

# A SURVEY OF EARTHWORKS AND STRUCTURAL REMAINS AT BRAY'S WOOD, THE LEE.

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*A survey of earthworks at Bray's Wood, The Lee, confirmed the presence of structural remains at the south-western corner of the inner enclosure. These remains appear to be of a medieval stone dwelling-house. They produced surface finds including fragments of tooled Totternhoe ashlar, glazed roof tile and a sherd of pottery. The site lay in an outlying part of the manor of Wendover which was granted to Missenden Abbey in the early thirteenth century. The abbey's tenants here may have been the de Brays, who appear as witnesses in various thirteenth-century charters.*

## INTRODUCTION.

The earthwork site at Bray's Wood, The Lee, was originally documented by the Reverend Boughey Burgess in the first volume of *Records of Buckinghamshire* (Burgess 1855). Burgess noted "Several fragments of blue pottery and the handle of a rude amphora which Mr. Faulkner of Deddington, an experienced antiquary, pronounces to be Roman or of the Roman period" in the now ploughed-out eastern part of the south-eastern enclosure (Fig.4). He reported that the ditches were muddy and in some cases water filled, though they are now dry. A sketch-plan of this site was made by Allcroft (Allcroft 1908). Later descriptions were made by Michael Farley (1972) and Andrew Pike (1992).

A survey of the surface stones of this structure, and of inner enclosure EN1 was conducted using 5m tape. The outer enclosures were pace-surveyed. The most prominent feature within the site is the rubble-filled house platform (B1) at the south-western corner of enclosure EN1 (Figs. 2 and 3). The dimensions of this feature and the surface finds associated with it (Fig. 5) suggest that this was a medieval hall or chamber block.

## Situation (Fig. 1).

The Bray's Wood site (SP 915 049) occupies a level area at 182m OD, adjacent to the head of a dry combe. This joins a dry valley, which in turn runs east to join the Chess Valley. The underlying geology of the site is clay-with-flints over chalk. The earthworks are now within the parish of The Lee,

but the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (RCHM 1912, 306) and the Victoria County History (VCH III, 21) place them in Wendover, their historic location. Burgess placed them, in error, in Great Missenden.

The original entrance to the inner enclosure EN1 is to the east. From here, Burgess's plan shows a gap between a hedge to the north and the south-eastern enclosure (Fig.4). This is aligned to a kink in Arrewig Lane (SP 9188 0940) which might represent the site of a junction with a former approach to the Bray's Wood earthworks.

## The Outer Enclosures (Fig. 2).

The rectangular inner enclosure (EN1) is now surrounded by three outer enclosures (EN2, EN 4, EN5) and the remains of a fourth (EN3). A fifth one (EN6), east of enclosure EN3 was noted by Burgess. All traces of feature EN6 have now been obliterated by the plough. The largest enclosure (EN2), to the west of the site, is bounded on its western and northern sides by a flint rubble-filled bank. This is no more than 0.6m high above the ditch, where traces of the latter survive. Within this enclosure is a small mound and adjacent pit, probably a recent disturbance (D1). The southern ditch of EN2 is continuous with that of the south-eastern enclosure EN3, suggesting both are contemporary. The latter enclosure has had its eastern end destroyed by ploughing, but its approximate dimensions, suggested by Burgess's survey, are indicated on Fig. 2. The surviving ditch of EN3, varies in breadth from 4.7m to 6.1m. It is generally

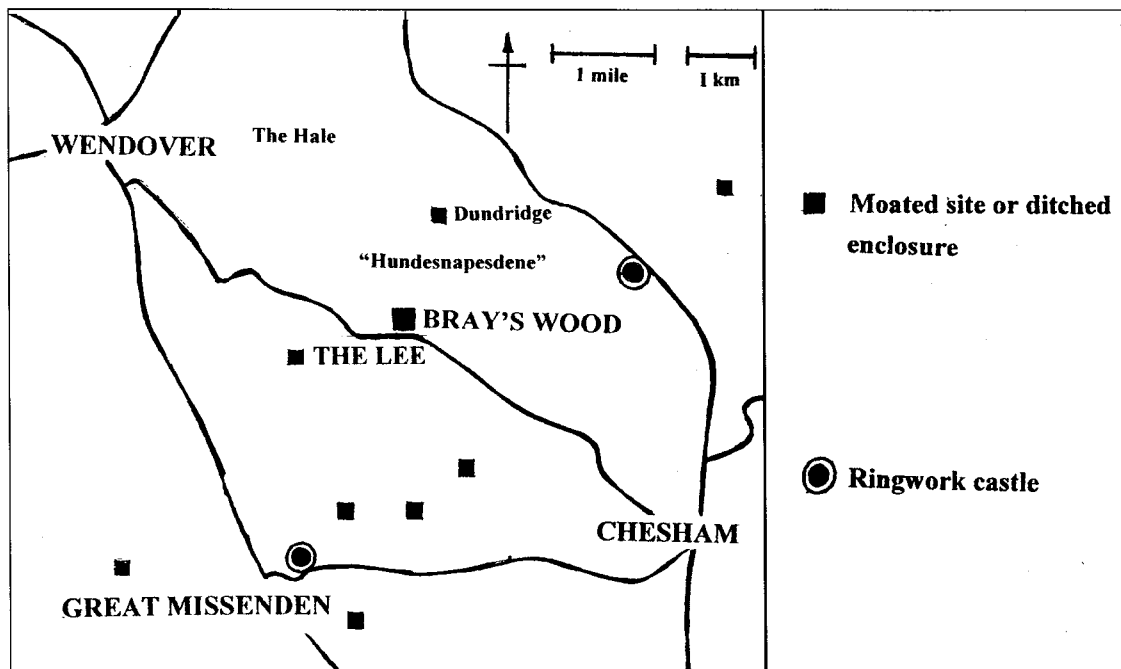


FIGURE 1 Situation.

0.3m deep. In places, there is a flint-filled internal bank accompanying the ditch, which rises up to 0.9m above the base of the latter.

There is some evidence that enclosure EN3 pre-dates the rectangular enclosure EN1. Firstly, the earthwork defining the northern side of EN3 (EW1), is cut by the ditch of EN1, which is at a lower level. Secondly, its western extremity forms a very narrow "finger" of land (EW2), which would serve no useful purpose.

The outer enclosures EN4 and EN5 are defined by very slight banks no more than 0.3m high.

#### The Inner Enclosure (Fig. 2).

The inner enclosure EN1 is a near-perfect rectangle measuring 60m long on its northern side, by 47m on the east, by 63m on the south and 49m on the west. Its northern, eastern and southern ditches are generally 6m wide and 0.6m deep, but the outer western ditch is only about 5m wide and no more than 0.3m deep. The entrance causeway across the ditch to the east, apparently an original feature, is flint cobbled. There are dense rubble concentrations alongside the outer lip of the ditch at its

south-eastern corner, and just north of the causeway (B2). These suggest that the external side of the ditch was flint-faced.

To the north of the eastern causeway is a slight bank internal to the ditch, no more than 0.2m high (EW3). This appears on Allcroft's plan, as does a corresponding bank at the north-western corner of the enclosure, which has now been destroyed. At the south-eastern corner of the enclosure, adjacent to the inner lip of the ditch, is a rubble-filled mound 1.4m across (EW4). Features EW 3-4, and the vanished earthwork noted by Allcroft suggest that the inner enclosure once had an internal perimeter bank or wall.

Parallel with the outer western ditch of the enclosure is a secondary, internal ditch (EW5). Its southern half is well-preserved, being generally 6.2m wide and 0.6m deep but its northern half has been virtually destroyed; both Burgess and Allcroft indicate that it formerly extended as far as the north-western corner of the enclosure. The bank between this internal ditch and the outer ditch is 0.9m high. It is breached by a causeway (D2), which is clearly modern. It is not indicated on

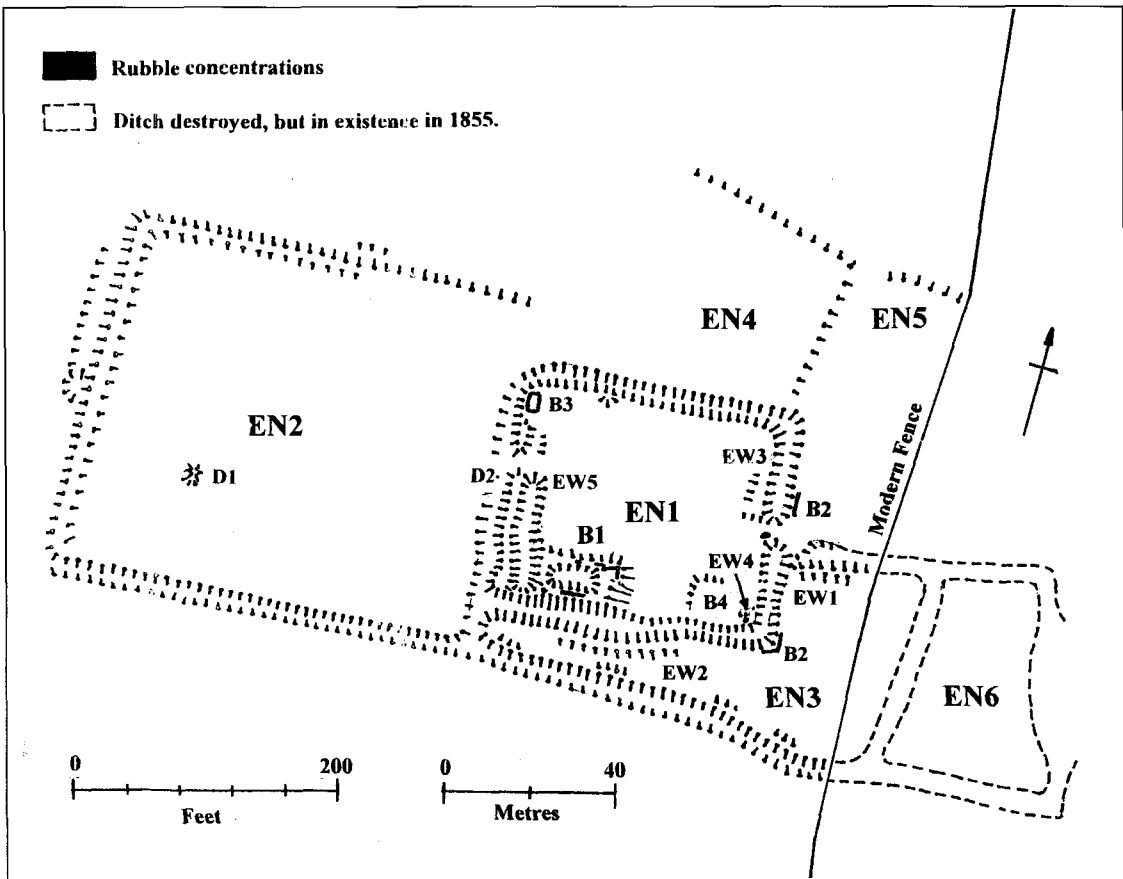


FIGURE 2 The Inner Enclosure.

Burgess's plan, while Allcroft shows a causeway across the outer ditch, but not the inner one at this point.

At the north-western corner of enclosure EN1 is a building platform (B3), 0.6m high. This has external dimensions of 4.3m north-south by 4m west-east, over flint rubble foundations 0.6m thick. Much roofing tile, some of it peg-holed, some of it blackened, litters the platform. There is also a large amount of iron slag, as noted by Andrew Pike (Buckinghamshire Sites and Monuments Record, 16/07/2003, SMR, no. 001750000-BC 159). This suggests that Feature B3 may have been a small forge. It was originally isolated from enclosure EN1 by ditch EW5, as Burgess and Allcroft indicate on their plans. If it were a forge, it is possible that ditch EW5 served as a precautionary fire-break.

Near the south-eastern corner of the enclosure is a further platform (B4). This is 6.2m west-east by 9m north-south. It may be the site of a building, but there is no rubble or tile on the surface.

#### Remains of Building B1 (Figs. 2 and 3).

The most substantial feature (B1) within the inner enclosure lies at its south-western corner and is defined by a rectangular rubble-filled bank 0.6–0.9m high. The summit of this is 1–1.8m broad on all sides apart from the east, where it is as much as 6.5m wide. The bank encloses a 'cell' with internal dimensions of 12.2m west-east by 6.1m north-south. The majority of flints embedded in the bank appear to define foundations. The dressed stone fragments described hereafter (Fig. 5) confirm this to have been a masonry structure. There is, how-

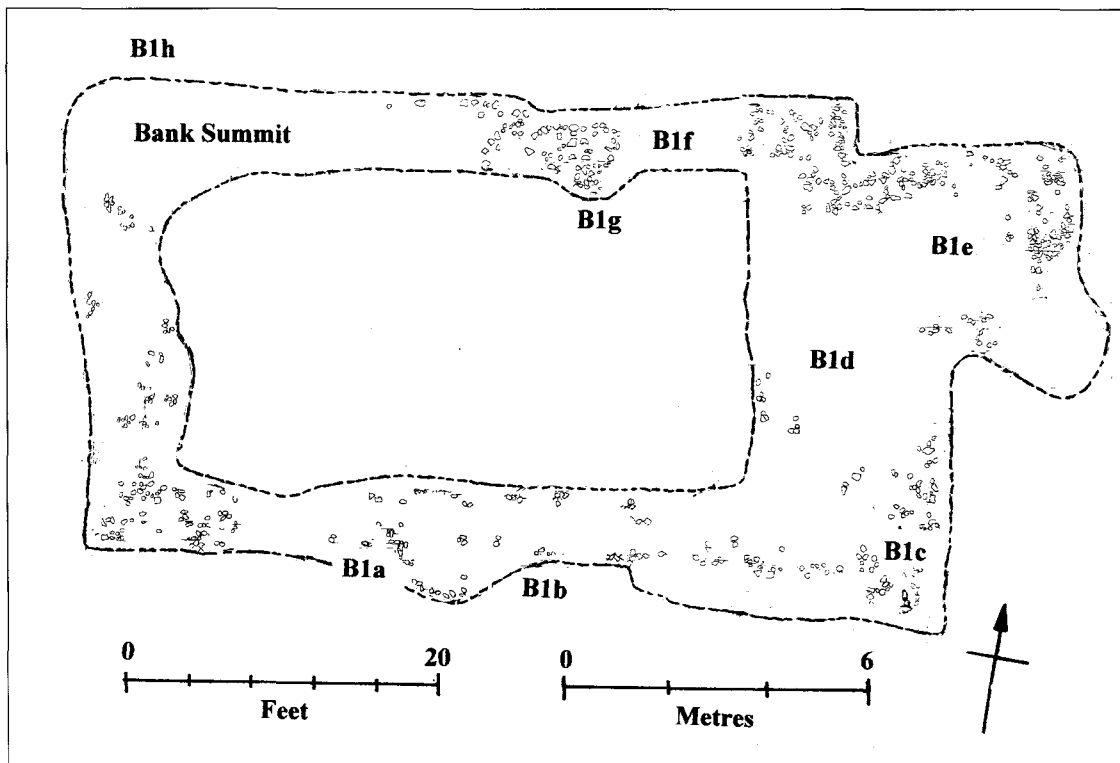


FIGURE 3 Remains of Building B1.

ever, no sign of mortaring, probably due to the deterioration of poor quality material. Loose flint and apparent debris were omitted from the survey.

Several significant features can be discerned amongst the buried foundations. In the centre of the southern wall are signs of an external projection (B1a, Fig. 3). At its south-eastern corner (B1b), rabbit activity has brought diagnostic materials to the surface. These include fragments of tooled Totternhoe ashlar (Fig. 5, b-f), glazed and unglazed roofing tile and a sherd of coarseware pottery. One of the ashlar fragments (Fig. 5e.) appears to have been part of a quoin. This would support the suggestion that there was an external projection here. There are indications of a further external projection at the eastern end of the southern wall (B1c). To the north of the latter, the bank summit (B1d) is 3m wide and of sufficient breadth for it to have been the site of a mural chamber. At the northern end of the eastern wall are the foundations of an annexe (B1e). This has external dimensions of

4.5m west-east by 4.1m north-south, with walls 0.6m thick.

The foundations of the eastern end of the north wall of the main building are well-preserved. A well-defined gap 2.2m wide (B1f) probably marks the position of a ground-floor entrance. West of this are signs of an internal projection (B1g) but no indication of foundations running south from this feature.

The bank defining the western part of the north wall of building B1 has no flint embedded within it. Just outside the western end of this bank, at point B1h, a large block of Totternhoe ashlar was found on the surface (Fig. 5,a).

#### Discussion of Building B1.

The date of the surface finds will now be considered, and the plan of the building compared with structures of a contemporary period.

The single sherd of pottery noticed in area B1b is of an orange sandy-fabric with larger siliceous

inclusions. It has reduced surfaces and the exterior is rilled. Jugs of identical fabric, and with comparable surface treatment have been found in a late twelfth century context at Bourbon Street, Aylesbury (Farley 1974, 438–9). While most of the roofing tile at Bray's Wood is undiagnostic, the presence of some glazed pieces is significant. Glazed tile is rare, though not unknown, before the thirteenth century.

The presence of predominantly diagonally tooled Totternhoe ashlar is paralleled at the old church at The Lee, 2 km west of Bray's Wood (SP 8979 0338, Fig.1). At The Lee, this type of stone is employed in the dressings of lancet windows in the nave of the church, which are the earliest dateable details there. The narrow, plain form of these windows and their simple internal splays suggest they are no later than c.1225, and possibly as early as c.1190.

Taken together, the finds at Bray's Wood suggest that building B1 was constructed in the first-quarter of the thirteenth century. At Whaddon, near Milton Keynes, the plan of a hall and solar block of contemporary date has been excavated (Griffiths 1979). However, the latter was considerably larger than the building at Bray's Wood.

The internal dimensions of building B1 at Bray's Wood (12.2m x 6.1m) are more directly comparable with those of some stone houses outside Buckinghamshire. The hall block of c.1180–90 excavated at Wharram Percy, North Yorkshire, for example, was 12m by 6m internally (Platt 1997, 55). The chamber block excavated at Penhallam Manor, Jacobstow, Cornwall, of c. 1180–1200 was smaller (10m x 5m internally). At Penhallam, a wardrobe annexe was added to one end of the building shortly after its completion (Ibid, 59). The position of that annexe can be compared with feature B1e at Bray's Wood, though the latter is smaller. The external dimensions of building B1 at Bray's Wood are similar to those of the intact stone house at Boothby Pagnell, Lincolnshire, a building of c.1200 (Wood 1965, 19). Here there is an ashlar chimney-breast, with moulded details, in an otherwise predominantly rubble-built structure. At Bray's wood, the majority of ashlar fragments were found at point B1b, adjacent to the suggested external projection B1a. Some of the fragments might be of mouldings (Fig 5, b, f). It is also worth noting that at Bray's Wood, the probable ground-floor entrance (B1e) is in an

opposing wall to external projection B1a, but in a staggered position relative to the latter. At Boothby Pagnell, Penhallam and Wharram Percy, the chimney-breasts and ground-floor entrances all occupy comparable positions. It would therefore seem likely that feature B1a at Bray's Wood represents a similar chimney-breast. The houses at Boothby Pagnell, Penhallam and Wharram Percy are, or were, two-storey structures. There is no reason why building B1 at Bray's Wood should have been any different.

#### Discussion of Earthwork Development (Fig. 4).

It has previously been suggested that the rectangular inner enclosure EN1 may have been imposed on an earlier irregular enclosure EN3. The postulated course of the northern ditch of the suspected primary enclosure across the later one is indicated on Fig.4. If correct, building B1 must be contemporary with, or later than the laying out of enclosure EN1. A remodelling of the complex at Bray's Wood could be contemporary with a change in ownership of the land. Historical evidence suggests such a change took place in the early thirteenth-century.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The land upon which the Bray's Wood earthworks are situated lay within the parish of Wendover until the twentieth century. The manor of Wendover was held by the king until 1151, when Stephen granted it to Hugh de Gournay. Subsequently, it was held by Faramus of Boulogne, constable of Dover Castle. Faramus's daughter, Sybil, married Ingram de Fiennes, who died in 1190 (VCH, III, 23). After this, opinion differs as to who held the manor. The Victoria County History suggests that Sybil held it until her death in 1208. J.G. Jenkins, in his commentary on the *Cartulary of Missenden* (hereafter abbreviated "MC"), has an alternative view (Jenkins 1939). In his footnote to MC, vol. 1, charter no. 226, Jenkins asserts that Hugh de Gournay was in possession of lands in Wendover in 1202, forfeited them in the following year and regained them no later than 1206.

Whichever opinion is correct, the south-eastern portion of the manor of Wendover was granted by Hugh de Gournay to Missenden Abbey before 1213. In the charter describing this grant, (MC, vol. 1, no. 207), he gave:

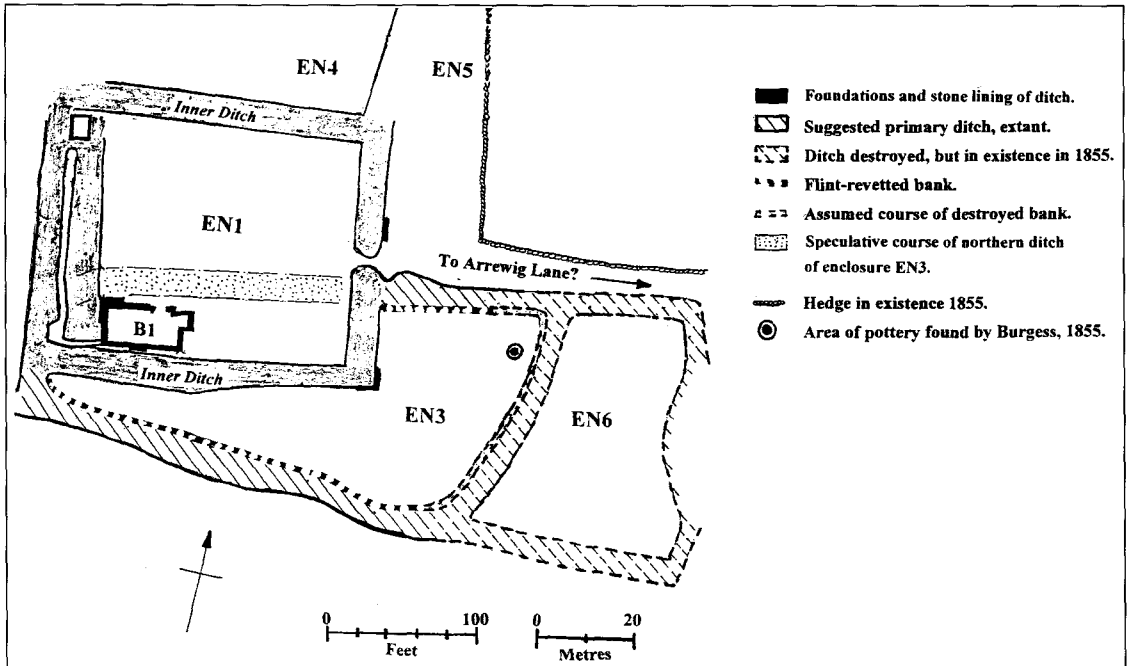


FIGURE 4 Earthwork Development.

.....All land in Wendover lying between *Dunruge* and the valley called *Hundesnapesdene*, and between the land which Robert de *La Hale* held, and *Menuebeah*, and between the land which Henry de Crokesley held of the fee of Wendover, and *Coliersruie*.....

*Dunruge* is Dundridge Manor (SP 918 066), which was held by the de Crokesleys (MC, vol. 1, no. 254). Henry de Crokesley's Wendover land was presumably close to this. The valley immediately south of Dundridge Manor (SP 92 05) must be *Hundesnapesdene*. The other valley near to Dundridge, to the north-east of the latter, is and was in the parish of Cholesbury, not Wendover. *La Hale* is The Hale (SP 893 074). The locations of these places are indicated on Fig.1. *Menuebeah* and *Coliersruie* cannot be identified.

The grant suggests that the entire south-eastern portion of the manor of Wendover was granted to Missenden Abbey and annexed to their adjacent manor of The Lee at this time. The land in which the Bray's Wood earthworks are situated, lying so close to *Hundesnapesdene*, is most likely to have

been included in this grant.

It has already been suggested that the primary earthworks at Bray's Wood (EN3) were altered by the imposition of the rectangular inner enclosure EN1, and that building B1 was constructed at this time or later. It has also been observed that the surface finds from feature B1 suggest a structure of late twelfth or early thirteenth century date. It would thus appear possible that building B1, and associated enclosure EN1 date from around the time that Missenden Abbey acquired the land, in other words, from between 1206 and 1213.

#### The de Brays in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns.

The question arises as to how Bray's Wood got its name. At least four de Brays are known to have lived in the Buckinghamshire Chiltern area between 1200 and 1300. These were Ralph, Henry, John, and another John de Bray.

Of these, Henry can be eliminated as the owner of Bray's Wood, The Lee. In 1286, he held a portion of a half-fee in Little Missenden from the de Vere Earls of Oxford (VCH, II, 357). In the parish of

Little Missenden, there is another Bray's Wood, which should not be confused with the site described above. Within this wood is another ditched homestead (SU 933 977) which encloses house-platforms and produced 13th-14th century surface pottery (Pike 1992). It would therefore appear likely that Henry de Bray resided at Bray's Wood, Little Missenden, and not at Bray's Wood, The Lee. In 1254, the above mentioned half-fee was held by William de Sumeford, William de Derneford and Hugh de Missenden. Hugh was perhaps a descendant of Ravening de Missenden, who held the whole of the half-fee in 1166 from the de Bolebec Honour of Whitchurch (VCH, II, 357).

Ralph de Bray was living between 1200 and 1229 (MC, 2, no. 383), John was living in c.1250 (MC, 1, no.104) and another John, perhaps the latter's son, was alive c.1300 (MC, 1, no. 255). Since these de Brays were contemporary with the above mentioned holders of the Bolebec/de Vere half-fee in Little Missenden, they cannot have held that manor. On the other hand, their appearances in the *Cartulary* suggest that they held land in the locality.

Ralph de Bray heads the witness-list in the charter of 1200 X 1229. This was issued by Thomas Pudifet of Bovingdon, who granted half an acre of land within that manor to Missenden Abbey. Ralph is described as "Domino Radulfo de Bray", indicating that he was a lord and thus held manorial rights. Among his co-witnesses are Ralph de Chenduit of Isenhampstead Chenduit (now Latimer), a sub-manor of Chesham (VCH, III, 207), and Richard de Bellingdon, also a Chesham landowner. Also mentioned in this charter is William de la Dene, whose probable descendant, Richard, held Ballinger in Great Missenden.

The John de Bray mentioned in the charter of c.1250 appears as a witness to a quitclaim made by John le Strange of a tenement belonging to Missenden Abbey. Among John's fellow-witnesses are Robert Mantel, Lord of Mantells, a sub-manor of Little Missenden (VCH, II, 356). Also present was John de Broc, lord of Hundridge, a sub-manor of Chesham (ibid, III, 212).

The John de Bray mentioned in the charter of c.1300 witnessed a grant of Richard de la Dene to Missenden Abbey of an annual rent of 12d from property he held in The Lee. Other witnesses to this charter include Hugo Hammond of Hammondshall Farm, Great Missenden (SP 898 032) and John de

Broc of Hundridge, possibly the son of the John de Broc mentioned above. In 1313, Adam de la Playdelle was accustomed to paying Richard de la Dene 6s, 4d rent for lands and tenements in Ballinger, which Adam held of Richard. Richard, in turn, rendered the rents to Missenden Abbey. This suggests that the de la Dene family were tenants of the abbey in Ballinger.

The above charters suggest that the de Brays who witnessed them, held land in the Chesham/Missenden/Lee area. If they did not hold Bray's Wood (Little Missenden), what land did they own? There is no direct evidence that links them to the Bray's Wood (The Lee) site, but the de Brays are more likely to have resided here than anywhere else in the locality. Ralph de Bray occurs as a witness at about the same time as the south-eastern part of Wendover manor was granted to Missenden Abbey.

The de Brays might have taken their name from the site under discussion, rather than having given their name to it. The Middle English "bray", or "bay" can mean any laterally divided area and, by extension, a plot or enclosure of land. The outermost bailey of Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, for instance, was known as "The Brays" (Thompson 1982, 14).

If the de Bray family did hold the Bray's Wood (The Lee) site from the Abbots of Missenden, the description of Ralph de Bray as a lord would suggest that it was a minor manorial complex. While the de Brays may have been resident, it is questionable whether they were responsible for the construction of stone dwelling-house B1. Firstly, though Ralph de Bray was a lord, he does not appear to be one of much significance and may have lacked the resources to raise what was clearly a fairly high-status building. Secondly, the tooled Totternhoe ashlar found on the surface of building remains B1 at Bray's Wood, can be compared with the probably contemporary dressings in the windows of The Lee old church. Since both were on Missenden Abbey's land in the early thirteenth-century, both buildings might be part of the same works programme; Ralph might simply have administered the complex on the abbey's behalf.

If the remodelling of the Bray's wood site, represented by construction of the enclosure EN1 and building B1 was the result of Missenden Abbey's acquisition of the land, this would mean that suggested primary enclosure EN3 could represent a

homestead held by tenants of the lords of Wendover in the twelfth century.

It is unclear when the Bray's Wood site was abandoned, but Burgess (1855) suggests stone was being robbed from the place in the early nineteenth-century. Large rotten tree stumps among the banks of building B1 suggest it was abandoned some time before this. The Royal Commission on Historic Monuments (RCHM 1910, 306) suggests the tile on the site is post-medieval, but it is not demonstrably so.

### THE FINDS.

#### (1) *Totternhoe Stone.* (Fig. 5)

Six pieces of worked Totternhoe ashlar were found upon the banks of building remains B1. With one exception, the stone is diagonally tooled.

(a). Large block with slanting, diagonally-tooled long face and wedge-shaped, badly-weathered end face. The latter has faint horizontal tooling on one face of the chamfer of the wedge. The weathering on this face suggests it was external. The block pos-

sibly represents part of the abacus for a doorway, the slanted long face being the springer of the arch. Context B1h.

(b). Part of diagonally-tooled block. Finds b-f are all from context B1b.

(c). Part of diagonally-tooled chamfered feature, possibly part of a moulding.

(d). Part of horizontally-tooled block.

(e). Part of diagonally-tooled quoin, suggesting a projecting feature near this point.

(f). Small, three-faced stone with main face diagonally tooled, possibly part of a moulding.

#### (2) *Pottery.*

A single sherd of pottery was found in context B1b. This was a body sherd with its upper end forming the base of a shoulder. The fabric is orange sandy ware with larger silicious inclusions. It has reduced surfaces and a rilled exterior. The fabric and rilling are identical to that on two jugs found in a late twelfth century pit at Bourbon Street, Aylesbury (Farley 1974, 438-9, nos. 30,37). The latter, however, had thicker walls.

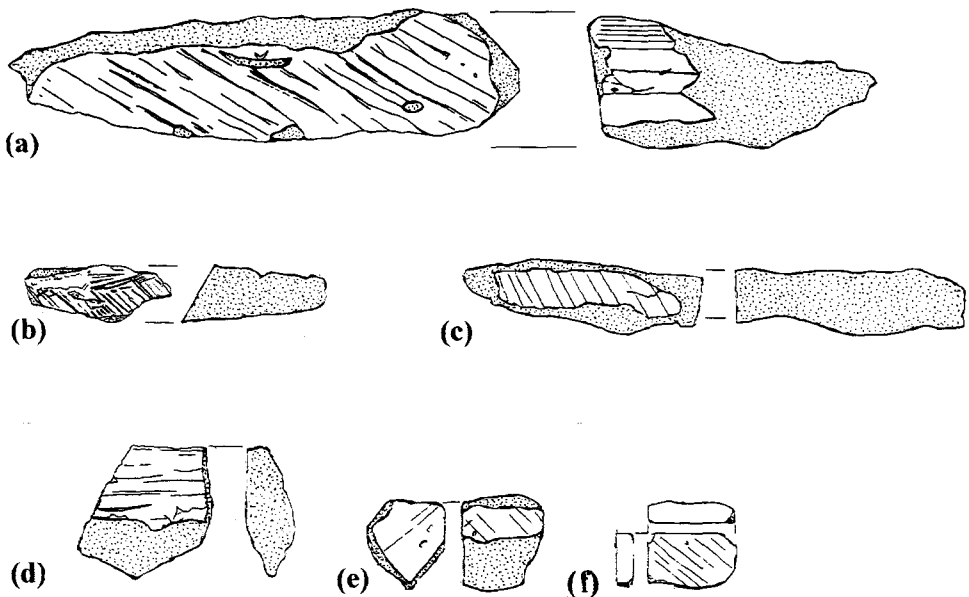


FIGURE 5 Dressed stone (1:4).



(3) *Tile.*

Five pieces of glazed tile, two of which joined, were found in context B1b. One of these was green-glazed, three had a green-ochre glaze and another had a red-brown glaze.

A considerable amount of plain roofing tile, some of it peg-holed, exists in area B1b and B3. One piece found in context B1b had the peg-hole set, unusually, at a sixty-degree angle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

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