# TimeSigns Episode 3
## The Turning Wheel

*This is a transcript and selected images from Channel 4's Time Signs programmes in order to ensure that the narrative is preserved. To view the full episode, please visit [4 on Demand](4 on Demand).*

With the dam completed, the water has begun to encroach on the lower part of the valley and the time left to the archaeologists is limited. The deserted village of Hennard has been unearthed and the foundations and floors of the earlier village suggest a date in the mid-nineteenth century. Pottery finds have joined other time signs such as documents and maps to indicate earlier stages of the valley's history. They show villages and farms existing as far back as the Middle Ages, over 700 years before the last farmers left the valley.

'Archaeologists rely an enormous amount on pottery and they have even more so in the past. There's several good reasons for this. One is there's a lot of pottery made and its usual set of purposes as it is today. It gets broken regularly. It's totally useless to you, you just tip it away. And also the styles alter. You'll know this from what granny's got on the cupboard compared to what you've perhaps got in your own cupboard. The styles do alter and an archaeologist can use this breakability and changing style to see the type of material in use at different times. '

*[pottery specialist]*'Here's a bag of fairly typical pottery from the site. Let's have a look and see what we've got. Now the first thing that I would do is to separate the pottery out into glazed pottery and unglazed pottery. And that's a fairly simple distinction to make. That can be done quite quickly. One of the other things you tend to get in bags from sites are ceramics which are actually not pottery. In this case, we have a piece of clay pipe, it's probably no more than 150 years old, and a piece of brick as well. So if we carry on separating these out, that is the sort of division we can make. The sort of things I try to look for to try to separate these out are firstly, the texture, the feel of the pottery. So in this case, this piece here has some pieces of white limestone in it together with some quite angular pieces of what look like shell. So you can begin to divide these up into groups of pottery with similar ranges of qualities – of inclusions, of texture, of hardness and the feel. So that gives us that group, that's the coarseware, the unglazed wares. '

'Moving on to the glazed wares, we have some pieces which will be familiar to anybody, the sort of thing you dig up in the garden, good nineteenth century blue transfer prints. And a series of pieces which have green or brown glaze. The brown glaze is a lead glaze onto a red earthenware biscuit. And the green glaze is on to a similar-coloured biscuit but in this case, they've added copper to the glaze which makes it go green. This is part of the rod handle of a medieval jug which there is an example here. Careful with this. There we are. And you can see that that's part of the rod handle, it fits in somewhere there. Now although the green glaze on it might at first sight suggest to you that this is a later piece, early modern or eighteenth to nineteenth century, if you look more closely at the inclusions in it, you can see that the fabric is actually very similar to the fabrics of this unglazed material. For that reason, I would say that's part of a medieval jug and doesn't go together with the much more finely textured post-medieval green glazed wares over here. So in terms of date, this

material here is of Anglo-Saxon, medieval date whereas the material out here is from say 1750 right the way through until thirty or forty years ago.'

*[another archaeologist]*'Just a little piece of coarse pottery like this can tell a huge amount about daily life. First of all, it's been made by a specialist craftsman, perhaps a part-time craftsman who's also got a bit of land of his own. He's works the pots some times of the year, works his land … through this other. The peasants from this valley go to market with a few pence. He will buy a pot like this for about a ha'pence. His wife will use it very carefully because a ha'penny is a lot of money so she has to be careful not to break it and, in the case of a cooking pot, we can be pretty sure that it's used for boiling things. And it's an insight into the importance of boiled food in the peasant diet. Either thick gruel made out of cereals or a more liquid for the soup using vegetables with a certain amount of flavouring from bacon or meat. That's the sort of information that you can hope to glean from a pot of this kind. It gives you an idea of the date of when it was being used but it also tells us about the daily life, domestic life of the peasant household and the contact that that household has with the outside world. '

***Medieval Pottery***

*[pottery specialist]*'I have here an example of a complete cookpot which has been reconstructed from the tiny fragments that we find from an excavation and, here, one of the pieces we've just been looking at is actually a piece of the base. You can see how closely those compare. And here we have a slightly smaller piece. Again, it's a cookpot and again, it's got soot blackening on the bottom. It would have been placed directly on top of the fire. It's possible that it would have been bought directly from the potter in the local village but more likely, it would have been bought at the local market. Now this lovely piece looks pretty modern. But in fact, when we look at it more closely, we can see that the surface is very irregular and there are no lines which are typical of a wheel-turned pot. In fact, it's actually handmade, not turned on a wheel. And it's probably about 700 years old. Okay, and if we add in the traditional medieval glazed jug, we have three pieces which are absolutely typical of your fourteenth century household in the Wolf Valley. The very large cookpot for over the fire, the glazed jug for the table and a much smaller piece, perhaps an individual cookpot for hanging over the fire.'

*[another archaeologist]*'Here I've got a piece of medieval pottery from a site in the valley, so that we know this is the sort of pottery that people were using in medieval times. And it's nice to be able to try and replicate how these pots were made. Most clay needs additives so that it won't explode in the firing as it contracts. And the means to do that is to add things like shell, just ordinary shell, sand, which is found here in the riverbanks, or grass. And you might find or you might think that grass is an odd thing to put into pottery, but particularly during the Saxon period, it was quite a common

additive to the clay. This pot here for example has been fired with grass and you can see the grass is burnt out in the firing. And it means that any small cracks that develop in the pot don't pass beyond the area of the burnt out grass.'

'These pots have been in for over an hour now and they've not broken. I think they've probably, it's quite possible they've cooled down enough for me to be able to take them out. It's very, very hot. I can see already that it's got a crack running down one side of it. But apart from that, they both seem to be perfectly well fired. We know this one's only just come out of the fire. You can see the pot is now quite manageable. Much of the water has gone into the voids of the clay but the pot is holding the water. So we fired a pot, we've shown that it will hold water. Let's put it back on the fire with the water in and see if we can go the full circle and boil the water. '*[water boils]*

***Millstone***

At Hennard, the discovery of medieval pottery along with the existing evidence of the buildings, the leat and the millpond, suggested the possibility that an earlier series of mills may have existed on the site. Each historical period may leave only a trace of its presence. A document here, a single object or part of a structure there. Excavation of a millpit turned up a section of an earlier mill wheel. Another organic find, it provided enough of a structure to create a detailed picture of what the original wheel would have looked like. In the floor of one of the houses, a millstone was embedded, possibly of early eighteenth century origin, with its distinctive hand-cut grinding edges. Research into the documentary records of local families referred to a fulling mill in the seventeenth century and of the existence of a medieval mill leat leading to the same site in the thirteenth century. These are rare and invaluable time signs which help the archaeologists to thread together the history of the site. And it's clear at Hennard, a mill had been at the centre of the community for over 600 years.

'I suppose the medieval mill, which was obliterated by that much larger modern mill, would have been a timber-framed construction, thatched roof, probably a lot of these cob walls as well with it. There'd have been an overshot water wheel powered by that great big, long mill leat. And when the peasants took their corn to be milled, their sack of oats slung over the back of the horse, they would have to pay the miller a proportion. The miller worked for the lord, the miller would take perhaps one-twentieth, perhaps one-sixteenth, of the corn that was brought to him, plus of course whatever else he could take off for himself.'

*[another]*'He'd take as much as he could… They're crooked characters…'

'Well, yes, everybody thinks the miller's a rogue. The medieval miller isn't necessarily a rogue. I think he's just very poor and so he takes as much as he can. And everybody thinks he's on the fiddle anyway so the miller may as well take as much as he can.'

As the excavation of the mill leat proceeds, evidence of another mill further upstream on the main site was found. This turned out to be the fulling mill referred to in the seventeenth century documents and its discovery was essential to complete the picture of early water-powered industry in Hennard Village.

‘The fact that we have mills on this site, a number of mills, and the fact that mills were a lord’s prerogative. Only lords could have mills, they were sort of the medieval monopoly really. People have to use them and you charge them to use them. You’re licenced to print money in a way. So the people living here would have been very aware of that, that here was this sort of cuckoo in the nest siphoning off money from the communities around. And of course one of the mills is a fulling mill which is another aspect really and that’s the beginnings of industrialisation, even in a rural community like this. Here the process, water-powered, probably from the Middle Ages although we’ve only got eighteenth century evidence for it so far. But that’s the beginnings of an industrial process right here out in the middle of the countryside. And I suppose that’s the interesting thing about mills. They are the beginnings of a use of a power other than animal or people’s muscles. It’s the first start of tapping another sort of energy. And in this particular case, they went through considerable engineering trouble to build these mills, to the extent of tapping the leat off the valley right up at the top end at Tuckham(?) and leading all the way round the contours to get the right level of water to feed the mill. So it’s not only the industrial aspects, it’s the surveying of the engineering aspects. Perhaps a surprising thing in such a rural community like this.’

*[mill specialist]*‘This is a hand mill. This is what you have to use if you want to grind corn without using any sort of other power at all. It’s a heavy thing and you’ve got to turn by hand for hour after hour to produce enough flour for a household bread. The alternative to using it, in the early Middle Ages, is water power. Water power which is free but which requires large investment to channel. This is what it’s all about, the harnessing of this sort of power, crude water power. The sluices are the essential part of any proper water control system, and the ability to operate the sluices properly are an essential part of the miller’s craft. It’s essential that water comes to the water wheel at just the right speed. Too slow and the wheel won’t turn, too much water and the wheel may be damaged, possibly the wheel mechanism itself. The essential part of every corn mill mechanism is what we can see here, which is the means by which the motion from the water wheel is transmitted up to the millstones. The water wheel of course drives a shaft which lies horizontally and the motion has to be transferred through ninety degrees to a vertical shaft. The power going into that wheel is enormous. It’s turning a millstone weighing a ton and a half above us at a considerable speed. Inside this case are the millstones. This is what the whole thing’s all about. The corn is pouring down from the bins upstairs through the hopper, down that chute going through the eye of the top stone to be crushed between the two stones to be turned into flour. Well here we are, wholemeal flour. One thing we can be certain of is that it’s the same end product as they had at Hennard. And that the miller from Hennard Mill could walk into this mill and he would know exactly what was going on.’

***Transmitting the Water to the Millstone***

In the valley of the River Wolf, the water is beginning to cover some of the lower sites. At Wortha, the same story as at Hennard is emerging of a small hamlet pre-dating the single modern farmstead. This has taken many months of careful archaeological work. As the site has passed through each layer of its history, each layer has been recorded in detail, from the remnants of the modern farmstead down to clear evidence of a medieval hamlet.

Gravestones at Wortha

Medieval pottery and the remains of burnt grains, found amongst the foundation stones, help to date these distinctive keyhole-shaped grain-drying ovens at the Wortha site. Groups of time signs like these have been able to confirm what the archaeologists suspected, that a medieval hamlet existed in this part of the valley. The name of the farm Wortha is, in itself, an Anglo-Saxon word for an enclosed homestead, and archaeologists have revealed traces of a distinctive V-shaped ditch that would have been typical of boundaries created by farmers during the Saxon period over 1000 years ago. These hedges and ditches are often of ancient origin and, as in the case at Wortha, can act as time signs to our understanding the past.

***Keyhole-Shaped Ovens***

***V-shaped Ditch***

'Here I am climbing up what well might be one of the most ancient elements in the landscape, an ordinary hedge. In fact, a bit more than an ordinary hedge because here we're standing on a Devon hedge. And you can see that it's not just a hedge with bushes and shrubs and so on in it, but it's a massive bank, something like up to ten feet high in places. And you tend to take these for granted. They are the most common thing in the countryside. These hedges and fences that divide up the fields are so obvious that you hardly give them a second thought. And yet they may well be some of the oldest things in the landscape. Certainly, as soon as people are involved in farming, they'll need something to keep the animals in and probably more importantly, something to demarcate the property between various farmers. This particular example that we're on is of more than usual interest because we're on Seccombe Farm just above the reservoir area and this particular hedge is mentioned in a thirteenth century boundary demarcating a piece of land that's passing from one person to another, from Robert de Denys, the Lord of Southwick, Southweek now, to Mark de Sedcoombe, the early name for Seccombe. And this piece of land is actually specified with a number of points around it, so that written in the document is the actual series of points that can be followed on the ground. And it actually calls this an old boundary which is 700 years ago and it's already an old boundary. So how old is it? It could well be perhaps even 1000 years if not more older than that. So we're probably all familiar with the village church and the Iron Age hillfort as obvious ancient features in the landscape but we tend to forget the humble hedge, the humble hedge bank as being an archaeological feature. And yet it's immensely important and immensely significant in terms of the development of any particular piece of

***Devon Hedge***

***Seccombe Farm***

landscape.'

The predecessors of the Seccombe family whose documents refer to the ancient boundary hedge were buried in the local church and can trace their line back to the twelfth century. In medieval times, the church would have been a powerful force in the lives of the valley's farmers.

'The position of this church does seem to me to symbolise the position of the medieval church in the community in a way. It stood here on the hillside overlooking this marvelous piece of countryside, really dominating the landscape just as it dominated society.

*[another]* 'Certainly, it's very impressive, isn't it?'

***Broadwoodwidger Church***

'It's very difficult for a modern community to realise what a vital role the churches played in the community life of each of the parishes which they served. All social life centred around the churches as well as the three great moments of life, that is baptism, marriage and burial, concentrated upon the church. Slowly, over the next three or four centuries, that power was to wane considerably. On the bench end beside me, there's actually a date. Very, very interesting, this is 1529. And this is a crucial date in this religious history because it was in 1529 that the Reformation Parliament met. Henry VIII, having failed to get a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, called the Parliament. And it was that Parliament which passed through the Reformation, abolishing the power of the Pope in England and making the King the Supreme Head of the Church. But while that was happening far away in Westminster, here at Broadwoodwidger, people were spending their money lavishly, because these things were immensely expensive, remember, on these beautifully carved heavy oak benches on which they could sit to hear the sermons of the priest, sermons which were of course to change very, very shortly from a Catholic theology which had been in operation for many, many centuries to the new Protestant theology introduced by the Reformation Parliament beginning in 1529.'

***Bench dated 1529***

***George IV Coat of Arms***

'After the Reformation however, the atmosphere of the Church changed totally. The figure of the crucified Christ is gone and would have been replaced by the Royal Coat of Arms, symbolising the fact that it was now the King , not the Pope but the King, who was the Supreme Head of the Church. And it was ordered that these royal coats of arms should be replaced at the accession of each new monarch. And that was done steadily at Broadwoodwidger until the reign of George IV. And at that time they stopped replacing the royal coats of arms, and so we are left here at Broadwoodwidger with a beautiful representation of the Royal Arms of George IV.'

***Broadwoodwidger Church Interior***

Tracing the historical record before the thirteenth century documents, the medieval pottery and the structural remains, leads us to references of the valley that exists in the Domesday Book of 1086. The Manor of Soutweek is recorded with references to the previous Saxon owner. The site of the manor still dominates the valley, although it's not one of the sites being excavated. Fieldwalking continues in some of the outlying fields and it's here that we hope to find the next evidence that will take us back beyond Domesday to the earliest farmers of the valley.

**Southweek Manor**

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