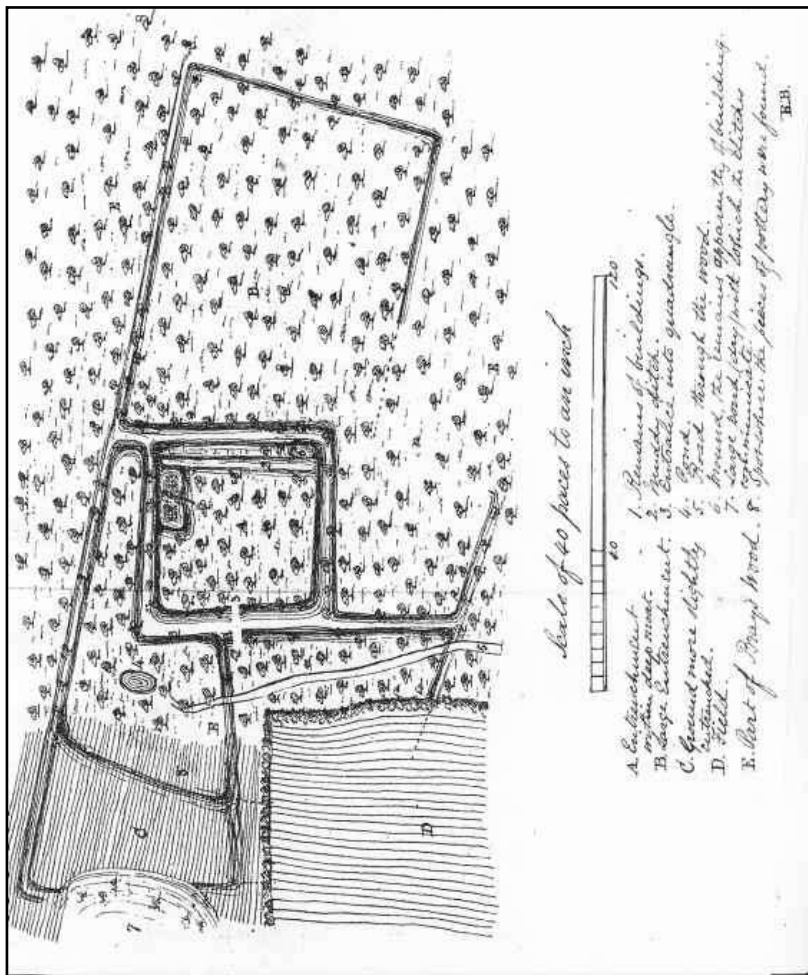


ON THE ENTRENCHMENTS IN BRAY'S WOOD,
NEAR LEE, GREAT MISSENDEN, BUCKS.
BY BOUGHEY BURGESS, ESQ.

No one passing along the road from Lee to Chesham would suppose, that in the large wood on the left hand side as he proceeds towards Charteridge large entrenchments lie concealed. They are overgrown with forest trees for the most part, hut this year a corner of one of the large enclosures has been laid bare, and turned up by the plough. The trees are mostly fine beeches, and appear to have stood for many a long year, and I believe the oldest inhabitant remembers a wood to have been there. To stumble upon a bank and deep ditch, enclosing a square of land in a thick wood, is particularly interesting, conjuring up, as it does, fancies as to what their object was, what building might have stood there, or whose camp or village they might have protected, the time that has elapsed since they were deserted, and become overgrown with forest. This is particularly the case amongst the woods of the Chilterns, evidently the remains of that huge forest which extended from their crest for miles towards the south-east. Any one who 15 or 20 years ago saw the magnificent beech woods which clothed the back of Aston Hill, between it and St. Leonard's, stretching away towards Tring, can form a good idea of what the dense forest must have been in early times. At the time of the Roman invasion, these forests must have been impassible to any one unacquainted with them, and doubtless formed secure retreats for their ancient inhabitants. The woodland appears to have clothed alike hill and valley, coming out through the latter into the Vale of Aylesbury, but there ending at the foot of the hills. Probably the upper Icknield Way crept along just at the edge of the woods. We can scarcely fancy finer ground for making a stand against an invader than the crest of the Chilterns afford — fine noble brows, steep enough to give much labour in climbing them, in many places easily scarped and made most difficult of access (for instance, Cymbeline's Mount, at Little Kimble); a road at their foot



giving means of communication along their whole length; almost interminable forest at their back affording secure means of retreat. Their height too over the vale gave a most extensive prospect to the front, whence the enemy might be descried for miles before he reached their base. The woodland continuing for miles on miles immediately behind them, effectually prevented the enemy from turning their flank, as the Roman legions could not fight when entangled amongst thickets as well as in the open field, particularly against a foe acquainted with their intricacies, and accustomed to desultory fighting. We cannot suppose that all this vast extent of forest land was without inhabitants, though probably but thinly peopled. May it not, therefore, be assumed that the so-called camps or entrenchments at St. Leonard's, Cholesbury, Hawridge, and other places were fortified villages amongst the woods, and that their inhabitants cultivated cleared spots round them, though their chief subsistence appears to have been derived from their herds and flocks? One would thus have been led to consider the entrenchment in Bray's Wood as such a village, but the finding of 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), would rather lead to the supposition that a small Anglo-Roman colony might have penetrated the woods and established themselves there. This is the more probable from the fact of a large Anglo-Roman village, perhaps town, having been situated at Little Kimble, as recent excavations at Chequers plainly show. Indeed, Roman villas appear to have studded the Vale of Aylesbury.

Besides the camp in Bray's Wood, there is another object of great interest in its neighbourhood and perhaps connected with it. About three quarters of a mile to the north-east, in a wood belonging to Brown's farm, within the hamlet of St. Leonard's, lies a most singular mound of slag, the remains of a large iron foundry, overgrown with beech trees. This mound is 112 yards in circumference and about four feet in depth at its centre. A cart road has been cut through it, and loads upon loads of the fine wood ash carted way into the fields. Some of the masses of slag are large, and contain much iron. In searching amongst

these lumps we discovered the charcoal with which the ore was smelted, and the sand of which the moulds were made hut we in vain looked for fragments of pottery, a coin, or an implement by means of which we could come to any conclusion as to who the workers of the forges were. There are no traces of buildings. Doubtless the chief object in having a foundry in such a spot was the profusion of fuel on all sides; hut, then, where did the ore come from? Could they have collected the pyrites, that now is found so sparingly in the fields, and smelted it? I believe pyrites is found in the chalk; perhaps they may have collected it from the chalk drawn from the enormous dells in the neighbouring woods. It is known that the Romans had many iron foundries in Britain, and as we have already shewn that the vale had at least one Roman, or rather, perhaps, Romano-British town, and as we know that some two or three Roman roads crossed it, and that an ancient British way passed along the foot of the hills, within five miles of the spot, is it not likely that the ore was brought from some distance to be smelted where wood was so plentiful? Mr. Faulkner, to whom I showed the fragments of pottery and the clay handle, at the Meeting of the Society at Buckingham, after having compared the fragments with some which he exhibited in the Museum, and which were dug up with other decidedly Roman remains, pronounced them to be Roman, or of the Roman period. This would lead us to the supposition that the colony in Bray's Wood was Roman, though, as the blue pottery was in common use, it might have been procured from Kimble, or some Roman station in the vale, and yet the occupiers of the camp and the workers of the forges (for I think them identical) have been British.

But, to return to the Camp. One thing is certain, that long after these times, a moated house stood within the large parallelogram, the remains of which, consisting of flints, mortar, and pieces of sandstone, are to be found at the spot marked 1 in the accompanying plan within the square A. An old inhabitant of the hamlet of St. Leonard's remembers, about 40 years ago, cart loads of flints having been carried away for the road in the neighbourhood. In a heap composed of flints, pieces of slag, mortar, and fragments of tiles, I

found a piece of what appears to have been a stone mortar for pounding ingredients in. This heap is marked 6 in the plan, and stands at the angle of the ditch, and close by the corner of a trench marked 2, which runs parallel to one of the flanking ditches. This trench is filled with mud, leaves, and water, and is of considerable depth: it has been suggested that this may be the remains of a fish pond, it does not now communicate with the outer ditches. These enclosing ditches *have* been very deep; they are *now* of considerable depth, though filled with decayed leaves and black mud, and overgrown with bushes and briars on three sides. At some of the angles the breadth from the top of the inner mound to the ground outside varies from four to six yards. The enclosure is a square of about 52 yards or paces. It will be seen by referring to the plan that this enclosure does not lie parallel to the large parallelogram, nor is it in the centre of it. The large enclosure is 196 paces in length, by 76 in width, on the side where it is perfect; on the north-east side the form is lost. From the south corner, another irregular shaped enclosure, surrounded with a slight ditch, projects, the south-east side of which is lost in a pond (7), now nearly dry, and ploughed up, but exhibiting marks of having been of some extent. The soil here is of a deep red colour, and of a strong clayey texture, showing signs of iron. At the eastern corners of the enclosures B and C are the remains of ditches, which are lost in the field D. At the spot marked 8 in enclosure B, the fragments of pottery were discovered, and this might rather lead one to conclude that this enclosure was the ancient entrenched village or camp, and that the enclosure C, and others, faint traces of which are perceptible in the directions pointed out by the dotted lines, were the small fields or staked enclosures for cattle round it. It will be seen that all the ditches communicate with the pond (7) and with each other. At the same time the strength of the square A, surrounded by its deep and broad ditch, and its central position amongst the enclosures, are strong reasons for believing that it was the stronghold or camp. I have thought from its lying at an angle within enclosure B, and not parallel to its side, it may have been a subsequent work, and not part of the ancient plan; that in times long

after the original village had been erected, the builder of the house that stood there, finding entrenchments already existing, might have chosen the spot for erecting his moated dwelling. Such a moated residence exists at Dundridge, and there are many such scattered throughout the country. But whether the square A is the site of an ancient camp or village, or merely of a moated house, one thing appears certain, from the remains proved to be of the Roman period, that this portion of the wood was inhabited at that time. Fragments of slag are found in abundance on the heap marked 6, and more sparsely in the ploughed portion of enclosure B. These might lead us to conclude, that in all probability the workers of the forges in the wood below were the inhabitants of this spot.

I have gone thus fully into this subject in order to have as clear a description as possible of two singular works, which all who have seen them consider of great interest. The former of these — the entrenchments — in another season will be partly filled up, and, should the wood be cut down and the soil broken up, the whole will in a year or two be barely visible. The other subject of interest — the mound of slag and ash — will not be so easily obliterated from its size and colour, and the stubborn nature of its contents will long resist the ploughshare. My chief object in writing this paper is to furnish a record of very interesting works that may soon be cleared away. Another object will be gained if it draw forth suggestions from others more acquainted than I am with the character and size of early British villages.

Before closing this subject I may mention, that in a wood in the direction of Hyde Heath, belonging to G. Carrington, Esq., there is another entrenchment. This I have not yet seen. It would be highly conducive to the study of Archaeology if this Archaeological Society would endeavour to collect all the information in its power as to the size, locality, and nature of such works, hidden away, as many doubtless are, in woods and out of the way spots, with any traditions relating to them, that may exist.