

A Sidmouth Diary 3–8 June 2011

Day 1, Saturday June 4: On our way to Sidmouth we stop off in Winchester to find the memorial that John Bacon Junior carved for his wife Susannah Sophia in 1854. A hunch brings us to the West Hill cemetery, and after a short tour we see what we're looking for. John Bacon wrote to his half-brother Samuel that he

"...is now working with his own hands the tomb of his late dear Wife who was his Christian companion for 52 years. It is a melancholy but pleasing employment. ... It is in Caen stone which admits of excellent finishing. It will have two Cherubs at each of three of the corners and one at the remaining corner, alluding to the seven happy spirits of her 7 daughters who departed this life before her. The Cherubs have been my principal work ..."

The cherubs are now rather worn and most of the lettering illegible. John Bacon moved to Bath where he died in 1859, but he too is buried in the tomb he carved for his wife.

Day 2, Sunday June 5: After a stop at Lyme Regis, we thread our way down to Branscombe beach and find the view almost identical to John Bacon's sketch done during the solar eclipse of 7th September 1820.

On the beach we get a call from Julian in Exmouth, but can't hear a word over the crashing waves. Onwards to Sidford, then Exmouth where we meet Julian and Sylvia at the Royal Beacon Hotel!



Day 3, Monday June 6:

Walking into Sidmouth from the Blue Ball Inn at Sidford via 'The Byes', a footpath which follows the River Sid, we try to pick out Sidcliffe House on the other side of the river.

After a quick look at the Esplanade, we look in the church for the Bacon family windows, and find Eliza's window for her parents, her nephews' and nieces' window for Eliza, and also a window to George Gutters, whose family still live in Sidmouth.



This is Sid Abbey, next door to Sidcliffe House



Day 3 continued:

We go to the museum next door, and find nice contemporary prints of the original Peak House and Clifton Cottage, the Lousadas' *cottage ornée* summerhouse ...



All prints on these 2 pages from Sidmouth Museum/Sid Vale Association

Peak House



Day 3 continued:

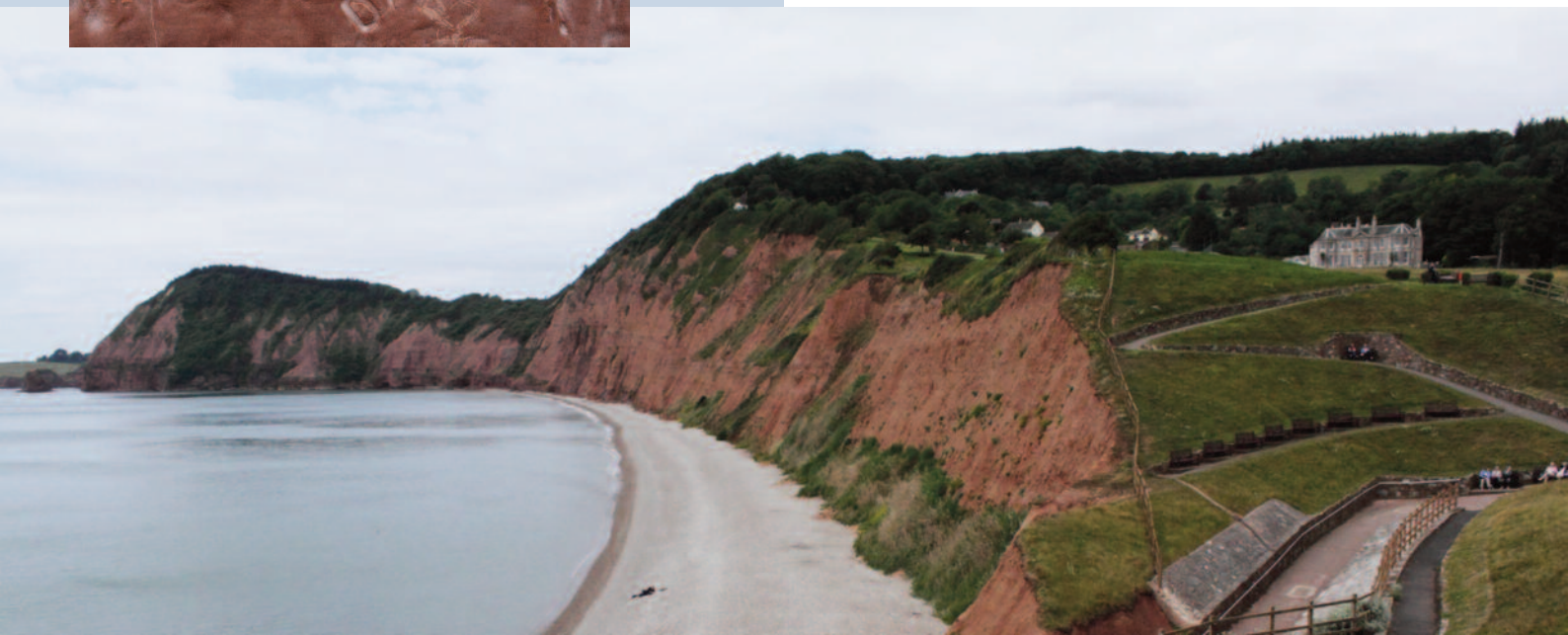
... and more contemporary prints of Sidcliff Cottage (as it was in the Bacons' day), showing alterations by different owners ...



... also a print of 'Helens', the Guttermans' family home.



Along the Esplanade to see Clifton Cottage as it is now, and then along under the cliffs to the Clock Tower, up Jacob's Ladder to see Peak House's amazing position overlooking the sea. We look for names carved in the cliff, but can only find 'Miriam', Mary Lousada's birth name!



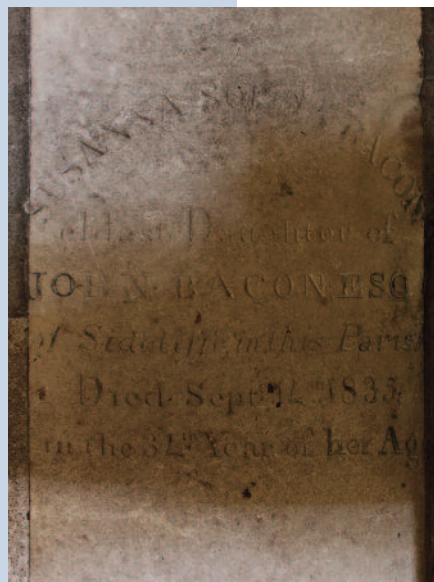
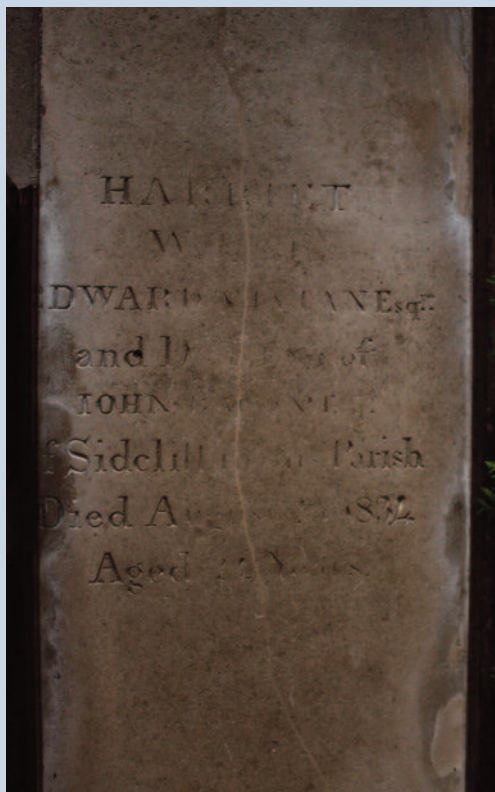


Peak House

Day 3 continued:

We set off to walk to Salcombe Regis, eating a picnic lunch on Salcombe Hill with a fine view back over Sidmouth, followed by another fine view over Salcombe Mouth.

In Salcombe church we find the very worn gravestones of two of John Bacon's daughters, Harriet and Susannah (the parts of Sidmouth east of the River Sid, including Sidcliffe, are in the parish of Salcombe Regis), among other very nice late 18th and early 19th-century memorials.





Day 4, Tuesday 7 June: We collect Julian and Sylvia from the Dolphin Hotel in Exmouth and, via Otterton and Pinn Lane, arrive at Peak House where Handel Bennett (Chairman of the Sid Vale Association who has arranged our visits), introduces us to Tony and Marilyn Barlow, owners of (most of) Peak House.

They explain that when Emanuel Lousada's original Peak House was demolished (or maybe burnt down), the new house was built in a slightly different position on the hill. The view is fantastic!



Marilyn, John, Alex, Julian and Sylvia



Above: John and Julian

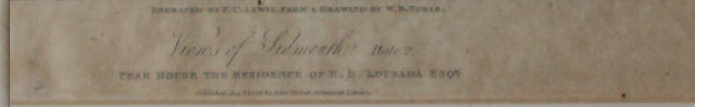


Alex, John, Tony, Julian, Marilyn and Sylvia on the Peak House terrace

Right: Handel and Julian



Tony Barlow has some photographs and prints of the original Peak House in its different building phases ...



A large black and white photograph of a grand, multi-story house with a large tent in front and a group of people standing nearby. An inset photograph in the top right corner shows a close-up of a field or garden.



Day 4 continued:

2.15pm We go to the Museum where we meet Dr Bob Symes, the curator, and Graham Thornton of the Museum sub-committee. John makes a presentation of John Bacon Jnr's portrait sketches, many done in Sidmouth, and his sketches of local scenes. We are joined by Nina Atkins, daughter of Peregrine 'Peter' Barrow*.

5.15pm Next stop is Sidcliffe House, where Handel Bennett has arranged for us to meet two residents: Brian Swallow lives upstairs, and has Regency-style windows looking out over the garden.

Sidcliffe House is now five apartments, so somewhat changed since the Bacons' day, but the position, on a steep bank running down to the River Sid with fields beyond, is much the same.

Maureen Hill lives downstairs and shows us the beautiful garden she has created which runs down to the river.

*Nina is a 4th cousin to Julian, fifth cousin to John



Brian Swallow's photo of Sidcliffe in the 1930s



Day 4 continued:

... Maureen has a plan of Sidcliffe (unfortunately undated), which shows that it was a more substantial property with land on both sides of the river.

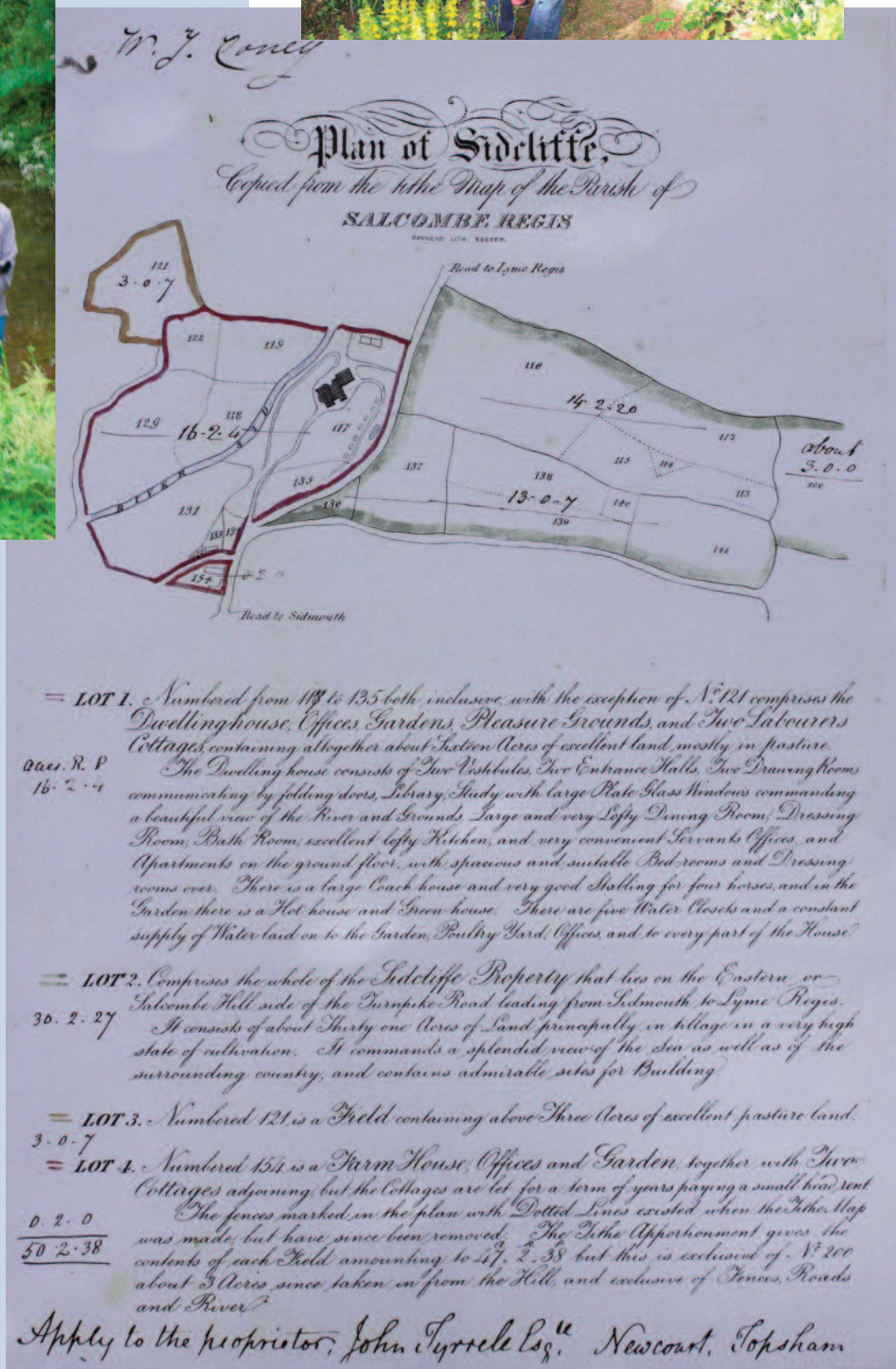
We repair to the Blue Ball Inn at Sidford before going our separate ways. A fantastic day!



Above: Julian and John at the bottom of the Sidcliffe garden



Top right: John, Nina, Maureen and Julian



Day 5, Wednesday 8 June:

We return to Sidmouth church to find the memorial to Hugh Lousada Barrow, tipped off by Nina. Why is he here?

Then off to Exeter to look for John Bacon Jnr's home after he left Sidmouth, at 'Upper Mount Radford Terrace'.

We can't find it, though the Regency houses in Mount Radford and nearby streets look hopeful.

We go to St Thomas's church to look for more Bacon memorials, but arrive as a funeral is about to start – the church is not normally open. We wait, and sneak in after the service.

John Bacon Jnr's rather fine memorial to his daughter Christiana is in the chancel. She was married to John Medley, vicar of St Thomas's and later Bishop of Fredericton in Canada.

Above Christiana is a plaque to her sister Mary Ann, who married Edward Thornton of the Clapham Thornton family. These are two of the 'cherubs' found in Winchester.

