

Cuckfield



This is the village that was once a town having declined the offer of the new railway service from London to Brighton. A consequence of this is the delightful Victorian Ouse Valley viaduct visible from the northerner end of the village and well worth a closer look on foot.

Cuckfield is a thriving community whose location offers much for the visitor and locals. We are within easy reach of the South Downs National Park and the Downs themselves can be viewed from various sites within the village. Brighton is about 20 minutes and London is less than 1 hour by train from nearby Haywards Heath.

One of the first recorded dinosaur fossils was found by Dr. Gideon Mantell and his wife at Whitemans Green in the north of the village explaining this oft-repeated theme through the village.

The old stage-coach route from London-Brighton ran through Cuckfield while it was in its heyday and as a consequence a number of London to Brighton events come through the village including Historic Commercial Vehicles (May) as well as the Vintage Cars (November).

History and Heritage

The earliest inhabitants of Sussex belong to the **Lower and Middle Palaeolithic**. They led a nomadic lifestyle following migratory herds across the tundra plains that covered most of southern Britain. The rising sea temperatures and the continuing land bridge with Europe had dramatic effects on the Weald landscape. Arboreal species spread across the region creating a dense forest of birch, hazel and pine, followed later by oak, elm, ash and lime. Migratory herds of animals would eventually arrive to the Weald, in turn bringing with them Mesolithic hunter-gatherers tracking the herds as shown by the recovery of Mesolithic flints at several locations within the Weald.

The Neolithic period was characterised by the adoption of agricultural living, together with the development of new technologies and construction of the first communal monuments in the landscape. The period marked the first human impacts on the Weald with areas of woodland cleared for settlement and to create agricultural land, evident by the recovery of Neolithic flint axe heads throughout the area. Significant accumulation of silts and alluvium in several valleys within the Weald suggest that woodland removal was extensive.

The Bronze Age and Iron Age is marked by the introduction of metals, changes in the social structure and development of new funerary monuments and practices. In the Weald, this saw an intensification of woodland clearance and wider settlement of the landscape. One major feature of the Iron Age is the hillfort, with several known of in the Weald, that were created to control the exploitation of the iron resources of the Weald. In comparison to the preceding periods there are no indications that there might have been much in the way of use of the Cuckfield area during the Iron Age as during this period within the Weald most of the activity was in the rich in iron areas (centre or

northern parts) of the Weald or on the Lower Greensand ridges that were more suitable for use as farmland.

Romano-British (AD 43–410)

The Roman invasion of Britain in 43 AD resulted in dramatic changes to Britain socially and economically. Initially, the Weald saw few changes. The rural farmsteads and field systems that were in existence in the Late Iron Age continued to be used with limited expansion of the existing settlement pattern. By the 2nd century, the Weald had become the most important region for the production of iron within the province. There were two main groups of ironworks within the Weald, a private zone in the west and an eastern zone lined to the Classis Britannica. Over 100 ironworking sites have been identified within the Weald.

To support the transportation of materials into and out of the Weald a vast network of Roman roads was constructed. The closest to Cuckfield is the London-Hassock Roman Road. The road acted as a focus for habitation with a number of Romano-British settlements found close to the projected route of the road.

Anglo-Saxon (AD 410–1066)

The name Cuckfield is Old English in origin with the field element translated broadly to “a clearing where trees were felled”, more specifically to the Weald it can also refer to areas of ‘downland’ or common. This would suggest that the area was open fields during the Anglo-Saxon period with limited woodland coverage. The Cuck element has been debated. It could be referencing the presence of the cuckoo though it could also refer to people or individuals who lived, owned or utilised the area.

Although there are no records for Anglo-Saxon activity nor settlement prior to the 12th century, the name of the village would suggest that there was, or had been, a presence within the landscape sometime during the Anglo-Saxon period. The historic core of Cuckfield would be the most sensible location for settlement during the period and the lack of current evidence could be attributed to a lack of systematic investigation. Most medieval settlements were located upon or close to early occupation sites.

Medieval (AD 1066–1500)

No manor or settlement at Cuckfield is recorded in the Domesday Book. According to documentary sources the church was in possession of the Warenne family in the 1090s, suggesting that the manor was likely to be held by them as well. Not all medieval settlements located in the Weald were recorded. Often smaller sites might be grouped under a single record which would only record the name of the village/town they have been grouped with. It is likely that the original medieval manor would have been located close to the church, making the land immediately surrounding the church the likely position of the original settlement.

The earliest document that confirms the existence of Cuckfield as a village is the granting of a weekly market and annual fair, in 1255. The granting of the market strongly suggests that, like many Wealden villages, a recognizable trading settlement had developed by the mid-13th century.

Evidence of the medieval village of Cuckfield is limited to the church, the location of the medieval forge and the medieval farmstead of Paddocks. A couple of shards of medieval pottery were recovered during excavations for a swimming pool at Marshalls but no features were found. A medieval deer park was established c.1241 AD by the Earl of Warenne who held the manor of Cuckfield. The original extent of the park covered some 227 hectares of land located to the south of

the village, whose boundary would have been defined by the park pale. As per Forest Law, the use of exploitation of the park lay with the lord of the manor who hired a park keeper to maintain and monitor the health and condition of animals and woodland. The creation of the park would have been to the displeasure of the inhabitants of Cuckfield, taking this area out of public use. Furthermore, as development was forbidden within its bounds, the position of the park hampered the later expansion of the village which could no longer expand south of the church.

Aside from its size and the remains of the park pale, very little is known of the internal form of Cuckfield medieval deer park. Medieval deer parks were multi-purpose sites and would often contain a number of additional features including fishponds, rabbit warrens, hunting lodges, park keepers huts and forested areas. These could be spread across the park with no definable pattern for their placement.

Cuckfield underwent a period of expansion during the **post-medieval period**. The village was located on the trans-Weald route that made it an ideal stopping point for travellers and saw the development of the two inns or taverns. The village was also located near the heart of the post medieval expansion of the Wealden iron industry. The creation of the blast furnace in the late 16th century resulted in a boom to the local iron industry with 16 ironworks opening within a 10 km radius of Cuckfield during the 17th and 18th centuries. Many of the local families were either operators or owners of the nearby furnaces and forges. The impact both these industries had on Cuckfield is evident by the many listed buildings that were built in the village during the post medieval period together with the known sites of earlier structures



In the late 16th century, Cuckfield deer park was disparked and in 1575 half of the area, together with a quarter of the Manor of Cuckfield, was acquired by Henry Bowyer. Henry Bowyer had accumulated a substantial wealth as the owner of several iron furnaces in the region. Henry then built the large residence known as Cuckfield Place as part of a country estate on his recently purchased land. The estate comprised the main house, today a Grade II* Listed Building, 127 hectares of informal parkland, a kitchen-garden and a series of lakes.

The **post-medieval period** was also a time of considerable change to the landscape. Following the passing of several enclosure acts, new agricultural land was created together with several new farmsteads including Park Barn, located 10m to the west. A post-medieval windmill is recorded on the site of Park Barn Cuckfield.

Victorian Age

In 1835, proposals were put forward for the construction of a railway line from London to Brighton. Initial proposals were for the line to pass Cuckfield churchyard but stiff opposition by local residents led to the approved route being moved 2 km east of the village to Hayward's Heath. As a result, Cuckfield missed out on the 19th century expansion of population and economy that marked many

Sussex towns and inevitably led to the construction of a new population centre close to the railway station, later known as Hayward's Heath. Several businesses within Cuckfield would eventually relocate to the new town during the late 19th century and the prosperity brought by the coaching trade was wiped out almost overnight.

Modern (AD 1900–present day)

Cuckfield underwent very few changes during the 20th century with most development in the area focused on the recently created town of Haywards Heath. Most new development comprised of infilling greenspaces within the historic core of the village and along the main arterial roads.



During the Cold War period Cuckfield was the location for a Royal Observer Corps underground bunker, one of 1500 across the country built to monitor fallout from a nuclear war. They were closed in the 1990s and most are derelict or flooded but some – like the one in Cuckfield - have been restored. Accessed via a long ladder the bunker has period newspaper articles, tins of preserved food and lots of the original equipment. It is only open a few days each year but the entrance can be seen from the bridle path that runs from the southern end of Holy Trinity churchyard east towards Haywards Heath. If you reach Newlands Pond you have gone past it!

Holy Trinity Church



A church of some description has been present on the site for over 900 years. The present building went through a major reordering in the Victorian era and again in a project that was completed in 2012. The church website has links to a fascinating history leaflet which is available to download in English, French, Italian and Spanish.