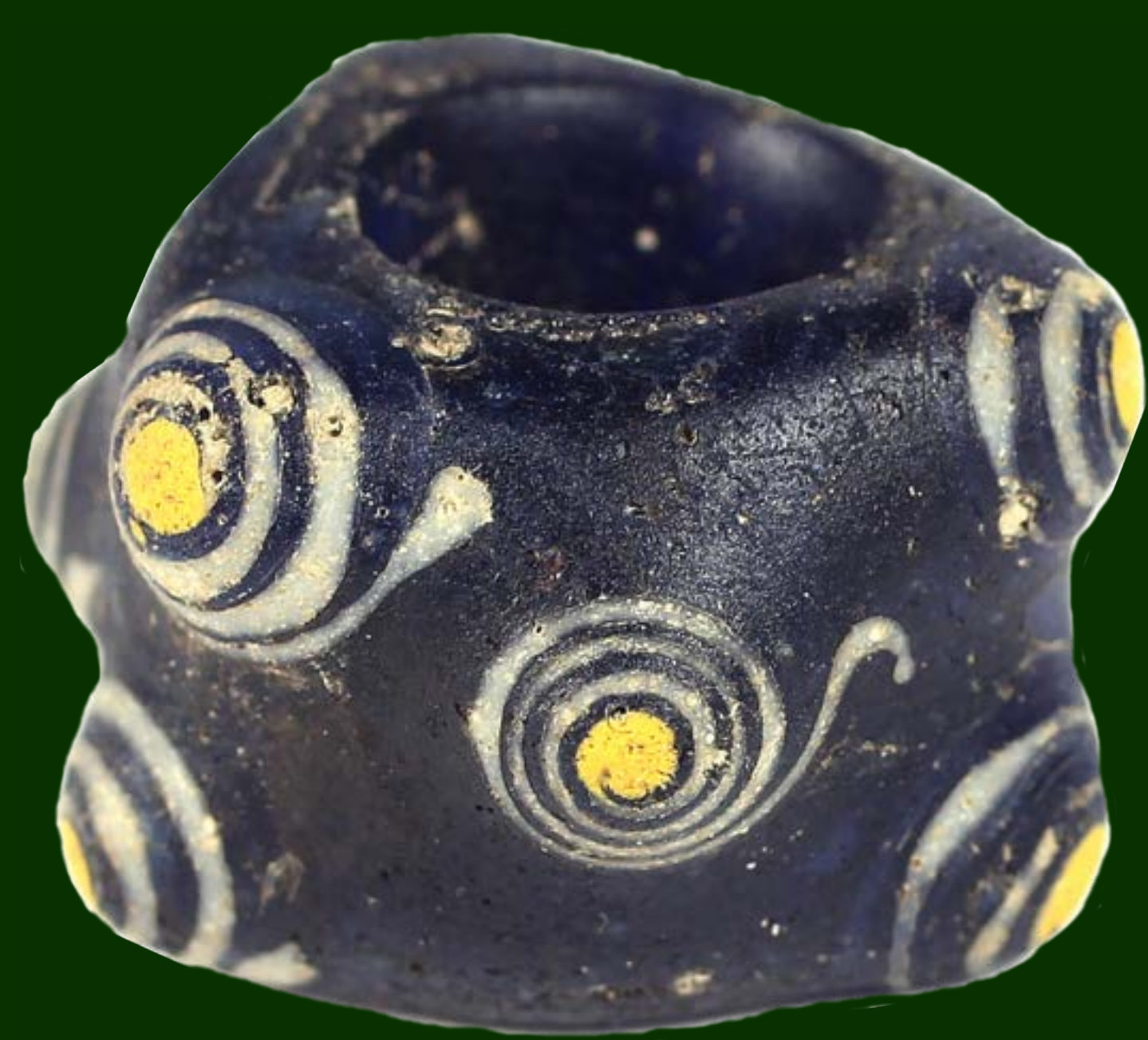


Eastbourne: From Prehistory to the Seaside Town

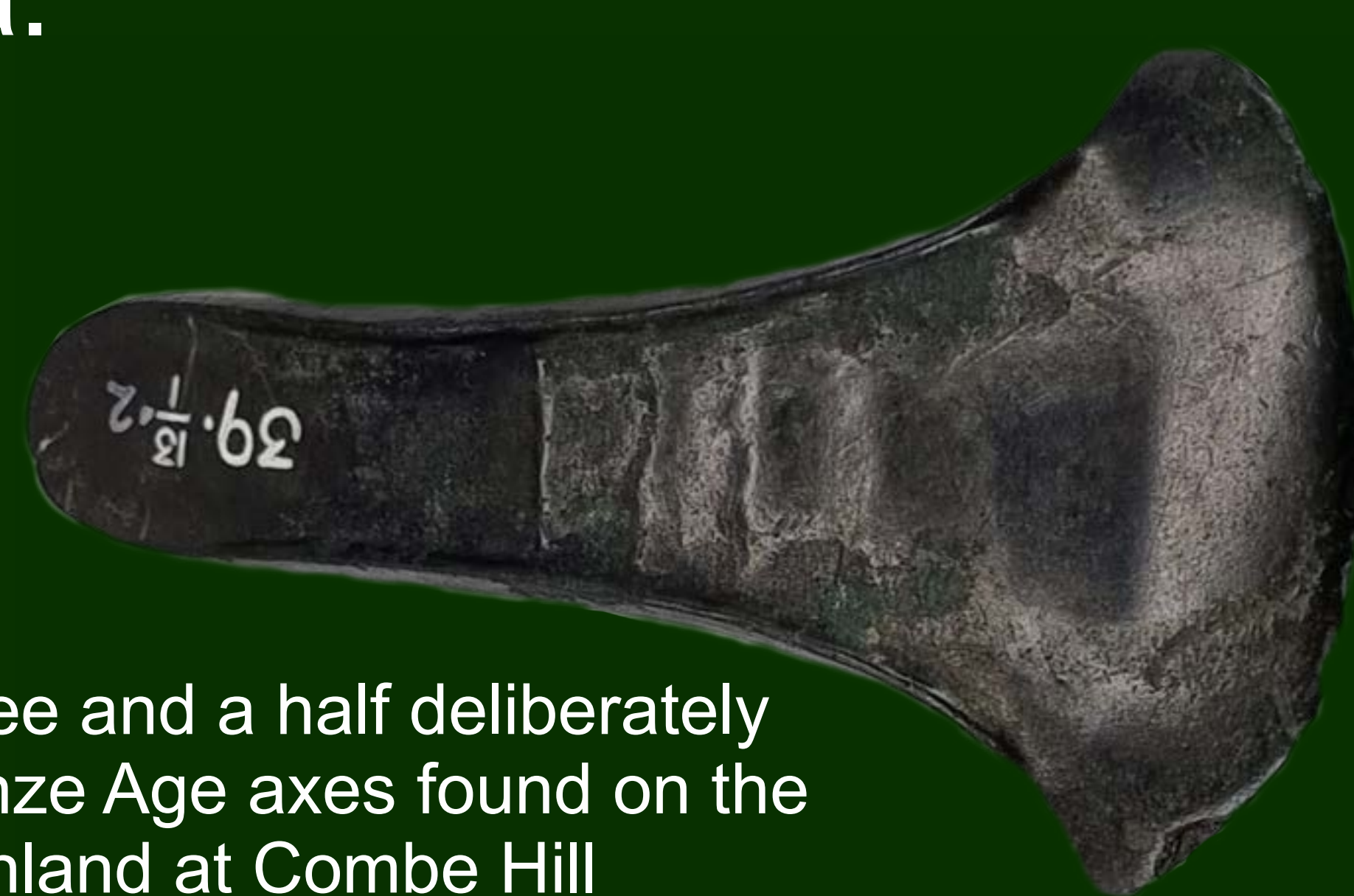
Archaeology reveals that Eastbourne's story stretches back thousands of years, long before it became known as a Victorian seaside resort. Excavations and projects such as the Big Dig have uncovered traces of farming, industry, and settlement that shaped the landscape and the communities who lived here.

A Land Shaped by People

The chalk downland and spring lines of Eastbourne made it a natural place for settlement. Archaeological investigations have revealed continuous occupation since the late Bronze Age, with people farming, crafting, and trading across the Downs. Finds from the Big Dig show how daily life was tied to both land and sea.



This glass bead is one of two beads found buried with an Iron Age Woman and Child near Kings Drive.



One of three and a half deliberately broken Bronze Age axes found on the Downland at Combe Hill

From Hamlets to Parish

For much of its early history, Eastbourne was not a single town but a collection of hamlets, including Beverington, Chollington, Yeverington, Lamport, and Upperton. The Parish of Eastbourne was formed more than 1,300 years ago, centred on what is now Old Town. However, research suggests the earliest main settlement may have been on the ridge at Upperton, with Old Town itself remodelled around 1190 CE by the Diocese of Chichester. The grand Parish Church of St Mary's and the Treasurer's Manor (Netherin Manor) reflected both religious and economic power in the area.

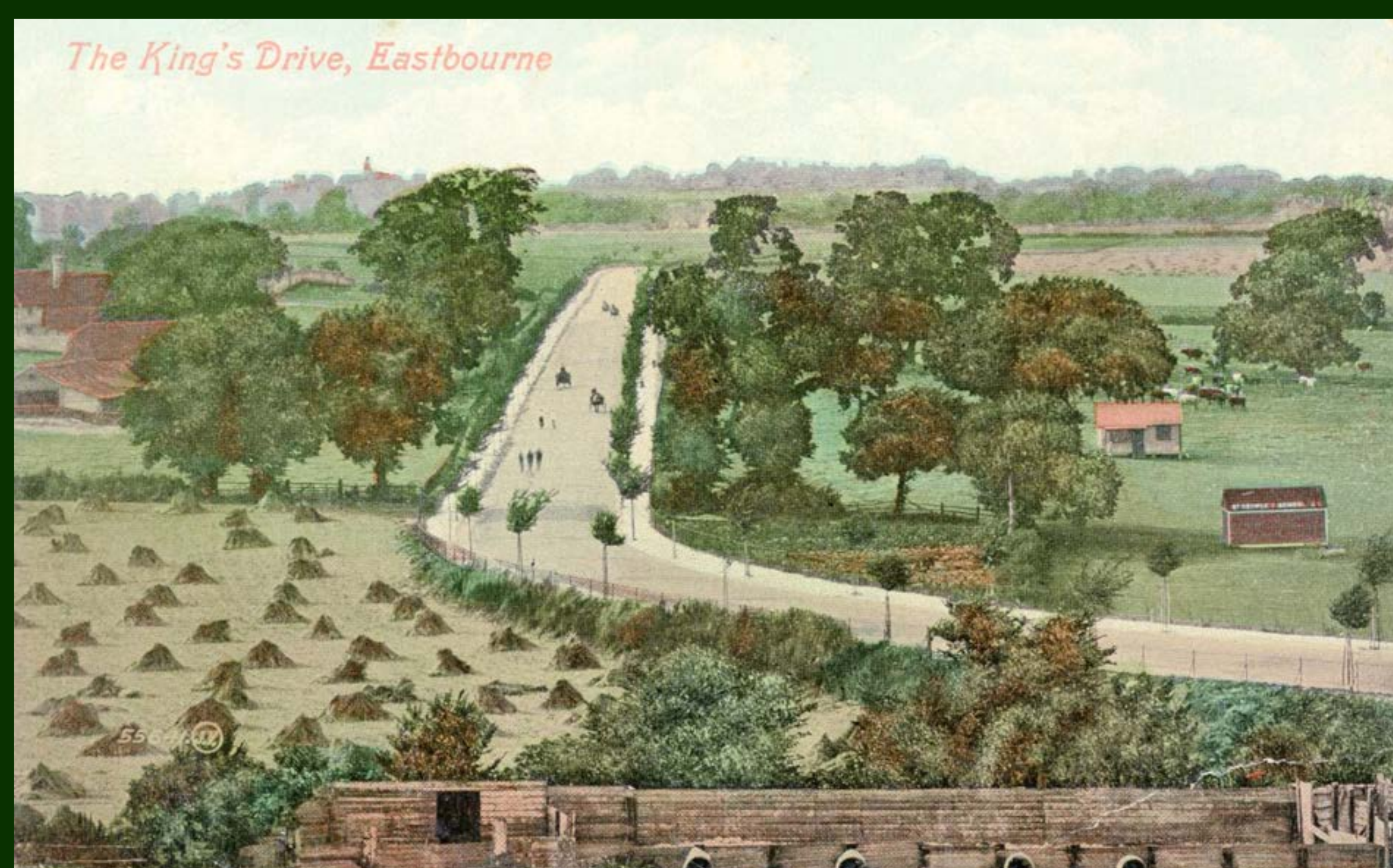
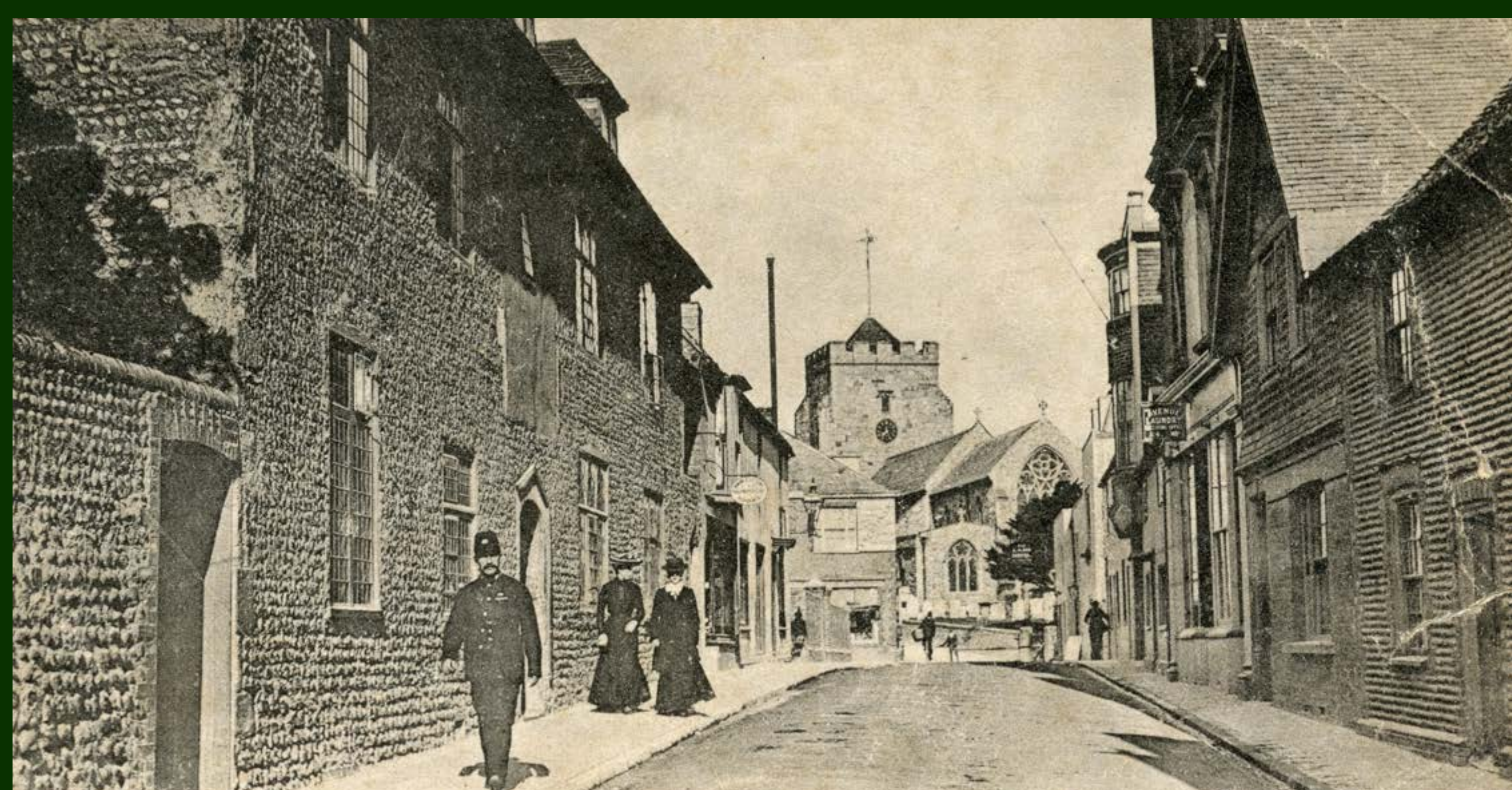
By the end of the 12th century, Eastbourne was one of the most significant contributors to Chichester Cathedral's wealth outside the city itself. Extensive sheep farming on the Downs and fertile arable fields sustained the population, which by 1250 CE may have been as many as 1,500 people—larger than many neighbouring towns.

A Market Town of Status

Through the Middle Ages and into the 17th century, Eastbourne remained a prosperous farming and market settlement, its layout centred on St Mary's Church. The Treasurer of the Cathedral, acting as Lord of the Manor, controlled farmland, fishponds, barns, and even dictated the price of bread and beer. Motcombe Gardens still preserves traces of this medieval manor landscape, with the dovecote a surviving fragment of the Treasurer's estate.

From Downland to Seaside

Despite its medieval importance, Eastbourne did not share in the Georgian expansions of nearby towns, remaining a largely rural Downland settlement with small fishing communities at Seaside and Meads. The great transformation came in the Victorian period, when the Duke of Devonshire built a fashionable seaside resort on the coast. This new development took the name Eastbourne, while the original settlement became known as Old Town—a reminder of the town's much deeper past.



Views of St Mary's Church, Old Town and Kings Drive, c19th Century