

HUMAN HISTORY

Pre-History

The past two million years, known as the Pleistocene Era, saw a succession of Ice Ages, with several glacial and inter-glacial periods. The glaciers and their melt-waters effectively created the landform that we see across much of the British Isles, and the rest of Europe, today.

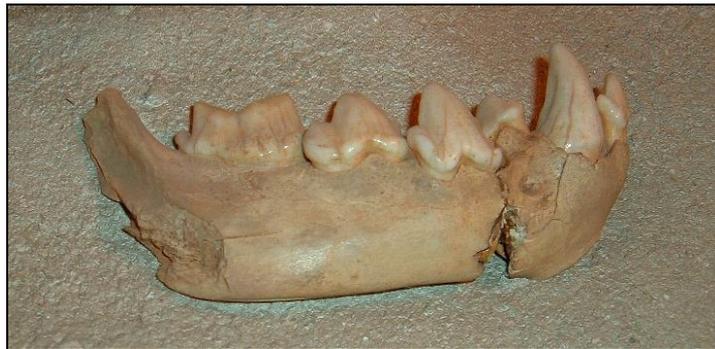
Probably we are currently living in an interglacial, a warm period between cold glacial periods. Previous interglacials have seen warmth loving trees such as Hornbeams, Limes, Wingnuts and Montpellier Maples growing in our forests. These forests were home to Merck's and Narrow-nosed Rhinoceroses, Straight-tusked Elephants, Lions, Leopards and Spotted Hyaenas, amongst other more familiar native species such as Foxes, Badgers, Pine Martens and Wildcats. The Severn and Thames Rivers, and, no doubt, our local Avon and Frome, were home to herds of Hippopotami during the warmest periods.

Britain has been inhabited by several early Human species over the past 800,000 years. More latterly Britain was inhabited by Neanderthals, a close relative of us, modern Humans. Neanderthals had been living in Europe for over 250,000 years when robust Modern Humans started to advance into Europe from Africa, via the Middle East. They reached western Europe approximately 35,000 years ago. The last pure Neanderthals may have survived until 24,000 years ago around Gibraltar. The robust Modern Humans were succeeded by more gracile people during about 32,000-22,000 years ago. All of these early peoples will probably have passed along the Malago, gathering wild fruit and hunting game as they went.



Reconstruction of a Neanderthal

During the Upper- or Late-Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) period (c40,000 – c10,000 years ago), the British Isles were suffering the greatest depredation of the Devensian glacial period. At the coldest period, about 25,000 to 15,000 years ago, Bristol was on the edge of the ice sheet to northwest and polar and alpine desert and steppe-taiga to the northeast and south. Humans could not survive the coldest conditions and retreated south in to Europe, but animal remains found in local caves, in strata dating to this period, include Mountain Hare, Red-cheeked Sausage, Wolf, Brown Bear, Spotted Hyaena, Lion, Woolly Mammoth, Wild Horse, Woolly Rhinoceros, Giant Deer, Reindeer and Bison. All of these will have roamed the Manor Woods Valley.



Part of a Spotted Hyaena lower jaw from Durdham Down

As the ice retreated Mesolithic hunter-gatherers returned to Britain from the south and east. DNA recovered from the 10,000-year-old skeleton of one of these people, 'Cheddar Man', found in Gough's Cave, only 22km to the southwest of Bishopsword, revealed that he was dark skinned, with blue eyes. There is every possibility that 'Cheddar Man', or at least his clan, knew the area that became known as Bishopsword, spotting big game from the top of the Dundry hills and hunting along the Malago valley.



The skeleton of Cheddar Man and a reconstruction of his likely appearance

The Neolithic period saw the advent of agriculture (livestock herding, then cereal farming), the use of pottery and the replacement of the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle by

sedentism. Originating in the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia and Egypt, circa 11,500BC, the Neolithic spread through Anatolia and Greece, and from there western Europe including, eventually, Britain.

Indo-European speakers from central Europe, equipped with bronze weapons and horses, reached Britain by 2,200BC. These were pro-Celts rapidly replaced the earlier genetic lineages.

Another migration took place around 500BC, when Central European Celts expanded over a large swathe of western Europe. Traveling with their families on wagons transporting their belongings, the Celts colonised most of France, Belgium and the south-east of England, as far west as the Bristol Channel. Soon afterwards the classical Iron Age Celtic La Tène culture flourished around the Alps and quickly overran Gaul, northern Italy and a big part of central Europe. In the first century BC, several La Tène tribes like the Belgic Atrebates and the Gaulish Parisii crossed over the Channel and settled in southern England and Yorkshire.



Reconstruction of a Celtic village

4.2 Early History

The Avon, just to the north of Manor Woods valley, formed a boundary between Celtic tribes. From at least 150BC and through the Roman conquest of 43AD, the Durotriges occupied the area approximately corresponding with today's Somerset and Dorset, to the south, with the Dobunni to the north, occupying most of area that was to become Gloucestershire. The tribes continued to exist as identifiable entities under Roman rule.

The Romans first ruled Britain as a single province, Britannia; however by 300AD the Avon, or just north of it, formed the boundary between the newly created Roman provinces of Britannia Prima (First Britain) to the south and Flavia Caesariensis (The Caesarian province of Flavius) to the north.

All pre-Second World War maps show a track or path running along the bottom of Manor Woods Valley parallel to, and northwest of the Malago, generally slightly to the northwest of the modern cyclepath. This path may have been in use since prehistoric times (Malago Society 1993). The track joins Bishopsworth Road at its southwest end, with Headley Lane to the northeast. The former is part of a Roman Road which runs from the lead mines at Charterhouse in the Mendips to Dundry Hill (See Ordnance Survey Pathfinder 1182). Within the Malago area, there was a large Roman village at Inns Court in south Bristol between the First and Fourth centuries as well as other, smaller Roman sites elsewhere in the city and a recently-discovered site in Bedminster. There is, however, much still to learn about Bristol during this period.

Roman rule stopped abruptly in 410AD. Later that century Saxons settled in the Bishopsworth area, possibly in the location now occupied by the Manor House on Church Road. This settlement was the origin of the village of Bishopsworth (Malago Society 1993, p.4f).

During the fifth century the area to the south of The Avon formed part of the Kingdom of Wessex (West Saxons), whilst that to the north formed part of the Kingdom of Hwicce which was later to become a client-kingdom of Mercia. The area to the south of the Avon became known as Sumorsaete (the people living at or dependent on Sumortūn [Somerton]) during the late fifth century or early sixth century.



A replica Saxon settlement

Bishopsworth was part of Somerset until 1373, when Bristol became a county in its own right. From the 13th to the 18th century, Bristol was among the top three English cities after London in tax receipts.

Bishopsworth Manor House was the centre of a system of manorial land use, until independent farmers started to buy up the land.

The first church in Bishopsworth was a small chapel of easy dedicated to St Peter and St Paul built under an arrangement in 1194 between Robert Arthur, lord of the manor,

and George de Dunster, prebendary of Bedminster. The triangular site on which the chapel stood was the centre of the village for many hundreds of years.

The aforementioned agreement provided for a chaplain to visit from Bedminster on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. This provision continued until dissolution in 1540. The chapel was converted into three cottages. A Congregational Chapel, was built on the site in 1828, but this was demolished in 1961. Bishopsworth Swimming Pool, now Campus Skate Park was built in 1974.

The present church, dedicated to St Peter, was built in 1841–43. The neo-Norman design was the work of Samuel Charles Fripp. Construction started on the current church in 1841 and was not completed until 1842 or 1843. The church's planned tower was never completed on time. It became a parish church in 1853. It is little altered except for a vestry / porch which was added in 1877.

Today Ashton Court estate runs to 340 ha of woods and open grassland laid out by Humphry Repton; however historically the estate covered a much larger area in south Bristol, including Bishopsworth.



Ashton Court

In 1600, some of Manor Woods Valley became part of Headley Farm. Part of the track which led to the farm still exists today, as a private access drive serving the rears of a number of properties on St Peters Rise, along the southeast boundary of Old Manor Wood.

Tithes were originally a tax which required one tenth of all agricultural produce to be paid annually to support the local church and clergy. After the Reformation much land passed from the Church to lay owners who inherited entitlement to receive tithes, along with the land.

By the early 19th century tithe payment in kind seemed a very out-of-date practice, while payment of tithes per se became unpopular, against a background of industrialisation, religious dissent and agricultural depression. The 1836 Tithe Commutation Act required

tithes in kind to be converted to more convenient monetary payments called tithe rent-charge. The Tithe Survey was established to find out which areas were subject to tithes, who owned them, how much was payable and to whom. At that time Bishopsworth (or Bishport as it was then called) was mapped in detail for the first time. The map showed Manor Woods Valley as mainly farmland with field boundaries, presumably hedgerows.



1840 Tithe Map of Manor Woods Valley, with Old Manor Wood in the southwest corner, the confluence of the Malago and Pigeon House Stream in the northeast corner