

# Heywood Sumner

Born in 1853, George Maunoir Heywood Sumner learnt to draw as a child, encouraged by his maternal grandparents who lived near Malvern. Initially studying law, by the time he had completed his legal training he was already beginning his artistic career. Over the next 20 years he was to become a noted, if not prominent, figure in the Arts and Crafts movement and was closely associated with the development of Art Nouveau.

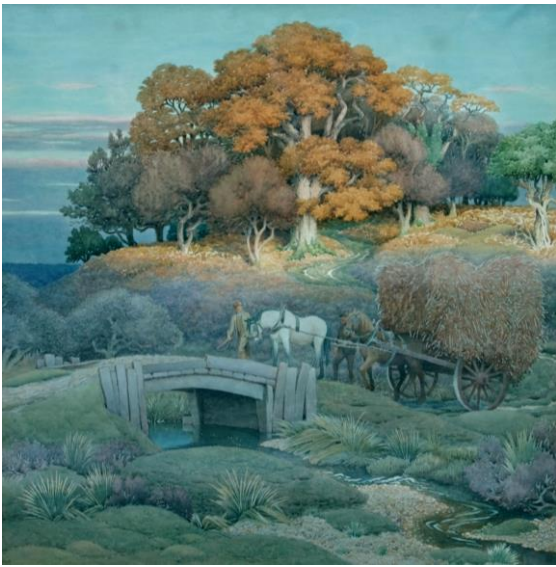
Sumner began his artistic career with etchings, publishing a series of views of the River Itchen in 1881, one of which was exhibited at the Royal Academy that year. These were noticed by John Wise who invited him to contribute a series of etchings for an 'Artist's' edition of his classic study of the New Forest. Sumner spent the first six months of 1882 exploring and falling in love with the Forest and in September the following year he and his new wife Agnes spent their honeymoon at Boldrewood in the heart of the Forest.

Despite the wide range of his work, including book illustrations, etching, watercolours, posters, wallpaper design and sgraffito work, Sumner is today one of the lesser known Arts and Crafts artists. This may be due to the limited amount of work he produced in any particular field - as a gentleman with private means he could try his hand at various media without worrying about selling work or developing a reputation in one area. He was, nevertheless, an innovative artist being one of the first exponents of Art Nouveau and excelling in the design and execution of sgraffito wall decorations.

*Etching of a man carrying a scythe, 1891. Courtesy of Hampshire Cultural Trust*







*The Fern Cart. Courtesy of Hampshire Cultural Trust*

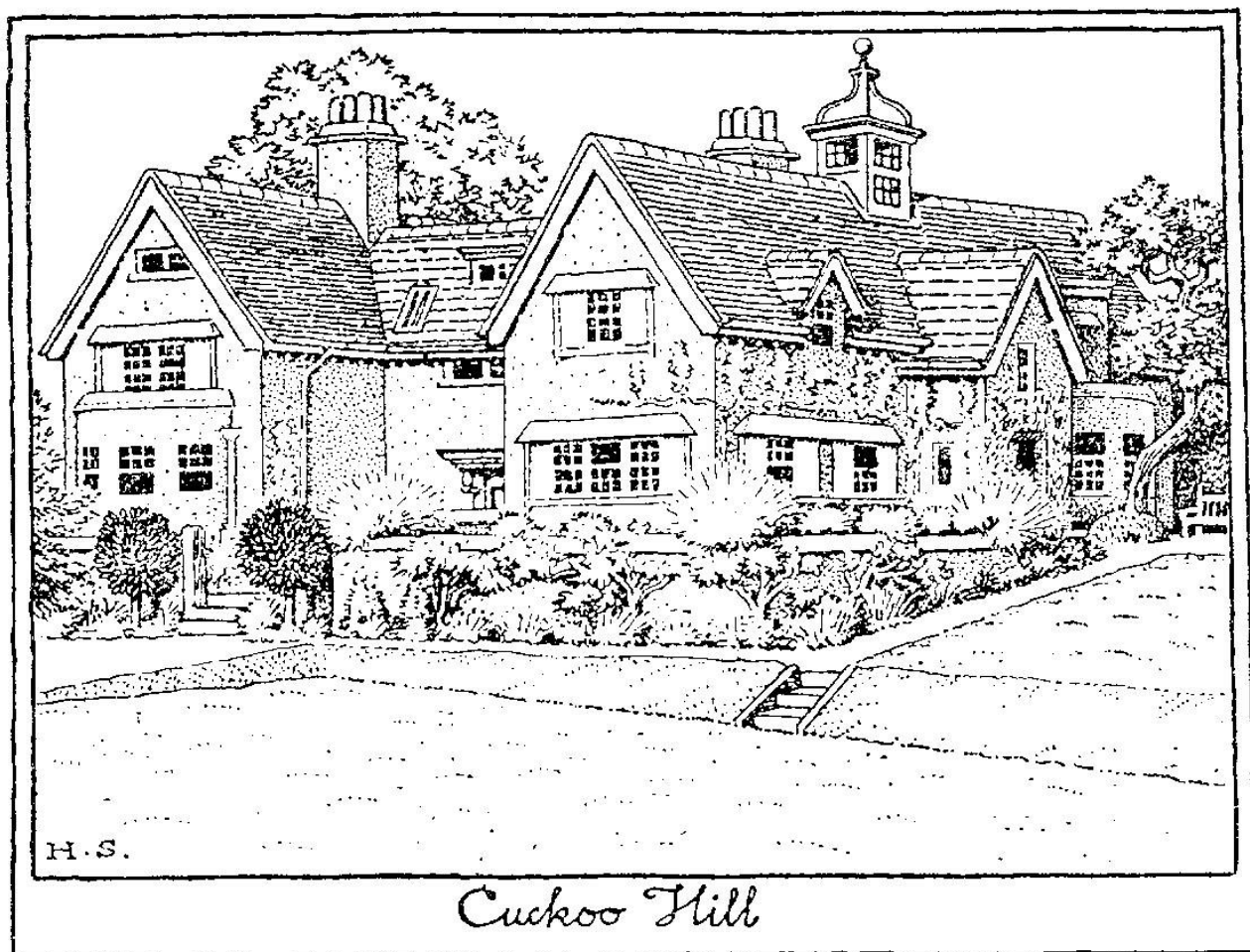
It was after his move to the New Forest that Sumner began to produce large paintings. Few artists continue with the same style throughout their life, and these watercolours show another change in method. Here he paints in a precise manner that is instantly recognisable from the use of colour and the lack of shadows, which gives a magical feeling to many of his works. The pictures were never intended for sale: they decorated his home or were given to family and friends. After 1908, the year of *The Chace* tapestry, he produced little more professional artistic work, and he may have felt it was time to retire. He was 52 years old and comfortably settled at Cuckoo Hill and seemed to be slipping into the life of a country gentleman, however, a completely new career was about to begin.



*'The Chace' a woven wool tapestry designed by Heywood Sumner in 1908. Courtesy of Hampshire Cultural Trust*



In 1897 the family moved to Bournemouth. Sumner would often cycle 50 or 60 miles a day and soon got to know the New Forest. On one trip he discovered a ramshackle cottage at Cuckoo Hill near Gorley, where he decided to design and build his own house. The extensive gardens and orchards were planted, designed and cared for by Agnes. Friends came for long weekend visits, and admired the house and its setting. The poet, Dylan Thomas, described it as *"Cuckoo Hill, the house with the beautiful sunsets"*.



*Cuckoo Hill*

As Cuckoo Hill was being built, Sumner began work on 'The Book of Gorley,' published in 1910. This is a mixture of local history, topography and observations on rural life, beginning with an account of the building of Cuckoo Hill. However it was the final chapters, on the New Forest and Cranborne Chase, that were to point the way forward. They show a fascination with the history of the landscape, and in particular with the ancient earthworks found all over the Chase. Sumner regarded them as fascinating landscape features, and it was this fascination that led directly to his becoming an archaeologist.

In 1910, JP Williams Freeman produced a list of Hampshire earthworks, at the end of which he asked for help with the survey project. He and Sumner met and in early 1911 the latter began to survey the local earthworks, using the same methods as Williams Freeman.

It was at Cranbourne Chase that Sumner began his serious study of local archaeology, drawing on the work of Pitt Rivers, who had excavated a series of sites there during the 1880s. Over the next 18 months he surveyed a total of 49 sites, mostly prehistoric or Romano-British. His maps set new standards of clarity and accuracy. As well as describing the monuments, his plans are also works of art, full of additional detail. The results were published in 'The Ancient Earthworks of Cranborne Chase' in 1913.

As he finished work on Cranborne Chase he turned to the New Forest, a much less well known area. Of the 38 sites he described in 'The Ancient Earthworks of the New Forest', 16 were previously unrecorded.



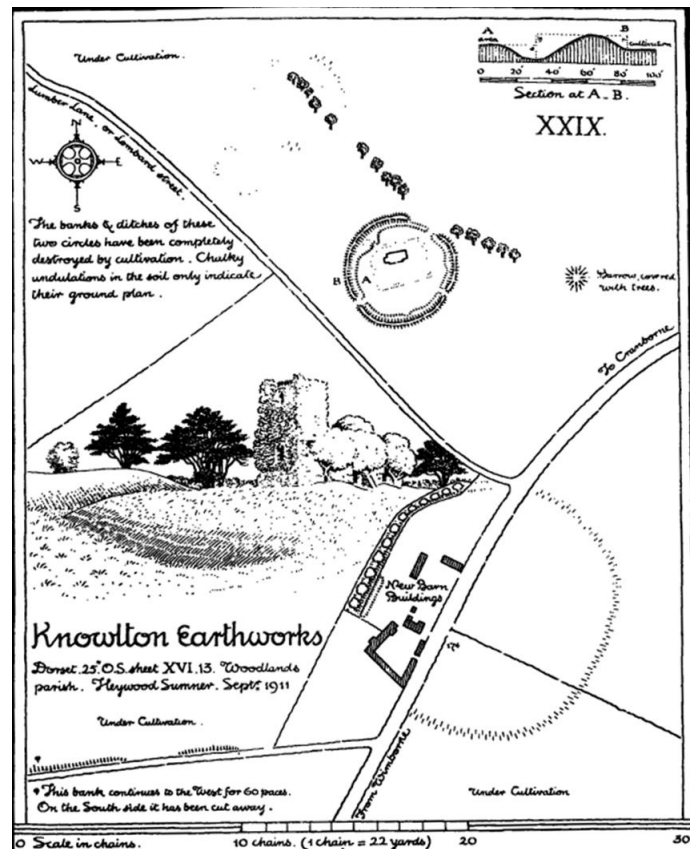
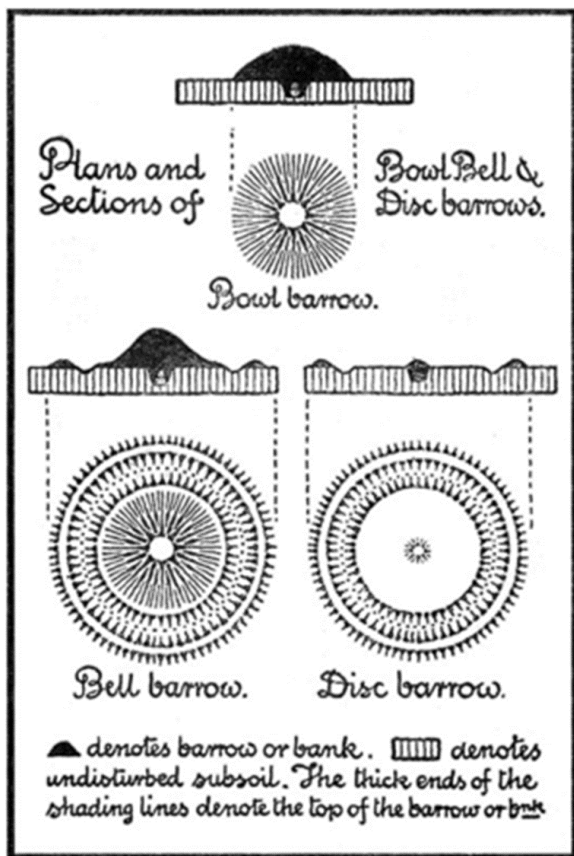
### *Excavation on Rockbourne Down*

Sumner's first major excavation resulted from his survey work: early in 1911 he noticed a substantial bank above Rockbourne. Following the bank, he discovered that it formed a massive enclosure of about 96 acres. The site was previously unknown, so he set about excavating to try to discover its purpose.



Over the following three years, Sumner revealed evidence of a small farmstead at Rockbourne Down. While it had long been realised that small farms must have existed in Roman Britain, no one had found one before. When 'Excavations on Rockbourne Down, Hampshire' was published in 1914, it made his name as an archaeologist. The site became a classic, and for the next 50 years it was quoted in many textbooks as the typical, small, Romano-British farm.

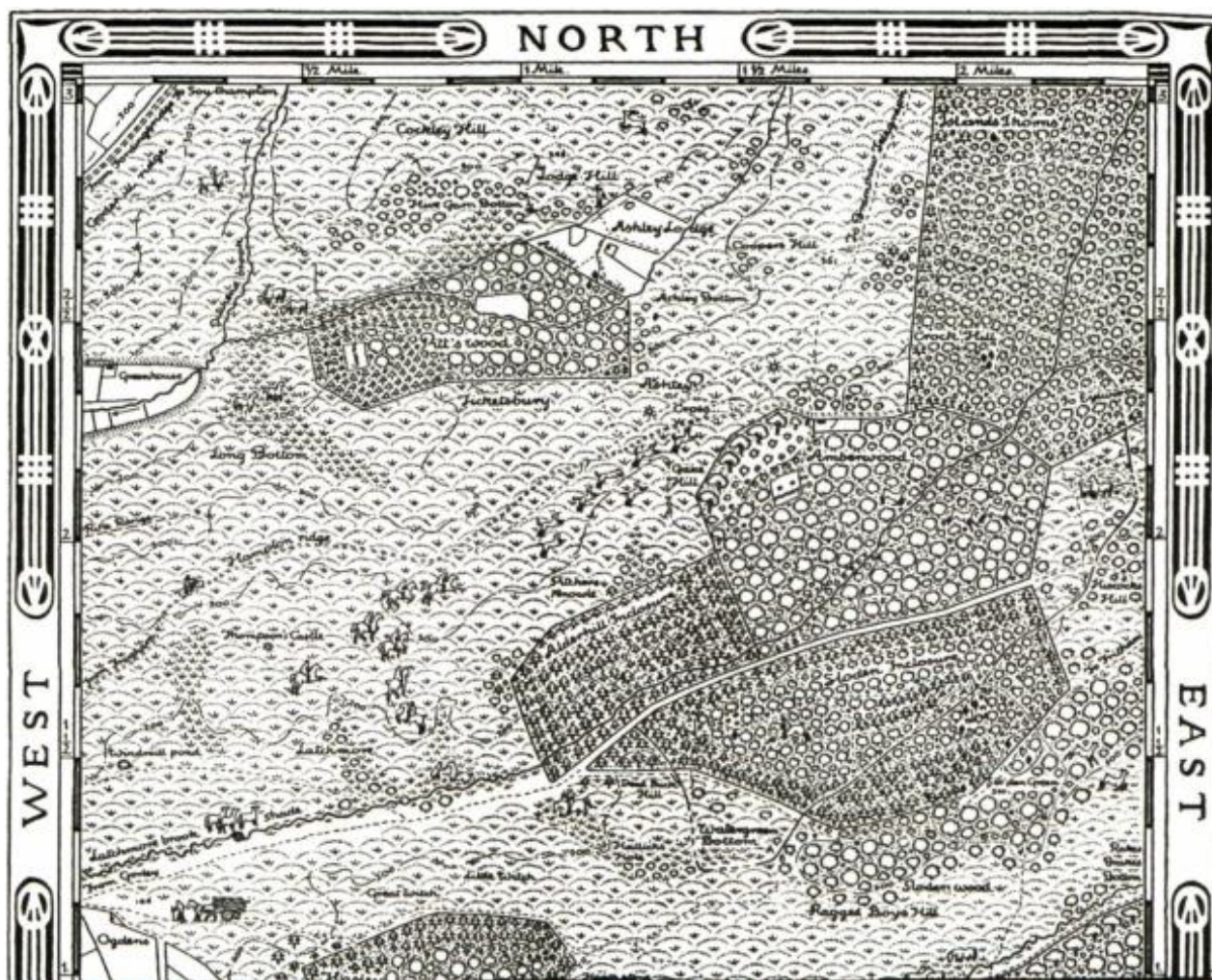
The period from about 1914 to 1930 was the highpoint of Sumner's archaeological career. As well as large excavations and surveys, he was involved with numerous smaller excavations, and assisted and gave advice on a range of archaeological subjects. He was asked by Salisbury Museum to investigate a Roman building discovered at East Grimstead, just east of Salisbury, in 1914. Excavations continued on and off for the next ten years and a small villa was uncovered, unusually with three bath houses. At Didsbury Camp north of Bournemouth, with a grant of £12, two labourers and six volunteers, he excavated a hill fort. His discoveries were slight, but the fact that he was able to place the hill fort in the Iron Age, was of sufficient value at the time for the excavation to be referred to several times by other contemporary authors.



During his excavation on Rockbourne Down, Sumner found large quantities of coarse pottery which he could not identify. Frank Stevens suggested that they probably came from New Forest kilns so Sumner re-excavated the known kiln sites, finding large quantities of pottery. These ancient potters fascinated him. He wanted to find out more and in 1917 discovered a previously unknown kiln at Ashley Rail.

In 1920, a conversation with an old forester led him to Sloden Wood, and later to Linwood and here, at last, he found evidence of the kilns' structure and use. His booklet, 'A Descriptive Account of the Roman Pottery sites of Sloden and Blackheath Meadow, Linwood' appeared in 1921. Typically it shows Sumner's delight in all aspects of the Forest, whether he is describing the pleasures of watching the deer as he excavates a kiln single handed, or of watching a party of schoolboys racing each other up a tree, in breaks from helping on the dig.

In 1925 he excavated the remains of a potters hut just outside Islands Thorns Inclosure, and a further kiln at Linwood. All this work was brought together in his magnum opus 'Excavations in New Forest Roman Pottery Sites 1927', which immediately became, and has remained, the classic work on the subject.



*An extract from 'Map of the New Forest Potteries'*

Sumner's booklet about the Roman pottery sites of Sloden and Blackheath Meadow contained the first version of his map of the New Forest Potteries, one of his most remarkable creations. As well as showing the location of the pottery kilns, he included details such as foxes, deer, cyclists and horse riders to "cheer the map-maker as he fulfils his task, and the map reader as he pours over the planned sheet; for it is a pleasure both to delineate, and to find things happening amid the hills and valleys and place names recorded".



In 1924, Sumner published a small guidebook to the New Forest. The text was illustrated with ten of his typical pen and ink drawings and the book soon became very popular, remaining in print until the Second World War.



In 1937 Sumner suffered a minor stroke which left him confined to a wheelchair. Agnes died at the beginning of 1939. Sumner lived on at Cuckoo Hill for a further two years, almost bedridden, but still alert and aware of the world about him. His last letter to Williams Freeman is full of stories about the effects of the war in the villages of Ibsley and Gorley - the local historian commenting on local history as it happened. Still fascinated by the world around him Sumner died peacefully at Cuckoo Hill on 21 December 1940.

When Sumner came to Cuckoo Hill he had been an artist, his art led him to look at the landscape which in turn had led him to archaeology. His obituary in *The Times* described him, quite accurately, as one of the leading British archaeologists, and didn't mention that he had been an artist. This change from art to archaeology was probably very good for him; many artists find their work neglected as they grow older but for Heywood Sumner this never happened. Though his art may have been out of touch with current trends, his archaeology was not, and until the end of his life his advice was sought by other archaeologists.