

## NOTES

### BREDINGCOTE; A 'MISSING' LOST VILLAGE

It is almost forty years since the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group began the process of systematically identifying the hundreds of deserted and shrunken settlements which pepper the English landscape.<sup>1</sup> The list for Buckinghamshire contains settlements, most of them on the claylands in the north of the county, where, *inter alia*, the conversion of arable land to pasture over the course of several centuries led to a substantial reduction in the density of settlement from its thirteenth century peak. Fortunately, it is always difficult to make such lists comprehensive, and the purpose of this note is to add Bredingcote in Cublington parish to the tally.

The main reference to the existence of Bredingcote is to be found in the surveys of enclosures which took place under Wolsey's aegis.<sup>2</sup> We read there that John Knight of Cublington converted twenty acres of arable to pasture in January 1509, followed by a message and forty acres in March 1513 – the house being burned down. He also had land at *Bredyncote* in the parish, used for pasturing sheep and other animals, worth 66s/8d, where he had put down one plough and deprived six people of work. It is not clear whether this was forty acres (and if so, if they were the same as those mentioned above), or whether Leadam's calculation that 66s/8d represents 84 acres at 9.5d./acre applies, although the latter might be more appropriate for a whole ploughland. The separate place-name of a type commonly used for minor settlements within a parish indicates that Knight's enclosure was the final act in the decline of an identifiable hamlet (cf. neighbouring Littlecote, another DMV), rather than contraction of the main centre at Cublington, itself the possessor of fine earthworks and known to have been relocated during the medieval period, possibly after having been abandoned for a while.<sup>3</sup>

An undated, but eighteenth-century, map of Cublington in the Bucks. Record Office shows that Bredingcote lay in the north-east corner of the

parish, next to Kingsbridge in Stewkley. Two names commemorate the lost settlement (centred on GR SP845235) Branket Common (39 ac.) and Branket Furlong (7 or 9 ac.). Adjoining these are Oat Land Furlong and Breach Furlong (33 ac.), the former indicating marginal land growing oats, the latter land resulting from the clearance of woodland. Together, these fields cover 79–81 acres, very similar to Leadam's suggested 84 for the early Tudor enclosure. The name Branket Common, however, suggests that the land had long since fallen out of cultivation before John Knight enclosed it, obscuring its true origin even more. In a glebe terrier of 1607, one of the four open fields of Cublington was called *Broncott*. (Two of the others, *Weyld* [OE *Wald* 'tract of wood; forest'] and *Meade* perhaps indicate the broad categories of land use at the time when the fields were created in the early medieval period.)

Declining arable farming was no new phenomenon in Cublington. The *Inquisitiones Nonarum* of 1341 reveal that two carucates (ploughlands) were out of cultivation and thirteen messuages standing empty because of the poverty of the inhabitants. That was eight years before the arrival of the Black Death and indicates a major agrarian crisis in the parish, which was no doubt exacerbated by the first and subsequent outbreaks of that pandemic. This situation of substantial tracts of uncultivated land was repeated in neighbouring parishes, but Cublington was worst affected in relation to its overall size. Cublington in 1332 had eighteen taxpayers,<sup>4</sup> none of whom bore names suggesting residence in Bredingcote. The thirteen empty holdings of 1341 represent a substantial proportion of the total.

It remains to see if there is any other evidence for the existence of two settlements in Cublington. Early sources are scarce, but as so often, Domesday Book offers some clues. Cublington was a typical ten-hide estate and manor, probably coterminous

with the parish. The name of this holding, however, is given as *Coblincoate*, and versions in *ington* do not occur until 1154.<sup>5</sup> In form, this name is identical to Breedingcote and means the cottages of Cubbel, with *-ing-* as a connecting particle, and not evidence of long-forgotten early Anglo-Saxon groups settling in the area.<sup>6</sup> Breedingcote, on the other hand, seems most likely to derive from OE *bred* meaning 'plank, board', hence 'cottages built of planks or boards'.<sup>7</sup>

In 1086, Cublington was in the hands of Jocelyn the Breton, but in 1066 it had been two entities, one of two hides held by Godwin and one of eight hides held by Thorkell. It seems likely that the first of

these represents Breedingcote, always the smaller partner and ultimately doomed to disappear. The two cot-names suggest that these were both secondary settlements, perhaps the result of woodland clearance on the margins of longer-established estates such as Wing. The shape of the boundary of Cublington parish suggests that it once formed part of Aston. Domesday records land for nine ploughs on the joint holding, all of them apparently at work, representing possibly 900 acres of arable in an area of only 1,223 acres. By analogy with the evidence from 1341 and 1517, it seems likely that two ploughlands and teams should be allocated to Breedingcote, occupying marginal land in one corner of the parish.

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#### REFERENCES

1. See e.g., M. W. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England*, 1954; Beresford & J. G. Hurst (eds.), *Deserted Medieval villages*, 1971.
2. I. S. Leadam (ed.), *The Domesday of Enclosures 1517-18*, 1897, Vol. 1, 1734.
3. M. Beresford & J. K. St. Joseph, *Medieval England, An Aerial Survey*, 2nd. ed., 1979, 103-5; fig. 38.
4. Bucks. Record. Soc., 14, *Early Medieval Taxation*, 1966, 54.
5. A. Mawer & F. M. Stenton, *Place-Names of Buckinghamshire*, 1925, 77-8.
6. A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 1956, 1, 297.
7. E. Ekwall, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed., 1960, s.v. Bred-.

#### CAPTAIN'S WOOD: CHESHAM

The lower bank of Captain's Wood, overlooking Asheridge Bottom, is one of the most ancient and hence diversified hedgebanks in the Chilterns. It is wide enough to be shown as a narrow woodland belt on the large-scale map appended to the County Council report. Last October one could hardly fail to notice its marvellous variation of colouring, as opposed to the rich but uniform colour of the beechwood just behind it. Its only rival so far identified is the celebrated Black Hedge between Monks and Princes Risborough.

The age of a hedge can be roughly estimated from counts of the number of species of trees and shrubs averaged over 30 yard stretches, using the Hooper regression formula (based on 227 dated hedges in S.E. England). Age of hedge in years =  $110 \times (\text{average number of species}) + 30$ .

Peter Casselden (*Records of Bucks* (1987) vol. 29, p 133) gives 12.1 as the average species count for the first nine sections of the boundary bank at its

southern end, adjoining Hivings Hill. This suggests a 7th century date. He comments "The position of Captain's Wood on the brow of the valley at the boundary between communities, its sinuous shape, large bank and long list of plant species all point to it being a primary wood, in continuous existence since the earliest settlement. Its boundary bank is therefore likely to date from the valley clearance, being in effect the tidal edge of that clearance".

Further along the hedgebank the count falls; the tide of clearance moved outwards from Chesham as more land was needed. In the really Dark Ages, 450-600, the collapse of the Romano-British economy must have led to much farmland reverting to scrub on the way to woodland. The Saxon colonisers would have found a belt of such land round Chesham and they seem to have cleared the fields called Great and Little Comps between Captain's Wood and the Asheridge valley. Initially this would be for grazing; cultivation would come later. There seems to be no written record that the Comps

were common fields (though the name New Close may imply this) but Mr. Casselden saw traces of long narrow divisions of land running across rather than down the slope. 'Comps' is a name borrowed from Latin *campus* in the sense 'open, uncultivated land on the edge of settlements; a belt of land surrounding a town or village'. There is good evidence that, during the settlement period, Latin as well as British (primitive Welsh) was being spoken by Romano-Britons in the general area of the Chilterns centred on Verulamium (St. Albans). The rounding of the vowel from *camp* to *comp* before a nasal consonant *m* is quite regular. ('Camp' in the sense of a military encampment is a quite different and later borrowing).

In the past century, overshadowing by high beeches of even age has probably tended to *reduce* the diversity of the hedgebank, as the report no-

tices. The oldest part of the bank may thus be even earlier than the formula suggests, perhaps sixth century, though one doubts whether it could be pre-Saxon. There is no Latin word for a hedge as distinct from a fence (*sepes*).

This hedgebank cannot be legally protected as a hedge (the Government's promise to legislate has not yet been honoured). It could just be regarded as a woodland belt, as was done at Bunn's Lane. But it is at one and the same time an ancient monument, an unwritten record of a highly non-literate period of our history, a site of great scientific interest and a distinctive landscape feature of considerable beauty. On all these counts, it deserves special protection.

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