

Here is a taste of the book we are producing with a working title “Paignton – My Home Town” -

Chapter 1

In the beginning:

Homo Sapiens. It is Latin and it means ‘wise man’. You are a homo sapiens.

How many years ago do you think homo sapiens were known to be living in Torbay? One thousand years? Ten thousand years? Wrong – the answer is over forty thousand (40,000) years ago. We know this because in 1927 a piece of a human jawbone was found in Kents Cavern, Torquay, which has been radio-carbon dated. If you would like to see it, then visit Torquay Museum.

40,000 BC is known as the ‘Upper Palaeolithic’ age, and the people who were living in Torbay then would have spent much of their time as Hunters and Gatherers. This meant they would have hunted wild animals and gathered edible plants for food, but would not yet have discovered how to farm the land.

Neolithic Age

Let's fast forward to around 2,500 BC. We are now in the ‘Middle Neolithic’ age. We know there were people living at Broadsands because they left behind a monument – a chambered tomb. The round tomb was built into the hillside and was covered by a huge ‘cap stone’. It was accessed by a narrow passageway. When the tomb was excavated in 1958, it was found that the bodies of two adults and a child had been buried there.



There are about 300 chambered tombs in England, and this is the ONLY one to be found in Devon.



Imagine what life would have been like for the people who built the tomb. There were about 250,000 people living in England then. Today there are nearly 68 million (68,000,000). You would live in a small settlement and seldom meet anyone you didn't know. The site of the settlement would be chosen for its shelter from bad weather, and easy access to fresh water. If you were lucky, you might live to the age of 40, but many died much younger than this. People had learned how to farm the land, and the area around the settlement would have been cleared of trees, so farmers could plant crops in the rich red Devon soil. Animals would be kept as livestock – sheep, cattle and goats. Imagine standing on a hill overlooking Broadsands – apart from a few huts, there would be no buildings to be seen anywhere – Torquay and Brixham would just be green hills in the distance. Across the sea, there would be no boats on the horizon – you might have a dug-out canoe to fish from, but you wouldn't go far from land.

The Romans

Another big leap forward 2,550 years and it is 50 AD. The Romans have invaded England and have built a city in Exeter, but in Torbay little is known about this. A network of Roman roads has been found by Archaeologists from Exeter University, stretching from Exeter to the far west of Cornwall, but none of these roads came near Torbay. The handful of people living here were from the Dumnonii tribe that inhabited Devon and Cornwall, and they were left in peace - they probably didn't even notice that the Romans left England in 410 AD.

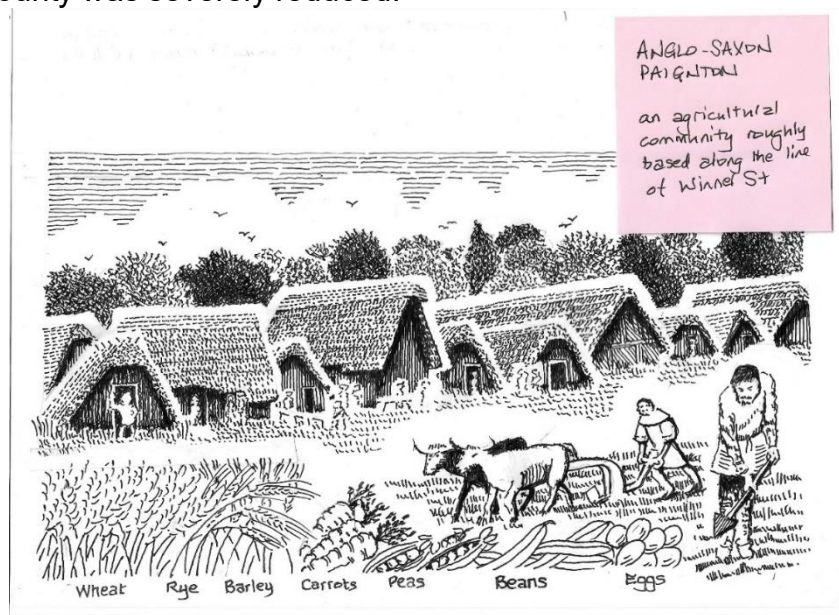
The Dumnonii Tribe

In 541 AD a terrible illness known as 'the Plague of Justinian' broke out around the Mediterranean Sea. It quickly spread across Europe as far north as Denmark and Ireland. It is estimated nearly 100 million people died. An outbreak in Devon was

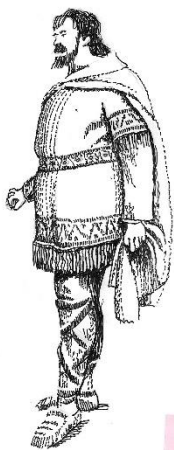
particularly severe. Many of the Dumnonii tribe fell victim to the disease and the population of the County was severely reduced.

Anglo Saxons

Around 660 AD, a new race of people began to migrate to England – the Anglo Saxons – they came from various tribes in Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark. They mainly came in peace, and settled throughout the land.



and



PAEGA
How he
may have
looked.

It is thought that a group of these Anglo Saxons found their way to Paignton. The leader of the group was a man called Paega, and he established his settlement around the Winner Street area. The name Paignton comes from him – Paega (his name) + ing (a Saxon word meaning a group of people) + tun (another Saxon word meaning a fenced area or enclosure).

If you put them all together you get Paega-ing-tun – the enclosure of Paega's group. The location of this small settlement was ideal – there was a spring of beautiful clean water (which still rises in Well Street, but now it runs through underground pipes to the sea), there were hills all around to provide shelter from bad weather, the land was good for farming and there was a plentiful supply of wild animals to hunt in the hills, and fish to catch in the sea.

At this time, all the land between Winner Street and the sea was marshland and sand dunes. Imagine if you drew a map of Torbay then – there would be no roads to draw, a few huts but no stone buildings, the towns of Torquay and Brixham did not exist – a few Dumnonii people lived around what is now Brixham Harbour but there was no town as we know it today.