

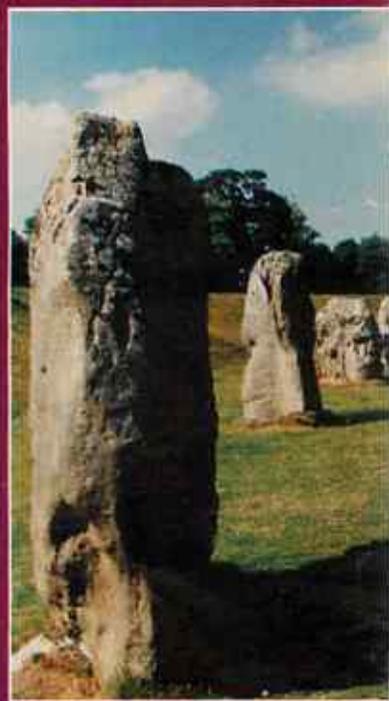
THE WORLD OF DEBORAH MOODY

Part I

Deborah Moody was the first woman to cast a vote on the North American continent. She was the first woman granted a colonial charter. She gave the name of Gravesend (Gravensonde) to the town she founded in part of what we today call Brooklyn. Her charter granted freedom of conscience and the right to practice religion without interference. She insisted on retaining the right even when threatened by Governor Stuyvesant.

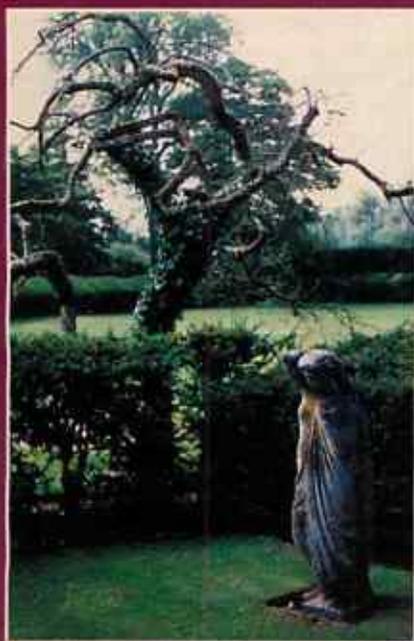
In this article Victor Cooper tells how he began the task of re-creating the world of Deborah Moody.

By Victor Cooper



Avebury manor, along with the village, is at the center of the largest stone circle in the world—outrivalling the famed Stonehenge, 18 miles away. More than 4,000 years ago unknown, by means unknown, moved the 98 huge uncut stones, called sarsens, three miles from the Marlborough Downs. The largest stone, called the Devil's Chair, weighs about 60 tons. Deborah and her playmates must have played hide-and-seek here.

OCOGS



The gnarled and the serene: two faces of Avebury.



he valued freedom. She opposed oppression. She spoke out for religious freedom. I wanted to know more about her. She sounded like a twentieth-century-style feminist alive and well in the seventeenth century. Her roots were waiting to be uncovered down the leafy lanes and in the rich libraries of England, land of my birth.

I read LIBERTY's coverage, and Eric Ierardi's *Gravesend: The Home of Coney Island*¹ and the Essex Institute Historical Collections: Swampscott in the Seventeenth Century.

I wondered, When and where was Deborah born?² What was she like? Who were her parents and grandparents? What influences shaped her strong spirit? Why did she leave England? What were conditions like in the England of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries? On which vessel did she sail to America? There seemed no end to my questions.

But how was I to find answers? She wrote no books or articles. How could anyone tell what she was like?

I began my attempt to reconstruct the world of Deborah Dunch with Ierardi's report that Deborah was born at "Dunch's Priory Manor of Avebury at Little Wittenham in Berkshire, England." This description is puzzling: Avebury and Little Wittenham are two different villages 40 miles apart. I would visit both.

Little Wittenham, I believed, was in the royal county of Berkshire (royal because the Queen has one of her favorite palaces there—Windsor Castle). But I soon discovered that while I was living in the United States, in 1974 in fact, the British authorities reshaped and renamed several English counties. Little Wittenham is now in Oxfordshire. However, the county records stretching back to the sixteenth century when Deborah was born, are still at Reading's Shire Hall, in Berk-

ORCS REFERENCE ONLY
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The Orange County California
Genealogical Society

Does Not Circulate



(above) Deborah's bedroom was upstairs in this original wing of the manor, (right) Deborah and her family worshipped at this church on the manor grounds.



shire (pronounced Barksher).

I searched through the sixteenth-century church register entries (recorded on film) to find the name of Deborah Dunch. In those days births were not recorded—only baptisms. The handwriting was difficult to decipher. No reference to Deborah Dunch! I surmised that her parents may not have believed in infant baptism.

In the name index file, I came across references to two documents under Dunch. An hour later I held in my hands the 1597 title deeds for the property of Deborah's uncle, Edmund Dunch.

And there was grandfather William Dunch's last will and testament, dated 1599. My five years of Latin classes, taken so many years ago and so little used since, were not of much help to me. But in closely written cursive script were listed the estates owned by William Dunch in Avebury, Wiltshire, in Little Wittenham, in Wookey Hole, Somerset; and elsewhere. Dunch was evidently a big landowner.

In my copy of the Automobile Association's *Book of Country Walks* I noticed reference to a walk, at Little Wit-

tenham, along ancient ramparts by the river Thames. The surrounding "Sinodun Hills are best seen under the full moon on a clear summer's night," it said. "But even in the day they retain a slightly eerie atmosphere." Apparently in Saxon days men died violently in battle on these slopes, and a phantom raven was said to guard their treasure in a fosse, or ditch, known as the Money Pit.

I was ready to go.

Then I read that "a mansion demolished in about 1800 was formerly the home of the Dunch family, some of whom are buried in the local church."

I was even more keen to go.

At Little Wittenham

I found Little Wittenham at a bend of the Thames, also known here as Isis. Footbridges cross first an arm of the river and then the main stream.

The town is nestled down a narrow lane at the foot of several hills. Castle Hill was turned into a fortified encampment 1,200 years ago. Harp Hill and the Dike Hills were the scene of prehistoric battles. Spearheads, swords, scabbard decora-

tions and a Bronze Age shield have been found. Also coins, cups, a lamp, and a key from Roman times.

In the church I met Clifford Hamerton, church warden from 1950 to 1988, and local historian. The stooped, gray-haired gentleman confirmed that the Dunch mansion was destroyed about A.D. 1800. The church, he said, was restored in the nineteenth century on a foundation here from 675. The existing church tower is fourteenth and fifteenth century, and the font is 500 years old.

Was Deborah baptized here? I wondered.

On ledges of the west wall of the tower are two recumbent effigies in alabaster: Sir William Dunch (Deborah's cousin) and his wife, Marie. He was baptized in 1578 and died in February 1612 at age 33. Small figures on the front of the tomb represent their nine children. Two are in swaddling clothes, and one rests his head on a skull (evidently a stillborn). Marie was an aunt of Oliver Cromwell, and sister-in-law to John Hampden.

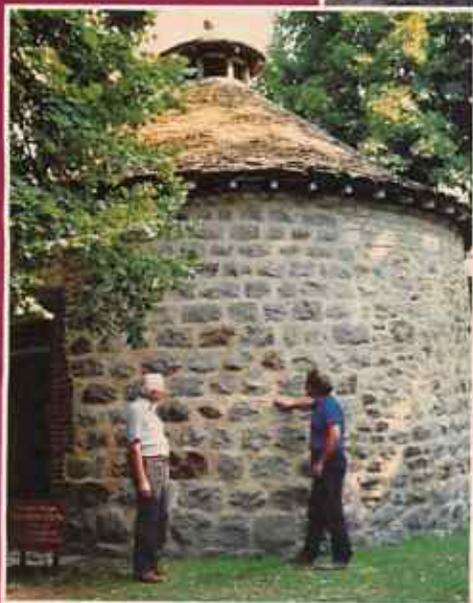
On the north wall are two fascinating brass memorials. One is to William



(above, right) Sir James Mervyn, high sheriff of Wiltshire, who married Walter's widow, Deborah, extended the house. The elegant entrance porch constructed in 1601 is surmounted by the crest bearing the incumbent's initials: M(ervyn) J(ames) D(eborah).



(left) Researcher-writer Victor Cooper and entrepreneur Ken King examine Avebury manor's dovecote, where future dinner fare wings toward a menu.



Dunch and his wife, Mary Barnes (Deborah Dunch's grandfather and grandmother). He was auditor to the mint in 1546, during the reign of Henry VIII, and reappointed in the reign of Edward VI. He was also "sworn Esquire extraordinary of the body of Queen Elizabeth," who granted him the manor of Little Wittenham, where he settled in 1562/1563. He died May 11, 1597, at the age of 89.

His wife, Mary Barnes, was sister and heiress to John Barnes, Esq., "Gentleman Porter of the Towne and Castle of Guysnes, in Fraunce when it was English."

The second brass memorial is in memory of Deborah's father, Walter Dunch, Esq., son of William and Mary Dunch, bencher of Gray's Inn, who died June 4, 1594.

So Deborah's father was a lawyer. That agrees with notes on a Dunch family tree I found in Reading, written in long-hand by an unknown writer. I must investigate that further.

I imagined Deborah and her mother and sisters at Walter's funeral. At most she was only 12, perhaps less—young to discover how transitory life is. Three years later her grandfather died.

But there is nothing in the old church to suggest that Deborah was born in Little Wittenham.

A mile over the flat fields lies Dorchester. The Dunch family members must often have walked across the breast of grassland outlined by the Thames. Situated on the main Oxford to London road, Dorchester has been continuously occupied since around 2500 B.C. Now a one-street village, it was formerly a Roman station (Dorocina) and then a cathedral city in Saxon times.

A thousand years before Deborah, Birinus, bishop of Genoa, brought the Christian faith here. He had promised that he would "sow the seed of our Holy Faith in the distant lands beyond the kingdom of the English where no other teacher had been before him." In Dorchester he converted Cynegils, king of the West Saxons, and baptized him in A.D. 635 by the Thames.

Queen Elizabeth II is a direct descendant of Cynegils through King Alfred. And the British monarchy is still adherent to the Christian faith.

The beautiful abbey church memorializes the important event. Its lead font was 400 years old in Deborah's time. I concluded that Deborah was not baptized



(above) The homey elegance of Avebury.
(above right) A jousting tournament on the manor grounds enabled us to relive Deborah's days.



(left) Worlds End: Where we came to the end of a perfect day.

here. But the Dunches must have seen the fourteenth-century windows, including the celebrated Jesse window. Its tracery is in the form of a family tree rising from the recumbent form of Jesse, father of David and ancestor of Christ.

And the Dunches must often have waited for transport outside the church at the George Hotel on High Street. They would recognize the hotel today along with the Fleur-de-lys Inn, Rotten Row, and Watling Lane. Outside the George still stands an old well-preserved stagecoach such as seventeenth-century travelers used to reach London and the rest of the country.

Deborah's Mother and Grandfather

Deborah's mother, also named Deborah, was the daughter of James Pilkington, Bishop of Durham.³ Of course, Deborah could not have known her grandfather Pilkington. He died before Deborah was born. But her mother must have told her stories of her young days. Perhaps she told about living 200 miles north near the dramatically sited Durham Cathedral on the

river Wear. And about living in London at the attractive Durham Palace on the Strand. She probably told young Deborah that her grandfather favored the Reformation and lived in the Puritan tradition.

Pilkington was appointed president of St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1550, and took part in a disputation about transubstantiation on June 24, 1549. When, during the reign of Bloody Mary, persecution of Protestants began, Pilkington along with other Protestants fled to the Continent, living in Zurich, Basel, Geneva, and Frankfurt. When Mary died he was the first to sign, if he did not also write, the "Peaceable Letter" sent to the English church at Geneva.

Returning to England, Pilkington was appointed one of the commissioners to revise the Book of Common Prayer. He preached at St. Paul's Cross in favor of assisting scholars at the universities and increasing clergy incomes.

At this time he was bishop-elect of Winchester, but he lost the job because of his outspoken Protestant convictions. Because of the shortage of other plausible

candidates, he was made bishop of Durham, the first Protestant to hold this position. Some of his writings survive.

Pilkington was one of the visitation commissioners of King's College, Cambridge. He also held a visitation of his cathedral when injunctions for the removal of superstitious books and ornaments and defacing idolatrous figures from the church plate were carried out with great rigor.

He once expressed his unenthusiastic attitude toward the supreme governor: "We are under authority and can innovate nothing without the Queen; nor can we alter the laws; the only thing left for our choice is whether we will bear these things, or break the peace of the Church."

During the northern rebellion of 1569, Pilkington and his family fled for their lives. In his will he desired to be buried with "as few popish ceremonies as may be, or vain cost."

Grandfather Pilkington died January 23, 1575-1576, age 55, at Bishop Auckland. He is buried at Durham Cathedral. I am sure Deborah would have learned all

this from her mother.

Religious freedom for all was certainly not guaranteed in sixteenth-century England. Persecution and martyrdom of both Protestants and Catholics took place according to the sympathies and influence of the monarchy.

Avebury Manor

Now we go to the village of Avebury, in the county of Wiltshire, some 40 miles west of Little Wittenham and Dorchester.

Avebury Manor is one of the finest Elizabethan manor houses in Britain. Built on the site of a Benedictine priory, it was bought by Sir William Sharington after the dissolution of the monasteries. Disgraced as master of the Bristol Mint, he sold the manor on May 11, 1552, to William Dunch, Deborah's grandfather, who purchased it for £2,200.

Mr. and Mrs. Ken King paid £1 million sterling (equivalent to \$1.7 million at current rates) for it in 1988. (See photos.)

Upon the marriage in 1581 of William's younger son, Walter, to Deborah, daughter of James Pilkington, bishop of Durham, William settled the property on Walter. And so it seems likely that Deborah, their first child, was born here.

The manor, along with the village, is at the center of the largest stone circle in the world—outrivalling the famed Stonehenge,

some 18 miles away. Avebury dates from more than 4,000 years ago when unknowns created a circle of 98 huge uncut stones known as sarsens. Covering nearly 30 acres, they surround two smaller circles of about 30 stone each.

We can only guess at how the megalithic rocks were moved the three miles from the Marlborough Downs. Were they dragged with the help of leather ropes, wooden levers, tree-trunk sledges, and a vast amount of man power? It must have taken 200 men two weeks to fetch one medium-sized stone. The largest, known as the Devil's Chair, weighs about 60 tons. Deborah and her friends must have played

hide-and-peek here. And she must have watched the doves flying around the dovecote. And with her family, worshiped at the adjacent church.

During my second visit to Avebury, in company with the editor of *LIBERTY*, minstrels, strolling players, court jesters, lords, and ladies recreated Elizabethan life with all its color and pageantry. In the gardens peacocks strutted while the scent of roses and old-fashioned herbs delighted us. A jousting tournament on the manor grounds enabled us to relive Deborah's days. There were displays of musketry, archery, and falconry, with the resident

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

The important things about Lady Moody are not her death or burial plot, or even what she looked like. What is important is her life and the principles of religious freedom that she practiced in an era when religious freedom was not generally espoused.

For these reasons Deborah Moody needs to be remembered: She deserves a United States postage stamp commemorating her, a bust in the state houses of New York and Massachusetts, and a scholarship named in her honor as *LIBERTY* has proposed. She also should be listed in encyclopedias and textbooks.

By paying tribute to this great lady, we will be paying tribute to the great spirit that forged the religious freedoms we enjoy today.

falconer demonstrating the hunting skills of merlins. Plays on the manor stage, exhibitions of crafts and torture instruments extended our insights into Deborah's world.

The kitchen and Elizabethan rooms in the east wing of the manor are largely unaltered. Upstairs are life-size wax models of former owners—the rogue William Sharington and the royalist Sir John Stawell.

Sir James Mervyn, high sheriff of Wiltshire, who married Walter's widow, Deborah, extended the house. The elegant entrance porch constructed in 1601 still bears the crest containing the incumbent's

initials: M(ervyn) J(ames) D(eborah [James's wife]).

The village historian, Mrs. Titcombe, informed me that Deborah Dunch had three sisters and one brother—Ruth, Mary, Anne, and William.² William was an infant of 4 months when his father, Walter Dunch, died in 1594. But we still do not know when Deborah was born. We surmise it was between 1582 and 1584.

In his will, Walter Dunch bequeathed the profits of Avebury Manor "to his widow for 21 years towards raising portions for his four daughters. The wardship of his son was granted to his widow, and when she married Sir James Mervyn in 1598 it passed to Sir John Cooper and Sir Daniel Norton, both of whom lived in Hampshire.

"William Dunch, either then or after his mother's death, went to live with Sir John Cooper at Rockbourne, and before 1610 had married Margaret, one of Sir John's daughters."

Walter was succeeded by his son, William, who sold the manor to Sir John Stawell in 1640.

So Deborah must have enjoyed her youth here in these very pleasant surroundings—a manor house surrounded by 160 acres of arable land and 1,300 sheep, according to a 1620 notation.

The largest element in Wiltshire was the native gentry—about 200 families in 1565 and not much below 300 in 1623. Many were

members of Parliament, as we shall see.



Next Installment: Deborah's Marriage

FOOTNOTES

¹ Eric J. Ierardi, *Gravesend: The Home of Coney Island* (New York: Vantage Press, 1975). See also *LIBERTY*, Sept.-Oct. 1987; Sept.-Oct. 1988.

² The earliest documents spell her name Debora. Dunch frequently has an *e* added on early documents. Moody is variously spelled Moodie, Modye, and Mudie.

³ David L. Edwards, *From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Collins), Christian England, vol. 2, p. 160; *The Dictionary of National Biography*, "James Pilkington," vol. XV, pp. 1179-1181.

⁴ *Wiltshire Notes and Queries*, vol. 8, p. 214.