

NOTES

HOW LARGE WAS THE IRON AGE 'HILLFORT' AT DESBOROUGH CASTLE, WEST WYCOMBE?

The Iron Age hillfort at West Wycombe, within which St Lawrence's church now stands, is well known, but its neighbour at Desborough, near High Wycombe, less than one-and-a-half miles to the south-east, is overshadowed by the prominent medieval earthwork on the same site, known as 'Desborough Castle'. The latter has long been recognised as an antiquity (Langley 1797, 2-8).

The existence of a hillfort at Desborough, as well as the medieval earthwork, was first proposed by Allcroft in 1908. He noted a curving outer scarp or lynchet north of the medieval earthwork and deduced that, since its course was asymmetric to the 'Castle' defences, it might indicate the existence of a preceding 'British fortress'. He inferred the course of the fort's southern defence by observing 'standing corn whose straight drilled lines reveal the otherwise imperceptible dip in the soil where ran the fosse' (Allcroft 1908, 442, footnote, and Fig 149, reproduced here as Fig. 1). Slightly

later, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments accepted that this outerwork was '... probably of a period earlier than that of the ring-work' (RCHM 1912, 318). In 1930 Williams-Freeman, another field archaeologist, provided a further description. He again records the northern lynchet and notes that it:

turns up about 100 yards on the West as a depression and can be made out for a few yards turning along the South side of the Camp. The east end of this lynchet like terrace is in line with a turn of the lane which evidently occupies the place of the ditch and is 5' below the level ground. This lane turns South and faint signs of the bank and ditch can be seen leaving it to go along the South side of the camp where it is not however discernible (*mss* in Bucks CC, Historic Environment Record CASS 0018).

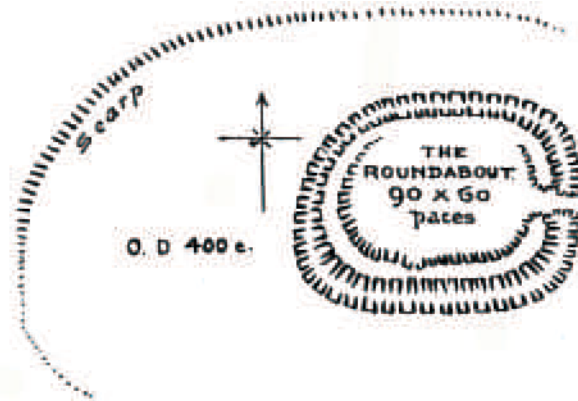


FIGURE 1 Desborough Castle, reproduced from Allcroft, A Hadrian, 1908. *Earthwork of England*, Fig 149.



FIGURE 2 Air photograph of Desborough Castle (M.Farley, February 2008).

About 1931, High Wycombe Borough Council acquired nearly 38 acres of land including the earthwork from Sir John Dashwood, and obtained consent to cut a new road (Rutland Avenue) through the area (*Marlow Journal*, May 22 1931). Later, utilising this road, Castlefield Estate was developed to the south. The 'lynchet' on the north side of the medieval earthwork was subsequently surveyed by the Ordnance Survey (CAS 0018), but no trace of the presumed southern side of the defence was then, or has subsequently, been observed.

In 1968 Chris Saunders excavated two trenches across the lynchet north of The Castle, near its western end. He confirmed that the lynchet marked the site of a bank and accompanying ditch, the latter about five feet deep. He also showed, unexpectedly, that there was a second, outer ditch, about four feet deep, further north beyond the lynchet (*mss* drawing in CASS 0018). There were insufficient finds to confirm the date of either ditch. He concluded: 'It is not clear if this marks an outer medieval bailey or is the remains of an earlier work' (Saunders 1971, 26).

A further, if rather unsatisfactory, earlier description of Desborough Castle by a Mr Downs

of Wycombe, has also to be taken into account, since he apparently describes two banks beyond the main medieval earthwork, which would fit Saunderson's discovery (Downs 1878).

At some distance from the summit of the outer bank runs parallel with it what is apparently a remnant of one of the outer defences of the camp, and formed a terrace upon which men might be stationed to prevent attack on the flank of the entrenchment. It was strengthened by an embankment in the front and rear, and at intervals had advanced posts for observation. As might naturally be expected, the banks and escarpments have been much modified and changed since their first construction; in some places they have been quite obliterated. What remains, however, is amply sufficient to enable the student of antiquity to recall the probable extent and directions of the several parts of these interesting remains. The outer bank has a general height of four or five feet, which is increased in some places to fifteen feet. The inner bank in its highest position has an elevation of seven feet, but is far from being perfect. A distance of sixty

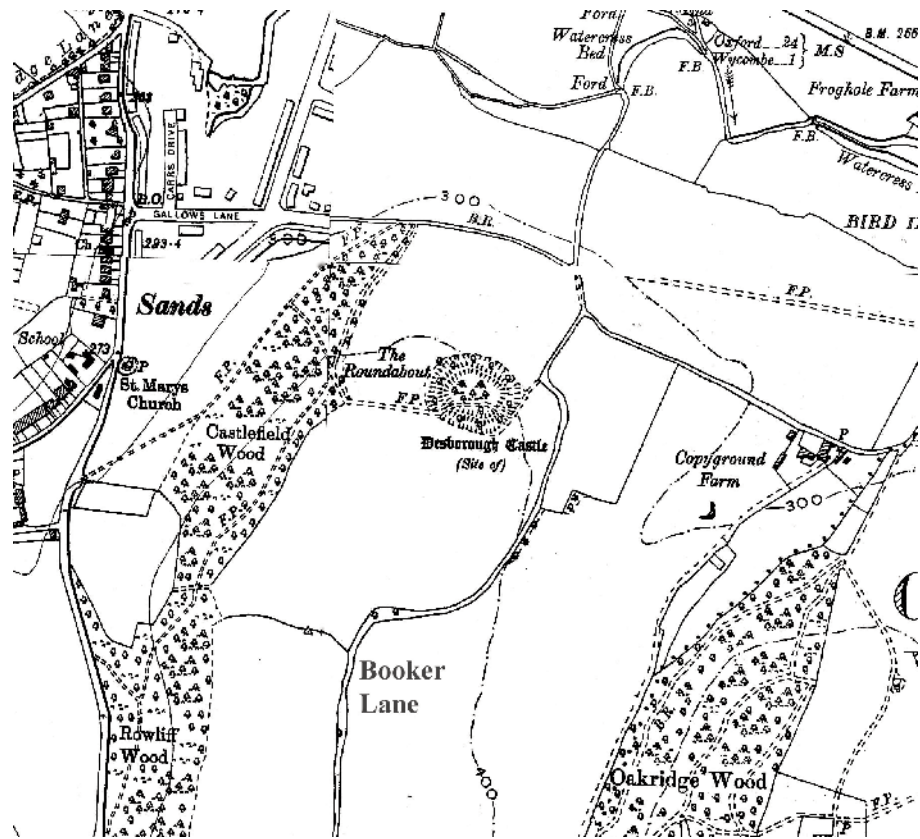


FIGURE 3 Composite six-inch Ordnance Survey maps based on 42SW (1900), 41SE second edition, 47NW (1900) and 46NE (1922). Words 'Booker Lane' added.

feet from thence will bring us to the edge of the camp proper, which consists of a double entrenchment[goes on to describe the main earthwork]

Presumably the 'outer' and 'inner' banks described here are the defences that Saunders identified, prior to their being levelled. Unfortunately this is the only known description. Early maps, such as the Tithe map of 1851/2 (BRO Tithe 420), give no clue as to the existence of any earthworks beyond the main medieval work. The award does record that 'Castle Field', which contained the main earthwork (named in the award as 'Roundabout Wood'), was under arable. Long-term arable can, of course, cause the disappearance of all but the most robust earthworks.

In a trial-excavation by Collard in 1987, in

advance of a proposed development east of Rutland Avenue (which did not eventually take place), no trace of the inner bank, indicated by the lynchet to the west, survived, although its former presence could be stratigraphically inferred (Collard 1988). Unexpectedly, the excavations did demonstrate the existence of substantial levelled outworks to the medieval 'castle', but none of these reflected the course of the defences noted above. It can be fairly confidently assumed that the outer banks indicated by the lynchet, despite Saunderson's caution, pre-dated the medieval earthwork. One possibility is that the banks were of a largely levelled hillfort. The monument is now a scheduled ancient monument (Number 19055).

A recent air photograph, taken on a misty day in February 2008 and not of high quality (Fig 2), clearly shows the curving lynchet that defines the

course of the northern defence. On the ground it is quite clear as a sloping bank up to 1.3m high. Only in a few places are there hints of the internal bank that once accompanied it, never surviving more than c. 0.3m high. There are no surface traces of either the inner or outer ditch. Nor is there any trace of the suggested southern return of the ditch noted by Allcroft and Williams Freeman, but there has been substantial earthmoving in this area, including construction of a perimeter road for the adjoining estate.

A striking feature of the local landscape is the curving course of Booker Lane. The lane swings east, immediately adjacent to the 'Castle' and then, as noted by Williams Freeman, arcs round in a pronounced curve, before heading directly south again. The lane's curve commences at the point where the northern lynchet (and 'inner' hillfort ditch) would join it (Fig. 3). Both Allcroft and Williams Freeman suggest that the course of the inner ditch was initially followed by Booker Lane, but that the ditch then broke away to the west, returning south of the mediaeval earthwork to complete the circuit. It remains to be explained why the lane continues its course for some distance further south, following the same alignment along the contour of the hill, past the point where the inner ditch turned west (with the land falling away abruptly to its east), before eventually veering west to climb towards the higher point of the spur. A possible explanation is that although the lane initially followed the course of both the inner and outer ditches, it then continued onwards to follow the line of the second, or outer, ditch which encompassed a far larger area than the, presumably earlier 'inner' ditch had done. If this hypothesis is correct, the outer ditch's return, presuming that it did follow the course of Booker Lane, would have been somewhere east of the present Cross Road.

The spine of this hypothetical larger enclosed

area, would lie roughly where Grenfell Road is now. From Grenfell Road, the land slopes downwards towards Spearing Road, which would lie close to its west/north-west side as not far beyond this the land falls quite steeply to the valley below on the west of the spur. The 'interior' of a larger enclosure would encompass ground rising gently from the 'inner' enclosure, which is slightly awkwardly placed from a defensive viewpoint.

The writer has had in mind the idea that a larger enclosure might be an extended hillfort, but is grateful to Sandy Kidd for the thought that it could equally be pre-Iron Age. All of the larger area is now under housing and the existence of a larger enclosure would not be easy to confirm, but opportunities to check the hypothesis may emerge in the future.

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EVIDENCE FOR ANGLO-SAXON ROUTEWAYS & ICKNIELD WAY IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Buckinghamshire is unfortunately not well endowed with charters related to land grants in the later Anglo-Saxon period (c.800–1066), and of the seven surviving boundary clauses, only four mention routeways of some kind. In this county, the great majority of boundary points refer to natural features or to human activity such as ditches and burial mounds.¹ This note examines the evidence provided by this source for transport links in the pre-conquest period.

1. CHETWODE-HILLESDEN (949)²

There are two roads or tracks which feature in this boundary clause: *holan weg*, ‘hollow way’ and *oderne weg*, ‘[the] other way’. Old English (OE) *weg* is the least defined of the various elements used to describe routeways. It covers anything between a rough track linking local places to cross-country routeways like Icknield Way and Fosse Way. These two boundary features are purely local routes. The hollow way runs south from Gawcott towards Hillesden, and is used by the estate boundary for a short distance near Stockingwood Farm. It is followed by a modern minor road. The ‘other’ way, presumably with reference to the hollow one is now only an unpaved track, running from Lenborough to Hillesden. Its significance is that it forms one of a cluster of paths which meet at Rowley Hill (OE *rugan beorg*, ‘rough hill or mound’) which gives its name to the local Hundred, and was its meeting place.

2. LINSLADE (966)³

Three of the boundary features in this charter refer to a *strate*. This OE word is often associated with a Roman road (e.g. Watling Street, Akeman Street), although it carries a more generic meaning of ‘paved way’.⁴ That need not indicate sophisticated metallurgy of the sort used by the Romans. The street in question forms the southern and

south-western boundary of Linslade, from the River Ouzel to the Leighton-Wing Road at Ascott. The starting point is named as Yttingaford, ‘the ford of a group called the *Yttingass*, whose territory probably lay on the Bedfordshire side of the river, the Buckinghamshire bank belonging to the *Widungas* of Wing. The name survives locally as Tiddenfoot.

It seems unlikely that a Roman road is intended here, there being no evidence for any continuation north or west of Ascott, nor on the east bank of the Ouzel. There is, however, evidence of a cross-country routeway known as the *δiodweg* (OE *δeod* ‘people, tibe, region’, probably used here in the sense ‘public way’⁵). This formed the southern boundary of an estate at Chalgrave in 926, and survived into the post-medieval period in Eggington as The Ede Way, by a characteristic form of mis-division.⁶ It is unclear where its eastern end lay, although a series of paths and tracks east of Wingfield leads to the Iron Age ditch/fort sites of Drays Ditch and Limbury north of Luton.

The Linslade *strate* may have been partly paved to assist horses and wheeled traffic up the steep slope on the west side of the Ouzel. Although by the tenth century it appears that the present Leighton-Aylesbury road was in use, passing close to the minster church at Wing, the original route evidently retained some significance. According to the late Ted Bull’s thought-provoking research into the possible existence of a county-wide bi- or co-axial prehistoric landscape of trackways, the *δiodweg* may have continued south of the A418 to reach Aylesbury via Wingrave and Hulcott, being used by the present route from Bierton.⁷ If these suggestions are combined, then the *δiodweg* could have connected the important Iron Age/post-Roman British centres of Limbury and Aylesbury, two of the places alleged to have been taken over by the West Saxons in “571” at the battle of *Biedcanford*.⁸

3. MONKS RISBOROUGH (903)⁹

The charter refers to *Icenhylte*, apparently the Upper Icknield Way, although it crosses the Lower Icknield at right angles. In this case the boundary follows this feature over a short distance, marking the division between the Vale and the Chilterns (see below). After following Icknield for a few hundred yards on the northern side of the estate, the boundary follows *cynges stræt*, ‘the king’s paved road’, although this is now merely a short length of paved road leading to the hamlet at Lower Cadsden, continuing into the hills as a footpath.¹⁰ The use of ‘king’ might be expected to denote a more significant route than this. In 903 the estate was held by the *dux* (equivalent to the later ealdorman) Æðelwulf, whose original charter had been destroyed.¹¹ The name may have arisen at a time when the neighbouring Kimble estate had already been granted away. The southern portion of Risborough remained in royal hands as Princes Risborough. The eastern Risborough was granted to the bishop of Dorchester in the late-tenth century, and then sold to the archbishop of Canterbury.¹²

4. WINSLOW, LITTLE HORWOOD AND GRANBOROUGH (c.948)¹³

Until little more than a decade ago, there was no evidence that a pre-conquest boundary clause for this multiple estate belonging to St. Albans abbey had survived. Along with other estates of that church, its boundaries were discovered in a seventeenth-century document in Belgium, unfortunately without the associated charter. Hitherto, a charter of dubious authenticity had been known which recorded the grant of this territory to St. Albans by the Mercian king Offa in 792, too early to have a detailed boundary clause.¹⁴

At a stroke, the number of named routeways in Anglo-Saxon Buckinghamshire doubled. The bounds start and finish in the north-eastern corner of Little Horwood at the *þeod weg*. This ‘public way’ ran roughly along the line followed by the Bletchley-Winslow railway, a continuation of Weasel Lane, which would connect Winslow to the suggested Roman road from the settlement at *Magiovinium* (Dropshort) on Watling Street to Water Stratford.¹⁵

The next routeway is merely a *wege*, in this case

the Winslow-Swanbourne road, which the boundary parallels for a short distance. Much more significant is the *stræt* which forms the entire southern boundary of Granborough parish though a landscape otherwise devoid of notable features. This alignment is no longer followed by any track or path, neither is it clear whether it represents a minor Roman road, although that is a possibility given its intersection with a known Roman route. (It is worth noting that the alignment of this *stræt* is followed more or less continuously by a series of minor roads as far as the Bicester-Towcester Roman road near Fringford in Oxfordshire.)

At its western end, the *stræt* reaches *hean stræt* (‘high street’), in this case the known Roman road from Fleet Marston towards Thornborough. This point, marked by a post or pillar (OE *stapol*) in the tenth century, lies at the convergence of no fewer than seven routeways.¹⁶ Some distance from where it leaves the *hean stræt* the Winslow boundary reached a second *þeod weg*. This appears to be the main Winslow-Buckingham road in the vicinity of Dudslow, ‘Dudda’s [burial] mound’.¹⁷

The final section of the Winslow-Horwood boundary follows the *gemær wege*, ‘boundary way’ from the Roman road between *Magiovinium* and Water Stratford back to its starting point, almost 1.5 miles. Compared with other Anglo-Saxon boundaries in the county, a substantial proportion of the Winslow estate is demarcated in this way, suggesting that it was carved out from a larger entity, either in the late-eighth or the mid-tenth century. On balance, the former is more likely, given the persistence of the relationship with St. Albans; the recently-discovered charter bounds merely confirming Offa’s grant.

5. ICKNIELD WAY

The *Icenhylte* of the Monks Risborough charter is assumed to be the earliest reference to Icknield Way. Far from being what many have assumed was a great prehistoric routeway linking the chalklands of Wiltshire and Berkshire to East Anglia, Sarah Harrison has recently argued that there is no evidence that it was other than the name of a local trackway prior to the 13-14th centuries.¹⁸ References prior to the twelfth century are rare, and clustered in Berkshire at the foot of the Downs, with an outlier in a similar position at Wanborough near Swindon, along with

Risborough at the foot of the Chilterns. At Wanborough the bounds refer to *Icenhilde weg* (c1050, manuscript c1250).¹⁹ The Berkshire charters in question relate to Hardwell (*Icenhilde wege*; 903, MS c.1200),²⁰ Harwell (*Icenilde/Ycenilde weg*; 960/973, MSS 12th cent.),²¹ and Blewbury (*Ichenhilde wege*; 944, MS c.1240).²² These are spread along what is now the B4507 and A417 roads for around fifteen miles (25km), although the name Icknield Way is not in current use. The Ridgeway runs between one and three miles (1.5–5km) to the south. This route runs towards a Thames crossing at Goring. It seems probable that we have here a routeway linking, but generally not passing through, scarp-foot settlements, and of relatively local significance.

In Buckinghamshire the Risborough reference is the only one to Icknield from before 1066, and the absence of *weg*, which is used elsewhere in the

charter, may mean that this is not a track. The alignment named Icknield Way, together with its Upper and Lower manifestations, currently runs from the Ewelme area in Oxfordshire north-eastwards through Risborough, Wendover and Ivinghoe towards Dunstable, always at the foot of the Chiltern escarpment, between about 350 and 600ft OD, if indeed the Upper Icknield Way around Bledlow actually represents a long-distance medieval trackway. The only evidence that this “eastern” Icknield Way ran to the Goring Gap to meet that from Berkshire is the name of a much later farm in South Stoke (Oxon.), so that we may be dealing with two quite separate routeways sharing a name.

So, what evidence is there for the name Icknield Way in post-eleventh century Buckinghamshire? The collection of material on field-names and other local names has so far yielded a reasonable corpus of material:

Aston Clinton	1639	Ecknell Way	BGT 6
Bledlow	1685	Hackney Way	BRS 5 398/22 no.38
Drayton Beauchamp	1607	Egleway/Eglenway	BGT 42
Edlesborough	1839	Icknield First Piece	Tithe; Dagnall North
Edlesborough	1839	Icknield, Furlong down to	Tithe; Dagnall South
Edlesborough	1875	Icknield Way Piece, Upper/Lower	BAS Gurney Map
Ellesborough	1639	Acknell Way	BGT 48
Ellesborough	1805	Akeman Street Way	Encl.
Ellesborough	c1190	Akemannestrete	MC 3/602
Great Kimble	1341	Ekenild	Non Inq
Ivinghoe	1603	Ecknell Waie	BAS Gurney 70; Ct Rolls
Kimbles	<1190	Akemannestret	MC 2/435
Kimbles	e13th	Ikenild	MC 2/509
Kimbles	1227	Akemanestrete	MC 2/455
Marsworth	1639	Ecknill Furlong	BGT 86
Marsworth	1809	Icknield Furlong	Encl. BRO IR58a
Marsworth	1809	Icknield Road	Encl. BRO IR58a
Pitstone	1838	Icknield Way, Furlong above	Tithe
Pitstone	c1600	Icknield Way Furlong	BAS Woodman 14; Rental
Princes Risborough	1810	Icknield Way, Furlong shtg. on	BRO IR/22 (ii)
Princes Risborough	1823	Icknield Road, Upper/Lower	Encl./BRO IR87Q
Princes Risborough	1823	Icknield Way Furlong	Encl./BRO IR87Q; Monks Risb bdy
Princes Risborough	c1821	Icknield Furlong	BRO D42/G2.T; also 1810
Saunderton	1227	Ykenildestret	FF 15/17 33
Saunderton	1807	Acnel way	Encl.
Saunderton	1807	Icknield Way Close	Encl.
Wendover	1607	Acnell way	BGT 127
Wendover	1639	Eglon Way	BGT 128

The name Akeman Street which properly belongs to the Roman Road between *Verulamium* (St. Albans) and Bath, and which crosses Buckinghamshire between Aston Clinton and Ludgershall was evidently applied to parts of Icknield Way, as was the case in Oxfordshire in the 13th-14th centuries at Watlington and Chinnor.²³ Hackney Way appears both at Bledlow and Crowmarsh.²⁴

The bewildering array of spellings, both medieval and later, testifies to the difficulties facing anybody attempting to interpret the meaning of the name *Icknield*. Margaret Gelling favours a pre-English origin, while Eilert Ekwall opts for 'the etymology of this name has not been found'.²⁵ Mawer and Stenton go further, first stating that 'no suggestion can be offered as to its etymology', later modified to 'there can be little doubt that *Icenhyllte* is purely British in origin', without adducing any specific meaning!²⁶ At least none of these scholars favoured the common link with East Anglian place-names containing the Anglo-Saxon personal name *Icel*. Unfortunately, the most recent study of the Celtic impact on English place-names makes no mention whatever of the possibility that Icknield is Celtic, and while it may be agreed that river-names quite often contain roots which are pre-Celtic, this is not the case with the names of trackways.²⁷ Prof. Jackson in his seminal study of 1953 equally seems to find no evidence that Icknield has its roots in the pre-Old English era.²⁸

In the face of such scholarly uncertainty and silence, it is perhaps rash to contemplate what Icknield means. There are however two OE place-naming elements which might offer a solution, even if they do not obviously appear to underlie the pre-conquest forms given above. The first element is OE *æcen*/**ācen* 'oaken, growing with oaks'.²⁹ This is found in the names Eggington (Beds.) and Ekeney (Bucks.), and in i-mutated form in Itchingwood (Sur.). The assorted medieval and later names in Eck- and Ack-, together with the earliest and modern forms in Ick- suggest that this may also underlie Icknield. The occurrence of -h- at the start of the second element in the charters also suggests a possible OE origin: the word *holt* 'a wood or thicket', which has a recorded alternative form **hylte*.³⁰ This element is often qualified with tree-names, hence giving a possible meaning of 'oak[en] wood' for Icknield. In this case the name found in the charters would mean 'way past or through the oak wood', and as such could have

arisen independently wherever this was appropriate, and not necessarily signifying a long-distance route of any kind. Oak field-names are unusual in the Chiltern area of Buckinghamshire, oak occurring in only three parishes out of the 46 with recorded examples, and oaken in two out of fifteen parishes.

Alternatively, the name may have appeared in one or other of the areas between Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire and been extended to a longer route when this was developed in the medieval period (cf. the application of Watling Street to the whole Roman road from Dover to Chester, from the tribal name *Wæclingas* in the St. Albans area, also the use of Akeman Street for the Roman road between St. Albans and Bath, the latter appearing as *Ācemanescæster* early in the AS period).³¹ In attempting to ascertain the history of the name Icknield, it is instructive to examine early maps, although they do not show large numbers of routeways prior to the mid-eighteenth century. In addition, prior to advent of Ordnance Survey maps after 1800, they were almost always on a county basis.³² An early example is Warburton's map of Hertfordshire (1749), which names Icknield Way from Drayton Beauchamp, south of Ivinghoe and Edlesborough right across to Royston and beyond. The first Buckinghamshire map to name Icknield Way seems to be Jeffreys in 1770, where it refers only to the section between Ivinghoe and Dunstable. Andrews & Dury (1777) name it eastwards from south of Lewknor to Saunderton as *A Roman Road Ickneld Way*, thus following the line of what is now called Upper Icknield Way. Cary's maps of 1778 and 1789 name Icknield Way between Pitstone and Dunstable, as well as Akeman Street Way northwest of Aylesbury. Bryant's map of 1825 names Icknield Way, following the Upper route between Saunderton, Great Kimble, Ivinghoe to Dagnall cross roads.

The first edition one-inch Ordnance Survey maps do not consistently name cross-country routeways, either because they were not required to do so by the Board of Ordnance, or because of the whims of individual surveyors and even engravers. Sheet 7, published 1 August 1822, names both the Upper and Lower Icknield Ways, the former only between Wainhill and Saunderton, but the latter from near Chinnor to Ellesborough. This seems to be the first formal use of two names for separate alignments, although it does not prove their long-term existence.

The adjacent map to the west (Sheet 13, published 1 May 1830) does not name this as a through route, either east or west of the Thames at the Goring Gap. Between Lockinge and Upton (Berks.) it is called “a branch of the Ickleton Street”, and between Woolstone and Wantage “The Port Way”. The present Ridgeway route south of Lockinge and Ilsley is shown as “The Ridge Way or Ickleton Street”. This suggests that the Icknield Way identifiable from the tenth-century charters was not known by a consistent name in the early-nineteenth century. (Port Way is a common name of Old English origin for a route into a market town.) Sheet 34 to the south (published 12 August 1828) names only the Ridgeway along the Berkshire Downs, as “Ridge Road”. Sheet 46 (published 1 December 1834) names Icknield Way from south of Halton to Tring Wharf, south of Ivinghoe and Edlesborough to Dunstable and beyond. Taken together, the evidence of these early “official” maps indicates no consistency in the use of Icknield Way except as a collection of south-west to north-east roads and tracks following the Chiltern escarpment.

To summarise, early county mapmakers appear to have favoured the Upper Icknield Way route if they named it on their maps, with the OS surveyors introducing the Upper/Lower distinction, but not in any consistent way, and not south-west of the Buckinghamshire-Oxfordshire boundary. Field-name and other evidence shows that the name Icknield was known and used from the tenth-century in Buckinghamshire. Continuity of use north of the Berkshire Downs and in Oxfordshire is less apparent, however. This lends support to the arguments of Sarah Harrison that the name was localised until the late- or post-medieval period. The parishes of the Chiltern scarp region are commonly elongated north-west to south-east, with local routes developing within each parish to link the various agricultural and woodland assets. Icknield Way provided an inter-parish link, in a reasonably direct line from Aston Rowant (Oxon.) to the World’s End north of Wendover, and from Marsworth to Dunstable, generally by-passing the principal settlements in each parish. The route followed between Wendover and Pitstone is, however, far from clear.

CONCLUSION

From the very limited evidence provided by Anglo-Saxon charter boundary clauses, it appears that

settlements were linked by a well-developed network of routeways. These fall into two groups, known in Old English as *stræt* and *weg*. Some, but not all, of the former do appear to represent known or inferred Roman roads, characterised by some kind of paving. There was no doubt a hierarchy of “ways” in terms of their width, surface quality and the sorts of places which they connected.

The use of the qualifier *þeod* indicates that some were considered to be what we should call public highways, over which people and goods could move as of right. Others, like the hollow way and the “other” way around Hillesden may have been more restricted, although both seem to be little different in terms of their origins and destinations. In the absence of a much larger sample of route-names, however, it would be unwise to press this distinction too far.

Little further evidence on routeways in medieval Buckinghamshire is available until the late-twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From data so far collected on the field- and local-names of the county, there are seventy-three examples of names containing Middle English *wey[e]/way[e]* prior to 1300, and twenty-four examples of *stret[e]*, a ratio of 3:1, compared with a ratio 1.25:1 for the unrepresentative sample of pre-conquest names. The major difference is that in none of the post-1200 examples is the name unqualified, hardly surprising given the need to be able to identify each route for administrative or travel purposes. Examples of purely local routes are the Mill Ways and Wood Ways (four each), and the Ridge Ways and Hollow Ways (three each). Longer-distance traffic flows are implicit in the eight examples of Portway, a *port* being Old/Middle English for a market centre (e.g. Newport Pagnell). So far, these names occur mostly in the north-east and north-west of the county.

Later-medieval street-names tend to refer to more important routes, sometimes with recognisably modern names such as Akeman Street, Watling Street and, unusually, Icknield Street (Saunderton, 1227). *Herestret* at Maids Moreton (1280; OE *here stræt*, ‘army road’) must be a carry-over from Anglo-Saxon times, as must the assorted Fielden Streets (Ellesborough, early-13th; Biddlesden, 1210/1260; Shalstone 1260), and Fielden Way (Missenden, 13th; possibly Horsenden, 1210). This name derived from OE *filde* (genitive pl. *fildeana*, ‘dwellers in the *feld*, or open countryside’, as distinct from woodland areas).³³ Feldon is the

name of the more open part of Warwickshire, in contrast to the wooded Arden, but the Buckinghamshire examples probably refer to more localised variations in the landscape. All are in areas, either in the north-west corner of the county, or in the Chilterns, where such contrasts will have been significant. Clearly, the 'open-country dwellers' were identified as such before the OE word became obsolete.

The only example of a post-conquest name which *might* tie in with the early charter evidence is *Kyngesweye* in Great Kimble (1286), which may represent the *cynges street* of the 903 Risborough boundary.

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A MEDIEVAL SEAL FROM CRESLOW

In the 1990s *Records* published several Notes on medieval seal matrices that had been found in the county. Quite large numbers of these artefacts continue to be discovered, often by metal detectorists, not only in Buckinghamshire but also throughout the country. For example the Norfolk Portable Antiquities Scheme recorded 53 in 2002, 55 in 2003, 57 in 2004 and 56 in 2005: a total of 366 in 8 years have been reported in that county. Nationally the Portable Antiquities Scheme has records for 1,500 medieval seals. Adding these to the many already in museum and other collections, it should be possible to link some to individuals known from deeds and documents, and to draw some conclusions about the type of people who owned seals and even about levels of literacy in medieval society.

Paul Willis found the matrix illustrated here with its impression, at Creslow in 2004. He brought it to the attention of Ros Tyrrell, Finds Liaison Officer at the County Museum, and has kindly allowed me to illustrate it. It is a faceted conical matrix with a suspension loop, in copper alloy, 18mm high and

16mm diameter. The matrix makes an impression of a squirrel in profile holding a nut in its claws. Within a pelleted frame is the inscription * I CRAKE NOTIS (= I crack nuts). Its probable date is the first quarter of the 14th century.

There is an obvious question of why an owner chose a particular symbol or design for his, or her, personal seal. Medieval seals were used for attesting legal documents and for authenticating official correspondence, and so usually carry the name of the owner, often with a heraldic emblem. It has been suggested that whereas the nobility and religious houses had seals made to order by respected goldsmiths, the lower ranks of society might purchase cheap ready-made 'off-the-peg' seals, whose designs might be duplicated. Some seals bear devices that are difficult to interpret. Besides those with obvious religious or moral connotations, many carry portrayals of animals (for example *Recs Bucks* 33). These were presumably affixed on less formal correspondence. The medieval bestiary might assist identification of the qualities signified by some of the animal designs but the intended

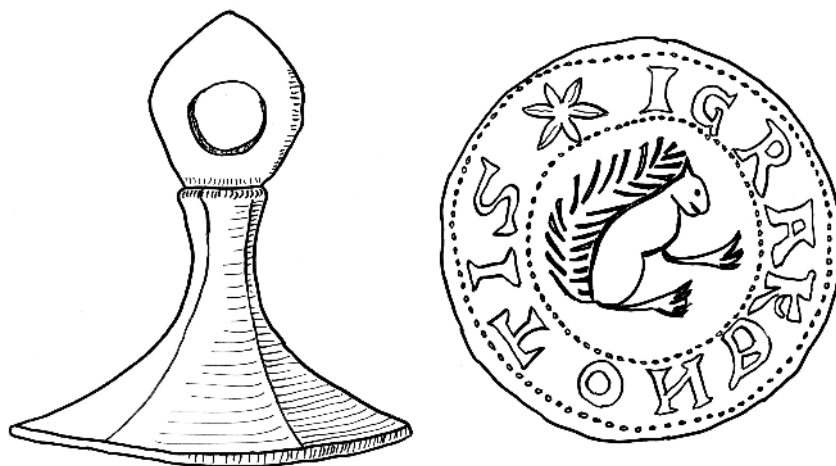


Figure 1 Medieval seal from Creslow.

meaning is sometimes elusive. The squirrel cracking nuts appears quite frequently on seals. The emblem may derive from the fact that ladies liked squirrels as pets (please remember these are red squirrels!) but there could also be an element of sexual *double entendre*. The medieval French story 'L'Esquirel' reveals that in the 13th century cracking nuts had sexual connotations. If this is the covert message of the Creslow seal, the matrix

would presumably have been used to seal very private correspondence of an amatory nature, leaving a suspicion that for some the morals of the fourteenth century were no stricter than those of the twenty-first.

I am very grateful to Paul Willis and to Ros Tyrrell for their cooperation in recording this seal.

George Lamb

NEW LIGHT ON QUARRENDON

The deserted village of Quarrendon lies to the north of Aylesbury just off the A41 road to Bicester. Over the years it has aroused much comment, most recently because the large housing estate of Berryfields – yet to be built – threatens to envelop it. A few years ago, Paul Everson investigated the archaeology of the Quarrendon site (*Records of Bucks* vol 41); while he does refer to some documentary sources, they are not the focus of his attention.

From February 2006 to April 2008 I worked on the revision of the Manorial Documents Register of Buckinghamshire and had occasion to identify the manorial records of Quarrendon, now in the Dillon collection at Oxfordshire Record Office (ref DIL/X/a-d). Everson mentions one or two records from this collection but he clearly did not study them in any depth. E K Chambers's *The Lees of Quarrendon*, (Oxford 1936), which traces the story of the Lees family, seems to be the only published work to have made significant use of this source. The surviving sets of records are very good: account rolls (misleadingly described as rent rolls in the Dillon catalogue) 1389–1443; court rolls 1396, 1411–55, 1471–72, 1485–92, 1505, 1571, 1591, 1605, 1623; and rent-rolls 1433, 1623 and 1701. These records have yet to be studied in any detail, but there is reason to believe that they could provide the key to a better understanding of medieval Quarrendon.

It has long been recognised that manorial records can be used to create a surprisingly detailed picture of medieval communities. Thus, P.D.A. Harvey's seminal work, *A Medieval Oxford-*

shire Village: Cuxham (OUP 1965) drew primarily on the very fine series of manorial records at Merton College, and other studies have followed suit. Yet truly in-depth study does require a long series of consecutive court rolls and preferably accounts as well. Quarrendon's records are not in that league. However, the 54-year run of account rolls appears to be complete and hence sufficient to be capable of revealing a good deal about the economy and wealth of the manor. Since there was only one manor at Quarrendon, the village and manor may be assumed to be co-terminous.

All inhabitants would owe suit to the manor court and render some sort of fee or service to the lord – whether rent as a copyhold tenant or suit of court as a free tenant. The account rolls should allow identification of most, if not all, of the properties within the manor and reveal how much they yielded to the lord in rent or service. They also give an idea about livestock as animals are often listed and valued on the back of the account roll. This is particularly useful for a manor like Quarrendon, where one of the chief issues to be resolved is when mixed farming gave way to purely sheep farming. The court rolls can also be used to chart changes in ownership and migration into or out of the village. Although the sequence of rolls is broken, the admissions and surrenders – which figure prominently in every court roll – may still illustrate shifts in population, in terms of vacant properties or of the buying up of land by one particular family. Pleas on the court rolls often concern broken fences, encroachments, or unlawful pasturing of animals – again of interest at Quar-

rendon, where early inclosure has been identified but not pinned down in terms of date or means.

Another consideration, hitherto neglected, is the status of the manor of Quarrendon. In the Middle Ages, Quarrendon was the centre of a Barony or Honour of Quarrendon and the *Victoria County History* (VCH) dates its duration throughout the thirteenth century. In feudal terms, honours form an additional tier between king and manorial lord and thus the VCH refers to them in terms of overlordship. Essentially an honour comprised a collection of manors or fees. Some honours were very large, bringing together manors across several counties, while others were quite small, consisting of several local pieces of land, often termed knights fees. Honours held their own courts and revenue was collected by the honour lord as well as the manorial lord. Buckinghamshire had several small honours of which Quarrendon was one (others included Long Crendon and Hanslope) but none survived the medieval period. However, in later times, traces of the honour could still be reflected in the make-up of an individual manor.

In the case of Quarrendon, the records show that the manor had outlying portions at East Aston (Ivinghoe), Ballinger (Great Missenden), Seabrook (Ivinghoe) and Cheddington, East Claydon and Botolph Claydon, Addington and Bierton. These outlying parts are called tithings in the records and probably represent the fees that made up the honour of Quarrendon. Suitors and tenants from these portions would have been expected to attend every court, yielding rents and other dues, taking part in the jury and answering disputes etc. The court rolls and accounts record the presence of people from the outlying parts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, long after the honour had ceased to function. Quarrendon's members are particularly far flung – so that many coming for the day's court would have required food and drink and overnight lodging for themselves and their attendants. The fifteenth century rolls show the courts were held twice a year; hence at these times, traffic into and through Quarrendon must have been quite considerable, providing a focal point for trade.

A further point to consider is the influence of the lord of the manor. From 1332 Quarrendon, along with Hanslope, Aston Clinton, Buckland and several others in the county, was one of the manors held by the Earls of Warwick. Of course, the Earls of Warwick rose to particular prominence in the

fifteenth century in the person of Richard Neville, known as 'Warwick the Kingmaker'. Warwick maintained an impressive private army and, given the costs involved, one can only suppose he milked all his manors for all they were worth. Shortly before Richard Neville became Earl of Warwick, the Lees make their first appearance in the Quarrendon rolls. Benedict Lee is named in the account roll of 1442¹ as "collector" of rents; previous holders are variously called reeve, bailiff or collector: There is every reason to believe Benedict was rent collector *alias* reeve, *alias* bailiff as well. He was thus the lord of the manor's official representative in the locality. It is perhaps significant that Lee was not a local man but, as Chambers points out, came from Warwick, the centre of the Warwick estates. Did he have some position in the Warwick household? Why was he, rather than a local man, chosen as bailiff? The Kingmaker's death in battle in 1471 ended the Warwick supremacy and fortune and there was confusion and dispute over the descent of the estates. In 1488 the Countess of Warwick surrendered her estate, including the manors of Quarrendon and Hanslope, to the Crown. With the Nevilles out of the picture, in 1499 Richard Lee opportunely purchased the lease of the manor of Quarrendon. The obvious question – not really addressed in the past – is how the dominance and fall of the Earls of Warwick affected the economy and wealth of Quarrendon. How did it compare with other manors of the once great Warwick estate? The Quarrendon records at Oxfordshire must surely provide some answers and even give further clues as to the course of Quarrendon's prosperity and demise.

It may seem surprising that these records have been overlooked in the past. Yet one need look no further than the multi-membraned, closely written, abbreviated Latin parchment rolls to find a reason. Although in good physical condition and written in a good hand – as one might expect in an important manor belonging to the Earls of Warwick – the account rolls are particularly challenging. Yet, until these records have been analysed and studied in depth, the history of the rise and fall of Quarrendon will remain incomplete. It is to be hoped that someone will rise to the challenge.

Sarah Charlton

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states that Benedict Lee was named collector in 1438 as well as 1442; however the catalogue to the Dillon MSS records that William Sprotte was collector in 1438, an office he held from 1434–1440.

MYSTERY AMERICAN DIGS IN ON IVINGHOE BEACON

The 2008 edition of *Records* marks the centenary of a mysterious series of excavations on Ivinghoe Beacon. An account of the excavations is recorded in the Society's letter books and there is a brief mention of them in the contemporary number of *Records* (*Recs Bucks* 9, 461). The National Trust acquired the Beacon in 1926, but in 1908 it was still owned by the Brownlow family. The Trust has been carrying out an archaeological survey of the area (due for completion in 2008) and this has provided a suitable occasion to reappraise the original letters. They offer salutary lessons on the interpretation of unpublished excavations and, indeed, on the tensions between amateur and professional archaeologists – a phenomenon still evident today.

The letters are from Edwin Hollis, the Society's first Curator, and are addressed to several committee members, but primarily to Alfred Cocks, the previous Honorary Curator. The first letter is dated 11 September 1908 and the sequence continues until 10 November. The letters explain that a Californian named Sandford, together with an 'accomplice' called Hicks and an unnamed 'navvy', had gained permission to sink several shafts into an area of existing workings in the chalk. The exact locations are not specified, although Hollis describes them as '*in the dip where the road runs through between Beacon Hill and Steps Hill*'. A sketch plan and section with compass orientation is given in Hollis's final letter. Hollis made several visits to the site and his letters report the progress of the excavations. It appears that four or five shafts (the sketch only shows two), 10 feet in depth, were sunk to reach an existing tunnel measuring roughly 50 feet in length and 3 feet in diameter. At

the west end of the tunnel a gallery was encountered measuring 12 feet in length, 9 feet in width and between 3 and 6 feet in height. Evidence of charcoal fires was found within the tunnel. Hollis also reported that they had cleared what was evidently an artificial trench about 30 ft long, 4 ft wide and 2½ deep in undisturbed chalk. He also mentions a caved-in 'well', which the excavators had cleared to arrive at the surface.

The purpose of these excavations remains a mystery; unfortunately Hollis does not make clear what the excavators were looking for. However, according to the notebooks of F G Gurney, an active local archaeologist and antiquarian in the locality (his notebooks are held by Beds. Records Office), it seems that Sandford was also digging at Totternhoe in Bedfordshire. Sandford was interested in the occult and was looking for flints carrying images of James I and Charles I. It seems that, at Ivinghoe, Sandford and his associates explored a series of existing workings, comprising a narrow tunnel and gallery, and a surface trench. The area in question is pitted with a number of small chalk quarries, which would have supplied material for liming the fields, and perhaps for road surfacing. The existing tunnel may have been dug for exploring a specific seam of hard chalk, or perhaps for exploiting one of the seams of flint found within the flint. Farley refers to the diggings at Ivinghoe in an article on 'chalk wells' (*Records* 21 (1979), 138). These 'wells' were a common feature in the Chilterns, though typically they took the form of a deep shaft leading to a series of horizontal galleries.

The mystery surrounding the episode is heightened by the deeply suspicious tone of Hollis's

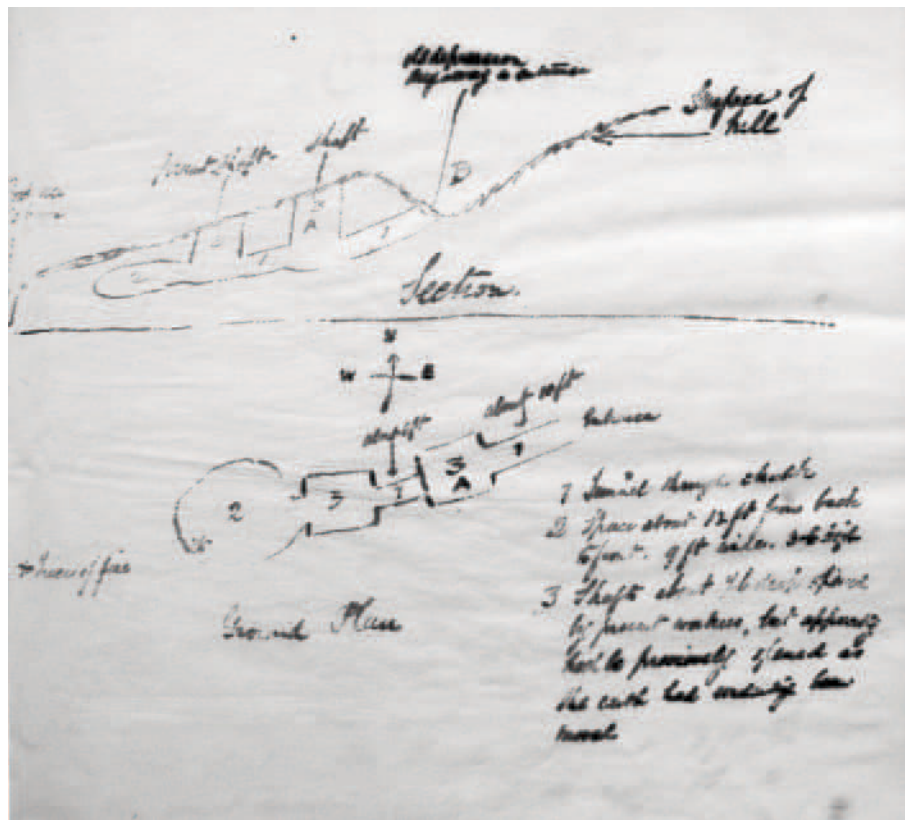


FIGURE 1 Section and plan of plan of Mr Sandford's excavations at Ivinghoe Beacon: from the Society's 1908 Letter Book.

letters. He describes Sandford as 'uncommunicative' and on several occasions expresses doubts about Sandford's truthfulness. Thus, he writes on 12 September:

They are staying at the Bridgewater Arms near Ashridge Park and tell me they shall be leaving there this Tuesday, but I think this is very likely a blind, to prevent me coming up to look round again.

In a letter of 8 October he observes:

They say they have found nothing and think they have done now. But I feel sure they are going on as they have a theodolite there and I could see a fresh line of stakes as if they are laying out another trench.

Hollis resorted to desperate measures to try to discover what was going on; he reports on 12 September:

I think with the glasses I can see from our roof if they continue working at the same place and if they do, I will ride up again.

Sadly, it seems that no account of the excavations was ever written up, even though Hollis urged Sandford to do this. It does appear that attempts were made to take photographs, but these were ruined because Sandford forgot to wind his film forward – and so all the views were on one exposure!

Gary Marshall

STROLLING PLAYERS AT AYLESBURY IN 1881

One of the joys of working on Census Enumerators' Books is that a search for information about one topic – in this case the railwaymen of Aylesbury in 1881 – often throws up fascinating information about something completely different. Thus, while scanning the 'Occupation' column for more signalmen, porters and engine drivers, my eye alighted on a 'Juvenile Prodigy' and 'The Little Wonder'. This was surely too good an opportunity to pass over.

The 'Juvenile Prodigy' was Paul Beckett, aged five, and 'The Little Wonder', his sister Ruby, aged three. On census night – 4 April 1881 – both were lodging at the Cross Keys in Market Square. The young boy and girl were members of the family of Frederick Beckett, most of whom were connected with the stage. Frederick himself, a comedian aged 30, had been born in San Francisco, California, at a time when the gold rush would have been at its height. Frederick's wife, Elizabeth, was a 26-year old actress. Apparently, Elizabeth had also been born in the United States, although, as we shall see, this was inaccurate. It seems to have involved an appropriate element of 'artistic licence', either on the part of Frederick Beckett or of the enumerator – perhaps carried away by this rather exotic family. The Becketts had five children: Ada aged 8, born Portsmouth; Georgina aged 7, born Great Torrington, Devon, both scholars; Frederick aged 6, born Aberdeen, an actor; Paul, the Juvenile Prodigy, born Goole; and Ruby aged 3, the Little Wonder, born Dundee. Also at the Cross Keys that day was John Beckett, comedian aged 40, also born in San Francisco and evidently Frederick's brother.

Here we have a classic family troupe and, as witnessed by the birthplaces of the children, always on the move. The key role of the railway network in facilitating such a lifestyle is clear. With five children under ten to care for, poor Elizabeth must have had little enough time for her acting. Even though the Becketts would have spent only a few weeks in any one place, they appear to have been obliged to send their children to school, although the enumerator initially recorded them all as 'comedian'. The

practice whereby even very young children were expected to earn their living on the boards certainly had a long tradition behind it. Indeed, it continued in stage and circus families well into the twentieth century (and to some extent even to the present-day).

The Becketts clearly visited a wide range of towns and cities. In some they would have performed in purpose-built theatres or music halls. In others, like Aylesbury, without such facilities, they would have used public houses, corn exchanges, town halls or the like. Unfortunately, the two local papers are silent about where the family might have been performing in April 1881, clearly regarding such entertainers as too frivolous for their columns. (The Census was taken two weeks before Easter.) The family offered a typical mixture of comedy, acting and specialised "turns" from the children.

There were other stage professionals in Aylesbury at the same time. John and Caroline Windley were both comedians, he aged 45 and from Leicester, she 35 and from London. With their one-year-old daughter Kate, they were boarding at 31 Kingsbury Square. This was the home of a boot manufacturer. No.18 St Mary's Square was the home of a retired butcher's daughter and the lodgers included: Frank Orchard, aged 25, an actor born at Deptford; Frederick Hazelton, aged 35, actor and musician from Lambeth; and John Freeman, aged 30, actor from Sheffield. Nearby 6 Church Row was another house full of stage people, part headed by Maud Osmond, a 32-year old widow from Birmingham, actress, with her son-in-law Herman Schupp, aged 22, born in Germany and a pianist. Lizzie Willan, also described as head of household, was an actress from Nottingham, aged 22, with a boarder George Knight from Slough, a 21-year old pantomimist. Evidently the townspeople of Aylesbury had a true variety programme to look forward to in April 1881.

Unfortunately, there seems to be no record of the Beckett brothers in earlier censuses, either in the

USA or in Britain. Frederick's family can, however, be traced in 1891 and 1901. In 1891, they were lodging in Rickmansworth. At the Foresters Arms were Ruby, now an ordinary actress, aged 14, with her sister Georgina, now 18 and married as her surname is Longrain. At a cottage in Talbot Road we find Frederick junior and Paul, both actors, while at the Feathers in Church Street lodged their parents. Frederick, aged 41 comedian, born in the USA but a British subject. Elizabeth, however, was now recorded as having been born at New Cross, London – rather than in the United States. Her birth in London was confirmed by the 1901 Census.

By the Spring of 1901, Frederick Beckett had died, and the family headed by Elizabeth was now described as visiting Aynscombe Cottages in Orpington High Street. After two decades, Ruby and Paul were still together on the stage and neither had married. They had a younger brother Henry, born 1891 at Rugby, presumably after the family had left Rickmansworth. Also in the rather crowded cottage were Arthur Lawrence and Jessie Tolhurst, actor and actress.

There the trail of the Becketts ends until the 1911 Census becomes available. They seem to have been adroit at avoiding the official registration of

the births of their various children in England and Scotland, not to mention the marriage of Frederick and Elizabeth c.1872 – a salutary warning to family historians about the realities of “compulsory” registration.

The Windleys can also be traced in 1891, to 36 St Johns Terrace Leicester. John was then a journalist and teacher of elocution, while Caroline had no occupation. They had three lodgers, an actor and vocalist, a vocalist and a piano tuner, evidence of the long tradition of former actors accommodating fellow artistes.

One can only admire the energy involved in a life of perpetual theatrical touring, from one digs to another every few weeks. The fact that Frederick Beckett died in his forties suggests that the touring life took its toll. It appears that the Becketts never advanced beyond a ceaseless round of provincial performances in place large and small, but nevertheless brought their varied talents to entertain many thousands who would otherwise experience little in the way of organised, as opposed to self-generated, popular culture.

Keith Bailey

WORLD WAR I PRACTICE TRENCHES AT HALTON

In 2001 while checking for archaeological features in the County Archaeological Service's collection of 1940s air photographs, Ian Scrivener-Lindley noted what are clearly First World War practice trenches adjacent to Lodge Farm, Buckland, near Halton (Figs.1 and 2) .

From September 1913 Halton became the base for a major military presence through the generosity of Alfred de Rothschild (Adam 1983, 77–79). By the summer of 1914, the 21st Yorkshire, the senior division of Kitchener's Third New Army (c12,000 men) were training there, and carrying out trenching practice. Their trenching system was still being added to in the spring of 1916. Adam estimates that between 15–20,000 men trained

there. In the winter the land became very waterlogged. In view of the extent of the works, it is not surprising that one stretch at least, remained visible in 1945. Although the site has not been investigated on the ground, more recent air photos appear to show that the trenches have been ploughed flat.

Other First World War practice trenches that survive in Buckinghamshire have previously been identified on Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough (Wise 1991; Farley 1998) and at Pullingshill Wood, Marlow (Dawson 2007; Laker 2008).

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FIGURE 1 RAF air photo showing practice trenches at Halton.(RAF 106G/UK/717 Frame 3015. Copy in Bucks CC Historic Environment Record, Run 163.



FIGURE 2 Detail of practice trenches near Lodge Farm, Buckland.

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Julie Wise and Michael Farley

THE CHEVENIX TRENCH BEQUEST

John Chevenix Trench, whose full obituary can be found in *Records* 44, was an active member of the Society for over 40 years and was the meticulous Editor of *Records* from 1980 to 1997. He was a man of many parts with several unexpected enthusiasms, from choirs to detective-story writing. His fascination with history and archaeology led him to study in detail the village of Coleshill where he lived, and this in turn led him into vernacular architecture. Not only was he a competent draughtsman but he developed considerable documentary research skills at the P.R.O. and elsewhere. In the twenty years after 1974, he and Pauline Fenley published a number of studies of Buckinghamshire timber-framed buildings, including the definitive description of the County Museum buildings.

When he died in 2003 his will included a generous bequest to the Society and the Chiltern Open Air Museum. The sum of £2,000 left to the Society reflected John's particular interest in buildings: it was his wish "that the sum be used for dendro-dating [tree ring-dating] of buildings in consultation with the Director for the time being of the Chiltern Open Air Museum." In the past few years various proposals have come before B.A.S. Council and each time the possibilities were explored with the advice of the Chiltern Open Air Museum.

The National Trust has been the recipient of two awards from the bequest, first for dating the buildings at the King's Head in Aylesbury (2004) and the buildings at New Inn, Stowe (2006). Unfortunately, the timbers at the King's Head proved unsuitable for

dating, and samples taken from the rear stable range – thought to date from the 15th century – proved inconclusive. Samples taken from the New Inn were more fruitful, providing a felling date of 1717 for the timbers of the main range and confirming documentary evidence which suggested that the inn was built in this year, possibly to the designs of Thomas Harris. Samples from the north and south ranges of the courtyard gave less precise dates but suggest that these ranges are contemporary.

A third award was made to support the buildings analysis component of the Whittlewood Project in 2005. Six buildings in the project area – covering the twelve civil parishes within the former Whittlewood Forest – were initially identified for dendro-dating. Only one of these – Bridge House in Lillingstone Lovell – was considered suitable and was sampled. The results confirmed the Late Medieval origins of one of the cross wings of the building but could not furnish a more precise date for the earlier main range. The analysis of the six buildings offered did suggest, however, that the timbers in these buildings were fast-grown in closed canopy conditions, implying that the local forests from which they derived may have been deliberately planted with foresight in the early medieval period for future building purposes.

The fourth and final award was made for the dating of Castle House in Buckingham (2007). This grade I listed town house has been the subject of several studies over the years, culminating in the publication '*Castle House, Buckingham*' by Julian Hunt and John Clarke. The impressive front range

was built in 1708 but the rear ranges were thought to date from the early 15th century. Only the rear west range contained wood suitable for sampling and the roof yielded five timbers which matched with each other, two of these retaining complete sapwood. They were found to have been felled in

the winters of 1405/6 and 1406/7, making the likely date of construction 1407, or a year or two after this date.

The results from these four projects have been of considerable interest and the Society is most grateful for the bequest.