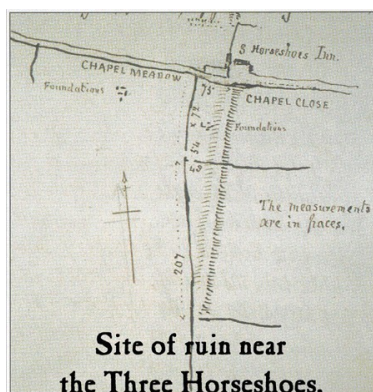
Barbara: Well! I'd have been interested to hear his reply ... Look, I know you'd like to linger but time *is* getting on ... Whilst Orlando, or, rather, his man, had been digging the natural mound, he heard tell of some trenches up near Gay's farm ...and so on July 9th



... We passed the Three Horseshoes and took the first road to the right, which brought us to the top of one of the Branscombe valleys where the view is beautiful. We were directed to the chalk quarry.

From Mr. Daw, who rents the land, we learnt that in excavating the quarry they opened the ends of two trenches in the face of the cliff, and from time to time they came upon bones and crockery, either black or stone-coloured. This happened some fifteen years ago and none has been saved.

In the plan, the white is the part excavated (by Mr Daw and his workers); a - all that remains of the trench, but full of loose flints. It turns at an angle at b. cc - direction of the trenches over the quarry before being dug away. In or near this tumulus was found a slab of stone, about three feet by two by nine inches thick, and under it were bones in a cavity. This stone now forms the floor or the 'eye' of the lower kiln close by. The spot is called 'Castle Close' and possibly these trenches may have formed two sides of a Roman camp ...



This is actually an amazing account ... a lime-working quarry which seems to have destroyed a prehistoric burial mound, including a stone cover which is then re-used to make the floor of the lime kiln, and, in addition, earth-works that may, or may not, be Roman ... Maybe we need to talk to the Crowes and take another look! Sorry, sorry There's another entry about looking in the field on the Branscombe side of the road near the Three Horse-shoes.

In 1861 Mr Chick takes Orlando and Heineken to look at some bits of wall that have appeared – because of the name of the land there's some thought that this might be part

of some chapel or cell that was once attached to a religious house. They also find a low bank that may be the continuation of the earth works to the north of the pub ...

Orlando: At this time I was rather busy with other things and didn't visit Branscombe so often ... We did have one excursion in April of 1864 to look at the Church bells, but I'll leave that ... And so we get to 1866 ... oh dear, dear, here's something – I know, I know, I should not digress but you might like to know that Guy Fawkes night in Sidmouth in 1866 was rather different from today:

Barbara: Oh really!!!

Orlando: How rude! It was quite a rackety affair – here's the account I sent to the Tiverton Gazette:

Squibs and crackers were freely let off in the town and troops of disguised persons paraded, swinging those brilliant but dangerous meteors called fireballs round their heads. The practice for troops of boys and men to disguise themselves by putting on masks and covering themselves with fantastic costume, and even of dressing themselves in the gowns and petticoats of women, is, comparatively speaking, only of recent introduction to Sidmouth. These mountebanks do not seem to have committed any assault. It is well of course for the general public to give them a wide berth, for a blow on the back with one of these balls will go far to destroy a coat, either with flames or hot pitch. These fireballs ... are in a great degree superseding the time-honoured tar barrel.

Alright! I shall go on. Anyway, it does, somewhat, tie in with my entry only a few days later, on November 13 and 14th ... Listen to this:

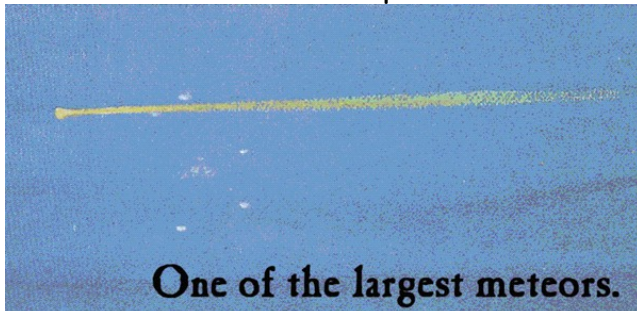
Astronomers had foretold an unusually numerous display of the periodical meteors at this period, as the cycle of rather more than thirty-three years is now completed. Mr Samuel Chick having some time ago erected a small observatory at the back of his house, Mr Heineken and myself, together with Mr Chick's eldest son and Mr Bray..

Barbara: The smuggler!?

Orlando:

and Mr Bray, proceeded there before eleven o'clock PM ... Occasional shooting stars showed themselves but it was not until after midnight that we began to keep regular

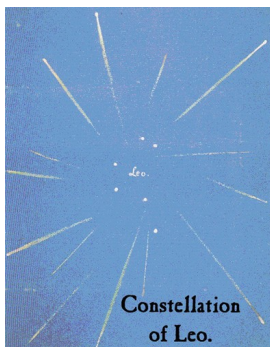
count ... From midnight to 12.50 (when it became cloudy) we counted 457. From 1.00 to 1.10, namely in the space of ten minute, we noted 130. About this period they became too numerous to count, but by 2.00 they had very much lessened in numbers. ... Perhaps one of the largest of the night was the one



represented here
(gestures to slide)...

After it had burnt out, it left a train on the sky where it had passed looking like bright vapour or smoke. This we saw for

upwards of six minutes but other people out of doors declare they saw it for much longer. After midnight, when the constellation of Leo had risen, nearly all the meteors seemed to emanate from that point, as shown in the second sketch ...



In colour some variety appeared. The burning head of some were ruddy, in some yellow, and some had almost a white light. The tails were green or bluish-green. None exploded, though one seemed to scintillate as if an explosion of its brilliant head was immanent.

Barbara: Well, you may be relieved to know that we are rather nearing the end – actually, for you Beer folk, there's an interesting entry from 1870 about the destruction of what seems to have been a small church or chapel in the farmyard of Court Barton ... he goes on to note a new boathouse covered with corrugated iron near the sea, and describes a pleasant lunch-time scene:

We mounted the high chalk hill [above the sea], lay down on the grass, ate our sandwiches and enjoyed the view. Our driver, who carried up the hamper, slipped and broke a bottle of ale and soon after, the bright sun being very hot, the cork of another bottle flew out with the report of a pistol and we lost half the contents. But as we had a jar of sweet cider ... we did very well.

Life of Riley!

Orlando: Riley? Well, really, who is wasting time now?

Barbara:

We descended the hill and visited the old church or chapel, the remains of the architecture being of the Decorated period. ... A tablet at the east end records the existence of the plague in 1646 .

JOHN THE FIFTH SONN
OF WILLIAM STARR OF
BERE, GENT. AND
DOROTHY HIS WIFE
WHICH DIED IN THE
PLAVGE. WAS HERE
BYRIED 1646.

Beer church, tablet
recording the plague.

I have heard that Beer was nearly depopulated and that the dead were mostly buried on the left hand side of the road leading from Beer to Seaton at the spot on the crown of the hill ...

Orlando: It is too bad! I wanted to tell you some more about the goings on on Guy Fawkes night

in 1870 ... but, no, there's no time, so here we are - November 17th, 1870. My birthday, my **sixtieth** birthday. I wrote:

I am sixty but I feel as young and active as thirty ...

Well, indeed, and today I'm nearly two hundred years old and I'm wearing quite well – as ghosts go ... and I have to say that you've been a most attentive audience and I have appreciated materialising this evening. I must admit that I am delighted that my feeble words should echo down the ages – I always feared that I hadn't really achieved much – I thought I was a bit of a failure, really. But perhaps not, perhaps not!

Barbara: Dear Orlando, you're a star! And we want to thank you very much indeed!!

