

## Case Study

# Offham chalk pit

### Background

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, Offham Chalk Pit was a busy quarry. The site was ideally positioned with the raw chalk of the Downs and the historic river sitting at their closest alignment. After being loosened by gunpowder, the chalk was dug away from the face and then taken to the onsite kilns to be burnt into lime.

Transporting lime and chalk down the steep slope by horse and cart was slow and dangerous. In 1809, a revolutionary funicular railway was completed which took wagons of chalk through brick built twin tunnels under the road (now the A275) to waiting barges at a loading wharf which linked to the River Ouse. It was said to be the first railway in southern England.

Prior to the establishment of the South Downs National Park, a request had been made by Mark Hayward, then local Park Ranger for the South Downs Joint Committee, to list the twin tunnels.

Listing identifies important heritage sites so they can be protected by law. Protecting these sites ensures our history can be enjoyed by present and future generations.

In 2013, the listing was successful and the Friends of Lewes Society suggested the provision of an interpretation board in view of the historic nature of the tunnels.



### The project

Interpretation boards are an effective way to inform and educate members of the public about local sites of importance. They also encourage a sense of ownership and place within the South Downs National Park.

As the National Park Authority had already provided an interpretation board on the top of the chalk quarry, contact was made by Friends of Lewes Society with Mark Hayward who was now the Area Ranger for the National Park Authority. He was enthusiastic over the provision of a further interpretation board close to the mouth of the tunnels and opposite the entrance to the public house, formerly the old chalk pit site office.

A joint project ensued in which Mark arranged for the provision of the board, and relevant permissions for it to be given. The Friends of Lewes Society agreed the wording on the board and provided the finance needed, amounting to £655.

The tunnels were officially listed in November 2013 and the interpretation board was unveiled in May 2015.

For further details of the listing, please visit:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1413082>

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“This project was seen as a memorial by the Friends of Lewes Society to Paul Millmore who, as a Lewes resident, had been closely associated with the project from the outset and was a keen advocate of the South Downs National Park and its cultural heritage.”

Robert Cheesman, Friends of Lewes Society

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### The outcome

Trevor Beattie, the Chief Executive of the National Park Authority unveiled the erected board in 2015.

From the number of leaflets about the tunnels taken from the dispenser and anecdotal evidence from those that have done so, it is clear that the board has proved useful in promoting understanding of the quarrying activity that took place in the location and the transportation of chalk via the funicular railway to the river below.

An additional outcome is effective joint working to deliver activities that meet elements of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan. The plan, published in 2013, sets out the first overarching five-year strategy for the management of the South Downs National Park.

It is a plan that sets out to shape the future of your South Downs National Park. For further information, please visit:

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/national-park-authority/our-work/>

### The future

This project is a good example of co-operation between the National Park Authority and the Friends of Lewes Society providing information of a cultural heritage nature that is consistent with two of the outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan.

It is essential for the National Park Authority to maintain close relationships with partners and organizations across the South Downs so that mutually beneficial projects have a better chance of coming to fruition.

Joint working makes best use of the limited resources of the National Park Authority.



Offham Pit tunnels

For more information, please contact:

[enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

### The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan

The provision of this interpretation board was consistent with the following outcomes in the South Downs Partnership Management Plan:

41. Local heritage initiatives (projects led by communities to investigate, record and share information about the heritage of local places)

58. Visitor information

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