

William Somner  
Chartham news  
London  
1669

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Chartham News:

OR  
A BRIEF RELATION  
OF SOME  
STRANGE BONES  
THERE LATELY DIGGED UP,  
IN SOME GROUNDS OF  
Mr. JOHN SOMNER'S,  
OF  
CANTERBURY:

WRITTEN

By his Brother, Mr. WILLIAM SOMNER,  
late Auditor of Christ Church Canterbury, and  
Register of the Archbishops Court, there;  
before his Death.

LONDON,  
Printed for T. Garthwait, MDCLXIX.

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TO THE READER.

Kind Reader,

THE Author of this short Discourse, even whilest  
he was upon it, and had scarce read it over him=  
self, was seised upon, first by sickness, then  
death, the common Fate of all men. If therefore  
there be any thing amiss, or imperfect in it; it would be great  
unkindness, to impute it to him, who by such unavoidable ne=  
cessity, was prevented the benefit of a review; and no less  
unkindness perchance, though more tolerable, to blame him,  
who, as out of a due respect to the Author; so, out of a de=  
sire to gratifie them, (not a few probably) who may desire to  
satisfie their Curiosities, or improve their Knowledge, in such  
things; hath published it. Farewel.

I. S.

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News from Chartham, in KENT.

Although it may, and perhaps must be granted, that Miracles  
(strictly understood) are long since ceased: yet in the lati=  
tude of the notion, comprehending all things uncouth and  
strange, (*miranda*, as well as *miracula*; wonders, as well as miracles)  
they are not so: but do, more, or less, somewhere, or other, dayly ex=  
ert, and shew themselves. *Dies Diem docet*. New days, make new dis=  
coveries; especially to such, as are in any measure, curious, (shall I  
say) or ingenious, and inquisitive; as few enough amongst us here in  
England are, unless acted and animated by some profit, or advantage

to themselves by the discovery; how considerable and remarkable soever it may be otherwise. 'Tis true, 'New lights;' are now adays much cried up: but as in matters (mostly) of Religion; so (if you mark it) by whom? But such, as not so much for conscience, as for lucre-sake, broach and obtrude them upon a credulous giddy sort of people, whose applause they first catch, and then, their purses. But leaving these spiritual Mountebanks, and their counterfeit ware, 'new lights' only in pretence; I shall here acquaint you with a piece of new light indeed, but of another kind, presented and held forth upon no account, or aim at all of profit, or advantage to the publisher; but (if he mistakes not) of good use and profit (in point of knowledge) unto others, (learned Antiquaries, and Naturalists, as I suppose) of more skill, insight and judgment, (if they please to employ them on this occasion) in things so rare and extraordinary, then he can, doth, or would be thought to pretend unto. Well, to the matter of fact then.

Mr. John Somner, in the moneth of September, 1668. sinking a Well at a new House of his, in Chartham, a Village about three miles from Canterbury, towards Ashford, on a shelving ground, or bankside, within twelve rods of the River, running from thence to Canterbury, and so, to Sandwich Haven; and digging, for that purpose, about seven-

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teen foot deep, through gravelly and chalky ground, and two foot into the Springs; there, met with, took, and turned up a parcel of strange and monstrous Bones, some whole, some broken, together with four Teeth, perfect and sound, but in a manner petrified, and turned into Stone; weighing, (each Tooth) something above half a pound, and almost as big (some of them) as a mans fist. Cheek-Teeth, or Grinders, as to the form, they are all, not much unlike, but for the bigness, the Grinders of a man. And whereas I said, 'almost as big, some of them, as a mans fist:' it brings to my remembrance, what I have read in Ludovicus Vives, of such a Tooth, but a little bigger; (*dens molaris pugno major*; he saith: that is, 'a Cheek-Tooth, bigger than a fist') which was shewed to him for one of St. Christophers Teeth, and was kept in a Church, that bare his name: which whether he believed, or not, I know not: but contradict it, he doth not, I am sure; neither he, nor his learned companion, whom he doth name there. Just such another Tooth 'of the bigness,' he saith, 'of an ordinary fist,' was seen by Acosta, (a very creditable Author) in the Indies, digged out of the ground, in one of their houses there, with many other bones; which put together, represented a man, of a formidable, or as he speaketh, 'deformed bigness:' or, 'greatness:' as he judged of it. And so must we have judged of these Teeth, and of the body, to which they belonged; had not other Bones been found with them, which could not be mans Bones. Some that have seen them, by the Teeth, and some other circumstances, are of opinion, that they are the Bones of an 'Hippopotamus;' or *Equus Fluvialis*; that is, 'a River-horse;' for a 'Sea-horse,' as commonly understood, and exhibited, is a fictitious thing. Yet Pliny makes *Hippopotamum*, (*mari, terræ, amni communem*) to belong to Sea, Land and Rivers. But what are the differences and properties of each kind, I leave to others to inquire. The Earth or Mould about them, and in which they all lay, being like a Sea-earth, or Fulling-earth, not a stone in it, unless you dig three foot deeper, and then it rises a perfect gravel.

So have you the story, an account, if you please, of what was found, where, when, and upon what occasion. For more publick satisfaction, and to facilitate the discovery; at least, to help such, as are minded

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to employ their skill in guessing and judging of the Creature, whose remains these are, what it was for kind; we have by, and with the help of an able Limner, adventured on a Scheme, or Figure, of several of the Teeth and Bones, with their respective dimensions, of breadth, length, and thickness.

No man, we conceive, not willing to be censured of rashness, will be very forward to divine, much less to define or determine, what the Creature was; and doubtless dubious enough it is, whether of the twain, the Sea, or the Land may more rightly lay claim unto it. But leaving all others to the freedom of their own judgments and conjectures; if he may have the same liberty from them for his, who as he knows the place, with the Country about it, hath taken a large time of consideration of all particulars and circumstances fit to be duly and deliberately weighed and observed in the case; he would adventure to conjecture it to be some Marine, or Sea-bred Creature, to which the Land can of right lay no claim. But admitting that (supposing it, I mean, a Sea-bred Creature) how then (will some say) should it possibly come there? *Piscis in arido?* and at such a depth under ground too? I answer, first, with as little wonder, as a Land creature should, which who with reason can imagine to have ever had at first so deep a burial? Next I say, the Mould, Soil or Earth, wherein it lay, was altogether miry, like to that *cœnum* ('oase,' some call it) on many parts of the Sea coast, both in England and abroad. But how possibly (will it be said) a Sea creature, when found at so remote a distance from the Sea? For solution (if it may be) of this, and the like incidental doubts, and removing all rubs out of the way of this conjecture; our future discourse and further progress in this argument, shall branch it self out into these four following Queries.

1. Whether the situation and condition, face and figure of the place may possibly admit of the Seas once insinuating it self thither?
2. Whether (that possibility being granted, or evinced) the Sea did ever actually insinuate it self so far as to this place, and when?
3. How in probability, and when this Valley, or Level being once Sea land, should come to be so quite deserted and forsaken of the Sea,

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as it is at this day; the Sea not approaching by so many, a dozen miles, or more.

4. By what means, the Sea once having its play there, this Creature comes to lodge, and be found so deep in the ground, and under such a shelving bank.

1. As for the first (the places capacity and aptitude for the Seas influx, or insinuation) such as know the situation, withal cannot but know, and must agree it to be so. As for strangers, and such as are unacquainted with the place, for perfecting their information in what either the common Maps, or a particular Scheme and draught of the Level, herewith intended, may chance to be defective in; they may please to know, that the place (*the locus loci*) we are upon, is a part of that wide, fair and fruitful Level, or Valley, extending it self not less than twenty Miles in length, between a continued series and range of Hills, Downs, or high grounds, lying at a pretty equal distance each from other all the way; beginning at the East-Kentish shore, and stretching it self, Westward, by Sandwich, Fordwich, Canterbury, Chartham, Chilham, Godmersham, Wy, Ashford, sometime in a direct, sometime in a winding course, as far at length, as to that famous spacious Level of Romney-marsh, and is washed and watered all along, at least from about Ashford, by a sweet and pleasant River running through the midst of it, as far as to Sandwich, and there by the Creek, or Haven, emptying it self into the Sea: nothing at all of obstruction, by the interposition of Hills, or high grounds, hindring, or controlling the Seas free play and passage for so many miles together. The place then, with the parts, the tract above and below it, from the condition, or constitution of it, is plainly not unapt or incapable of the Seas insinuation and influence.

If any shall object, Canterburies being in the way, as an obstruction, or bar; they are easily enough answered. For although that City seemeth, and indeed is, at this day, for the most part somewhat elevated above the pitch of the rest of the Valley or Level we are upon; yet not so much, as to defend it self many times from floods, and overflowings

in the lower, and most depressed parts of it, even by the Springs it stands upon, to her great damage and annoyance: towards the helping

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whereof, by the care and providence of former ages, it is very certain, and by digging Wells, Vaults, Cellars and the like, daily experimented, that the most part of the City, not excepting the very heart and center of it, is made and raised ground; the tokens of foundations upon foundations, to a very considerable depth, daily appearing, and the ground (as at Amsterdam, Venice and elsewhere) for supporting superstructures, in several places often stuck and stuff'd with Piles of wood, or long Poles and Stakes, forced into the ground, as Wells and Cellar-diggers have inform'd me. Nay, and as if where about now the Bull-stake market-place is kept, the River had sometime had its course or current, Pits and otherlike Tanners Utensils, have, not many years since, been met withal in digging for Cellars thereabouts. To this let me add, that my very next neighbour in Castle-street, within these thirty years sinking a Cellar, did at a good depth (five or six foot deep) light upon, and was put to some stop and stand, in his work, by a strong and well couched arched piece of Roman Tile or Brick, which he was fain to take, or break asunder, and remove, before he could proceed. Hereof I was an eye witness, and (for curiosity sake) took one of the Bricks or Tiles to my self, which with some other like Roman remains (some found in that, which is my own Garden) I keep by me to this day. However then, Canterbury may now seem to stand in the Æstuaries way; yet time was, when in probability it did not; when I mean the place, the soil which now the City occupies, as the rest of the whole valley both above and below it, was of too low a pitch, to be an obstacle to it.

2. As to the second enquiry, (whether probably the Sea did ever actually insinuate it self so far as to this place, and when) the answer is nothing so easie: Record of it, we have none. The best and eldest account we have now of the Condition, Scite and Constitution of these our Eastern Parts and Tract, we owe to Julius Cæsar, and the Romans after him: from whom (alas) we have not the least spark of light to such a discovery: rather indeed the contrary; both the Sea-coast, and In-land parts, by his, and their relation; bearing in a manner one and the same face and figure then, as now. However, that the Level we

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are upon, was sometime an Æstuary, or Arm of the Sea; several Criteria, or tokens, are not wanting. For example; besides what may be argued and infer'd from this parcel of strange Teeth, and Bones now under consideration; much (as I conceive) there is of probability for it, resulting from our Rivers name of Stoure, more anciently, not seldom both called and written 'Æsture,' 'Esture,' &c. which I doubt not to proceed and come from the Latin *Æstuarium*, and in process of time to have been corrupted and contracted into Sture and Stoure; giving name in part to Stourmouth, a place (a Parish) about six miles Eastward from Canterbury; so called from the Rivers disimboying there into the Sea, or Salt-water, flowing up thither: as also giving name to that Mannor of the Archbishops; at this day, and for some ages past called Westgate-Court, at Canterbury; but more anciently, as in the Conquerors time (witness Domesday-book) called, the Mannor of 'Esture' and 'Esturesæte,' from its situation by the Sture or Stoure. From which occasion doubtless, the late Lord Finches Seat in - - - - about five or six miles nearer to the Spring head, at this day vulgarly miscalled, East-Steward; is of old sometime called 'Esture,' sometime 'Æt-sture.' From Saxon Monuments and Records I could easily trace the name up to a very high date, by many examples.

But to leave that, and proceed to other Criteria; as by the Teeth and Bones now under consideration, we have an instance on that side of the Valley for the probability of the Seas quondam occupation of it; so I

shall give you here another no less remarkable from the other, or opposite side of it. By credible relation and assurance then you may know, that at a place called Westbere, an obscure Village, about three miles from Canterbury, Eastward, lying under the brow of the Hill stretching out by Upstreete, as far as to the West end of Sarr-wall, by which you make your entrance into Thanet; upon the like occasion to that here at Chartham, (the digging, or sinking of a Well) at a very great depth, store of Oyster and otherlike shells, together with an Iron Anchor, #firm and unimpaired, were found and turned up in our time. The like I have been told of an Anchor in our days digged up at Broome-downe, on the same side of the Level somewhat above Canterbury, West=

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ward. And although I can at present instance only in these few on either side the Valley; yet happily upon enquiry other might be found for confirming our conjecture. And I shall desire and hope, that every ingenuous person will so far oblige and incourage me, as upon this overture to help me in this research and scrutiny, by imparting to me, what either of his own knowledge, or credible relation from others, may conduce towards so noble a discovery.

3. Mean time let us entertain our selves with our third Query, and see if happily somewhat may not thence result adminicular and supplementary to what may be defective and wanting in the former. Our third Query now is, how in probability, and when this Valley or Level, being once Sea-land, should come to be so quite deserted, and forsaken of the Sea, as it is at this day, the Sea not approaching it by so many, a dozen miles, or more? In answer whereof, I must needs say and grant, that in case this Level were once Sea, an Æstuary I mean, or Arm of it; so very long it was ago, as we may not reasonably think, that Canterbury (whether as a City, or never so mean a *Pagus*, or Village) was then *in rerum natura*, or a place inhabited; which happily it may have been, if not as long as Julius Cæsars days, yet undoubtedly, not long after. For an account we have of it (as of some other places in Kent) in the Romans time, both from Ptolemy the Geographer, Antoninus Itinerary and elsewhere. Now (as was hinted erewhile) elder Records either of Kent, or of Britain that we may confide in, as Authentick; we have none that I know of, before the Romans time: no written credible evidences to help us in this scrutiny. We must therefore either sit us down, and rest contented to throw off all further inquiry, or else cast about for information as we can. Such as are for this latter, will tell you, that the world (all know) is very aged, many thousand years old, and that many and manifold are the alterations, changes and mutations, which time hath made in several parts and quarters of the world, to the notice and discovery whereof, no written Record, or unwritten Tradition at this day, can reach or direct us; Tradition it self (longer liv'd many times than any written evidence) failing us for age. Of such a nature they conceive may this of the Æstuary be, so very anci=

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ent, as time hath quite worn out the memory of it; withdrawn all light from us, that might conduct us in the scrutiny, and left us as men in the dark, without either *vola*, or *vestigium*, to stumble out our way, and rome and ramble at uncertainties. Such a one happily shall he be thought, that adventuring to conjecture at the reason and occasion of the Seas recess here, with an absolute valediction to the place of its wonted resort, shall pitch upon the Seas breaking, bursting and cleaving asunder that Isthmus, or neck of Land, between Gaule and Britain, rendring the latter of the same Continent with the former, such things (#tis certain) have hapned elsewhere. Thus (saith Seneca) hath the Sea rent Spain, from the Continent of Africk. Thus (as he adds) by Deucalions flood, was Sicily cut from Italy. More instances of this kind may be found in Mr. Cambdens 'Cantium,' and elsewhere. And although there be no certain evidence of such an accident here from ancient ei=

ther Historians, or Geographers; yet is the thing so strongly and rationally argued, by him especially, as by Verstegan also, Twine and others before him; and the conjecture back'd with such plenty of pregnant and probable Criteria, by the former; that what others may think I know not; but were I of the Jury, I should more than incline to concur with them, who would find for the Isthmus. Especially, when to the plenty of Arguments mustered up by Mr. Cambden, I shall have contributed this one, by him and the rest omitted, which is, that by a received constant Tradition, Romney-Marsh, that large and spacious Level, containing (saith Mr. Cambden) fourteen miles in length, and eight in breadth; was sometime Sea-land, lying wholly under Salt-water, and is therefore of some not improperly called, the Seas gift; which having, when time was, forsaken it, and withdrawn his wonted influence from it; the place thereupon became and continues firm Land. And if I may guess at the time and occasion of both that, and our Canterbury Levels recovery and riddance from the Sea, I shall (for my part, with submission to better judgments) be apt to pitch upon that of the Seas breaking through, and in time working and washing away that Isthmus, between Us and France. And then whereas before-time Romney Level (which had and hath its Stoures too, or *Æstuaría* as

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well as ours) and this other, not improbably (no high Lands, as we see, interposing for impeding their conjunction) were but one and the same Level, and lay under the Seas and Salt-waters tyranny; now both the one and the other (the Sea having so much more play and elbow-room, than formerly by cleaving asunder the Isthmus) were rescued from it, and of an *Æstuary*, became such a rich and noble Valley, or Level, as is second to none (I take it) in England.

I am resolved to keep home and conceive my self no further concerned than in our own Level. But if from hence any other shall take an hint to consider of the Nether-lands, or Low-Countries, and enquire whether those in whole, or in part, may not have arisen out of, and been gained from the Sea, by the very same occasion, which is here conjecturally assigned for our Kentish Low-lands; I shall not at all wonder at it, thinking it (for my part) a task not unworthy a learned, judicious, sober undertaker: and were I as much concern'd, and as well instructed there as here, I should not know how to purge my self of negligence, if I did not undertake it with the first.

4. To come, at length, to the fourth and last of our Queries, by what means the Sea once having its play there, (at Chartham) this Creature comes to lye and be found so deep in the ground, and under such a shelving bank? My answer is, that supposing this with the rest of the Level or Valley once occupied by the Sea, or Salt-water, that being a Creature which by fluxes and refluxes always is in motion, and thereby in time beating upon and working itself into the bank, or rising ground there, might at length so far undermine, eat into, and loosen it, as to fetch down so much mould, or earth upon, or over the place, as might lodge the Creature at so great a depth. Or else perhaps, the continual agitation of the Water might in time force, drive up, and cast over it, that great quantity of Ouse, Earth and other matter under which it lay. By the way, it is observed that the nature of the Soil here and there, is such, so loose, supple, rotten, and sandy, that meerly of it self, it is apt to sink and fall in; as was lately experimented by a Saw-pit, digg'd hard by, which after a little time by the Earths giving way on each side of it, fell in, and fill'd up it self.

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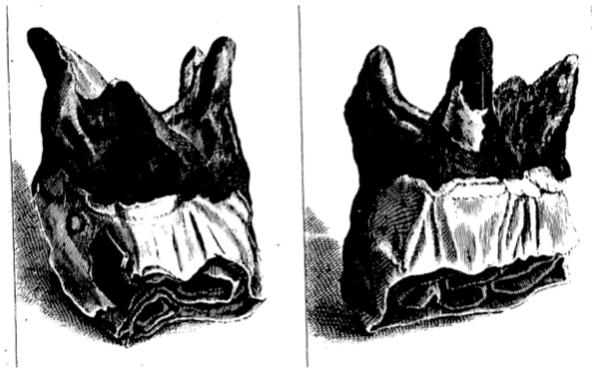
Thus have you (gentle Readers) our Chartham News, or discoveries with the circumstances, and the use my little skill will serve me to make of them, in point either of History or Geography. *Arcana* they are, but whether *tanti*; whether I mean, grateful, or useful to the Publick, is left to the judicious Antiquaries, Naturalist, &c. who are

desired to take the matter, where the Historian hath left it. It hath been the Finders care, and good will, as to preserve, so to expose and communicate what he hath found: and if at length, to this of the parts, and by them, a full discovery of the whole, by the skill and dexterity of the learned in the School, and secrets of Nature, may be added, for the benefit of the Common-wealth of learning; both the Finder, and Relator will think their time and pains very well both bestowed, and recompensed.

FINIS.

The exact Figure (part of what the Author intended, if he had lived) of two of the Teeth, is here set down at the end.

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<Though Somner cannot be blamed for not knowing what nobody knew, this is still a feeble piece of work. Beyond a few sentences describing the circumstances of the discovery, he has nothing sensible to say. He assumes, for no good reason, that the creature is some sort of sea-going hippopotamus (the only evidence he cites is a passage from Pliny's 'Natural History', book 32); and then he rearranges the landscape in order to make this seem vaguely plausible. Thirty years on, Somner's pamphlet was still thought to be worth reading and worth preserving. In 1701 it was reprinted in the Royal Society's journal, 'Philosophical Transactions', no. 272 (which I have not seen). In 1703 it was reprinted again, by Nicolas Battely, as an appendix to his new edition of Somner's 'Canterbury' (pp. 186–90). The bones and teeth have a history of their own. John Somner donated some of them to the Royal Society; they are described in the catalogue of the Society's museum compiled by Nehemiah Grew (1681, pp. 254–5). Since the collection happened also to include a modern hippopotamus skull, Grew felt fairly confident that the Chartham creature was not a hippopotamus. Seemingly just from the size of it, he thought that it might be a rhinoceros. He was right (see below). – C.F. April 2011.>

<From the Royal Society the fragments donated by John Somner – part of a skull and three loose molars – were transferred to the British Museum, and then to the British Museum (Natural History), where they were catalogued by Lydekker (1886, pp. 93–4). They are still in South Kensington, in what is now called the Natural History Museum, and an image of one of the teeth can be found online ([piclib.nhm.ac.uk/results.asp?image=056932](http://piclib.nhm.ac.uk/results.asp?image=056932)). The tooth illustrated in Grew's catalogue was recognized by Cuvier as a rhinoceros molar; the specific identification was made (or at least made certain) by Richard Owen, 'History of British fossil mammals' (1846, pp. 325–31). (He used Cuvier's name for it, *Rhinoceros tichorhinus*; the woolly rhinoceros's approved name now is *Coelodonta antiquitatis*).>