

The Worthing Society

Conserving, Preserving
and
Safeguarding our Heritage

Heritage Leaflet No: 8

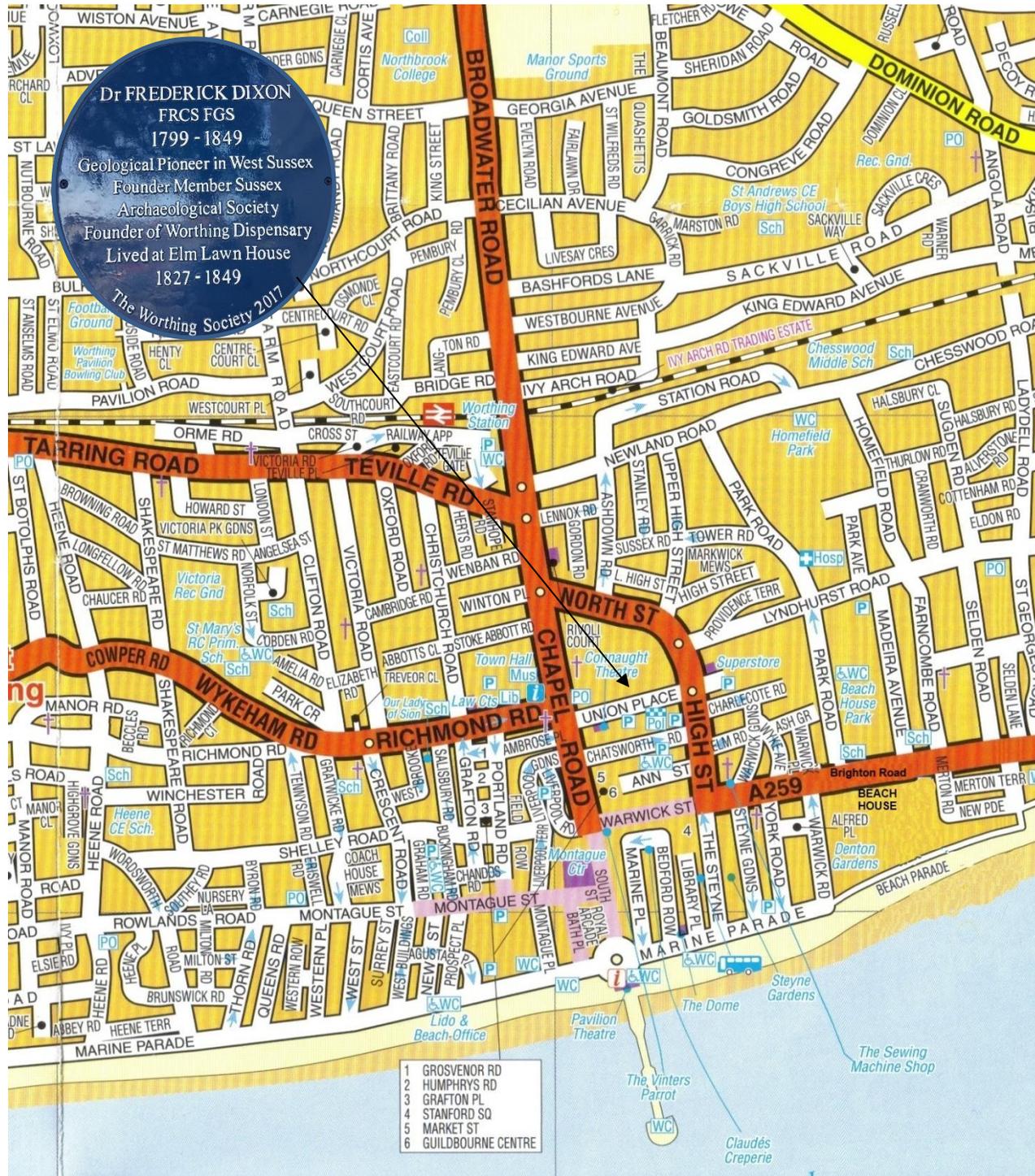
DR. FREDERICK DIXON FRCS FGS



(1799 – 1849)

This is one of a series of leaflets being produced by the Worthing Society to accompany the plaques erected throughout the Town to commemorate notable people, buildings, and events in the town's history. For more information about the Society and its activities go to our Web Site at: www.worthingsociety.org.uk

Reg. Charity No. 286899



Dr Frederick Dixon

Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons

Fellow of the Geological Society

Dr Frederick Dixon was born on 6 March 1799, the youngest of 3 sons of the Rev. Joseph Dixon, Rector of the small downland parish of Sullington. Inheriting 'a small fortune' from a distant relative enabled Joseph to ensure the future prospects of all his sons: he bought a Commission in the Army for his eldest son, William, and sent Henry and Frederick to Eton College, to be educated as 'gentlemen'. Henry proceeded to Oxford University and followed his father into the Church and eventually became Rector of Ferring, while Frederick was apprenticed to the leading surgeon of the day, Sir Astley Cooper, at Guy's Hospital, for his medical education. On 5 January 1821 Frederick became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, upon payment of the entrance fee of 10 guineas.

In 1825 Frederick married Maria Grant, daughter of the family associated with Westminster School; they spent their honeymoon in the eastern Mediterranean, visiting all the ancient sites in Egypt and calling on Captain William Dixon and his family, who was stationed on Corfu at the time. The young couple came to live in Worthing in 1827 in the newly-built, large house at No.3, Union Place, the middle one of 5 residences built on the north side of this new road, laid out in the mid-1820s to connect the High Street with St Paul's Church in Chapel Road. Dr Dixon's house stood on the slight rise a little way to the north of the contemporary built-up area, with fine views over open ground and

the rooftops towards the sea. In the 1830s and 1840s it became one of the social centres of Worthing, particularly for musical soirees, as Frederick was most proficient on the pianoforte.

At a Public Meeting on 20 August 1829, chaired by Rev. Henry Dixon, it was decided to establish a Dispensary in the town, for the benefit of all the townfolk; shortly thereafter, the Worthing Dispensary opened its doors in a disused building next to the Theatre in Ann Street. Dr Dixon was the Chief Surgeon, assisted by the other doctors in the town. It became so successful by 1840 that new premises were urgently needed and a splendid new Dispensary was built in Chapel Road in 1846 on a block of land just north of the Old Town Hall, in the town centre. All the while, Frederick insisted that 'the common people' of Worthing should receive basic medical treatment, such as it was, as well as the social elite.

Attendant upon his lifelong interest in and collecting of rocks and fossils of West Sussex, Frederick was elected a Fellow of the Geological Society on 13 March 1840, sponsored by the nationally-eminent geologists, Roderick Murchison, Charles Lyell and Gideon Mantell. He became a close friend and regular correspondent of Richard Owen, of 'dinosaur' fame, who visited the Dixons on several occasions. During the 1830s and 1840s Frederick amassed a substantial collection of Sussex fossils, some of which are superbly engraved in the 40 Plates at the back of his posthumously-published volume, usually known by its shortened title of 'The Geology of Sussex'. This landmark volume contains chapters

by many of the most prominent geologists of the time, all friends and acquaintances of Dr Dixon.

Like many geologists of the time, Frederick was also an antiquarian, and a founding member of the Sussex Archaeological Society, established in Lewes in 1846. He was very active for this county-wide society, serving on the Committee, organising and chairing Meetings, acting as the Worthing Correspondent, and publishing 3 short papers in the early annual issues of the Sussex Archaeological Collections. He had a Sussex-wide reputation.

Dr Dixon died suddenly and unexpectedly on 27 September 1849, at the early age of 50 years and 6 months, from a fatal water-borne disease. His funeral service was held in St Paul's Church, which was overflowing with all the town's mourners, rich and poor alike; thereafter, a long funeral cortege wound its way over the Downs to the Dixon family tomb in Sullington Churchyard.

After settling all matters concerning Frederick's estate, on 25 March 1851 Maria Dixon rented the house at No. 3 Union Place to tenants of suitably-high social status, and retired to London. The short but dynamic period of the Dixons in Worthing was well and truly over

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On June 22nd 2017
the Mayor of
Worthing
Clr Alex Harman,
unveiled the plaque
accompanied by
Worthing Society
Chairman,
Susan Belton