

Stanmer's historical treasure trove

Anooshka Rawden, South Downs National Park Authority Cultural Heritage Lead, writes about the layers of history that have shaped Stanmer Park and the wider South Downs.

Conserving and enhancing the National Park's amazing cultural heritage is at the very heart of our work. Indeed, the cultural heritage of this special landscape was an intrinsic part of its designation in 2010. So this opportunity to revive and celebrate the heritage of the Stanmer Estate is hugely exciting.

At first glance Stanmer Park is a unique and beautiful survival from the Georgian age, but there's more than meets the eye to this National Park gateway.

Archaeological excavations have unearthed evidence of people living in this landscape in the Neolithic period, some 6,000 years ago, when there was a shift from hunting and gathering to farming. Neolithic flint axes in the area may also suggest that woodland was cut back to make room for grazing.

The South Downs' changing landscape over time can be illustrated by paralleling this Neolithic activity with 18th Century tree planting, when Stanmer's characteristic manor landscape took shape

Other visible archaeological landmarks in the landscape are field systems dating from the Bronze Age. These are the physical remains of extensive farming systems characteristic of the chalklands, but which now survive piecemeal. Interestingly, some appear to have been incorporated into the designed landscape created at Stanmer during the 18th Century, and were used to support terraced trackways and woodland paths.

The Estate developed into a *ferme ornée*, or ornamental farm, where the landscape was complemented by decorative features and planting. However, this romanticism of rural life does not mean Stanmer was built only with the whimsical in mind – this was (and still is) very much a living and working landscape.

This rich tapestry of cultural heritage in a stunning landscape setting is what makes this restoration project so exciting and we're looking forward to sharing these stories of past, present and future with visitors."

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Overleaf: Some fascinating facts about Stanmer: >>>

- The park has a pet cemetery. There are two small gravestones commemorating 'Tip' and 'Snow'. Tip died in 1888 and Snowy, described as 'loyal and beautiful', died in 1889;
- Stanmer once had a menagerie. We know this from an 1800 estate plan. Princess Amelia, youngest daughter of King George III,, once gifted Stanmer a gazelle.

More information:

- Stanmer Park history and heritage information: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/stanmerhistory
- Stanmer Park Restoration Project: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/stanmerproject
- Get up to date news, and sign up to receive our project newsletters, by visiting www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/stanmernews