

NOTES

ROMAN LEAD-LINED COFFINS FROM BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

A few years ago ploughing accidentally unearthed a lead coffin lining at Fleet Marston in an area known for Roman occupation from the first century AD onwards. The approximate find-spot, marked by a slight depression, is on a hillside just above the 76m. contour and overlooks the valley of the river Thames. The summit is occupied by an artificial mound, probably that of a windmill.

The find was not immediately reported and, therefore, no proper investigations could take place. It was subsequently stated that the coffin had been found beneath a layer of stone slabs, but its orientation is unknown. A few bones were apparently present, but were re-buried at the time.

The lining had been distorted sideways and was reshaped and thoroughly cleaned before being professionally examined. It is possible that environmental and structural evidence was thus lost. After a spell as a plant trough it was brought to the notice of and acquired by the Buckinghamshire County Museum, (accession number AYBCM 1996.132.1). The Museum is very grateful to Tom Clark who realised the significance of the find and drew it to attention.

The coffin lining is made from two separate sheets of undecorated lead and corresponds most closely to Toller's Type 7. (Toller 1977). Two square corner pieces had been removed from the head end of the base and the head and long sides had then been folded upwards, with the top of the long edges folded over flat, to a maximum of 177mm (0.7ins), to support the lid. The open foot end had been closed by folding down the end of the lid. The present maximum length of the base is 1935mm (6ft 5.5ins). The length of the lid, if straightened out is 2070mm (6ft 9.5ins). The object tapers in both width and height from head to foot, from a maximum width of 507mm (1ft 8ins) to a minimum of 285mm (11.22ins) and from a maximum height of 241mm (9.49ins) to a minimum of

190mm (7.48ins). Both base and lid sheets are 4mm thick. The total weight is 118.18kgs (260 lbs). In spite of its treatment it is substantially complete although torn in places, and has a white surface deposit.

Four other lead coffins are known from the county. Three were discovered in Blind Lane, Bourne End in 1949 while service pipe trenches were being dug by a mechanical excavator. (Anon. 1950,102, Anon 1952). One was orientated north – south and held the skeleton of a middle-aged man and a pottery unguent flask. This vessel, of the late 3rd – 4th centuries A.D., is in Buckinghamshire County Museum, (accession number AYBCM 1975.607.1), together with parts of the skeleton, (accession number AYBCM 1975.607.2). A second coffin had its lid missing and the bones of a bird were found underneath the head end. Parts of a third burial were also discovered. Unfortunately, these coffins were subsequently sold and melted down. A lead fragment bequeathed in 1987 is reputed to have come from one of them (accession number AYBCM 1987.343.1). This is a piece of plain lead sheeting, 156mm (6.14ins) long × 92mm (3.62ins) wide × 4mm thick.

The fourth coffin, a plain lead lining with lid, from Stanton Low, is in Buckinghamshire County Museum, (accession number AYBCM archt.21). The lid is a plain sheet, 900mm (35.43ins) long × 405mm (15.94ins) wide × 6mm thick. The base measures 860mm (33.86ins) long × 355mm (13.98ins) wide × 280mm (11.02ins) high. The sheet thickness varies from 5mm on the long sides and at one end, to 8mm at the other short end.

It corresponds to Toller's Type 2, his commonest type. The site at Stanton Low was discovered during gravel extraction and consisted of a complex comprising a villa estate alongside the Great Ouse, accompanied by the construction of roads, a bridge, a wharf, storehouses and a large house. (Jones

1958, Woodfield & Johnson 1989). The coffin was unearched by mechanical digger, (Anon 1960), one of the long sides being damaged in the process. Inside there was only about an inch of soil and a few child's bones. The alignment is estimated as WSW – ENE. About 22 iron nails, 98mm (3.86ins) long, from the outer wooden coffin were also recorded. There were apparent clusters of 4 and 5 nails at the SW and NE corners. Other burials were located at different times: many scattered bones, two extended inhumations and two cremations in late first to mid second century urns. (Woodfield notes).

It is regrettable that none of the coffins have been archaeologically excavated. The only datable grave item is the late third to fourth century vessel from Bourne End, while the sites at Fleet Marston and Stanton Low were occupied throughout the Roman period. It is striking that all three sites are next to rivers : Bourne End near the Thames, Fleet

Maston near the Thame and Stanton Low near the Great Ouse. Transporting very heavy objects surely cannot be the only factor. Passing across water to the other world seems a possible association.

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Linda Babb

POSSIBLE BUNDLE PLANTING IN THE CHILTERNES

In the spring of 1944 the Chilternes Countryside Management project was asked to provide Special Management advice for a Woodland Grant Scheme application covering Cadsden Wood, south of Princes Risborough.

While preparing the advice a number of unusual Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) trees, initially thought to be a mixture of old coppice and pollards, were found. On further investigation and following discussions with E. E. Green of English Nature and Helen Read of the Corporation of London at Burnham Beeches, it was suggested that these trees were more characteristic of bundle planting.

Pott (1989) describes bundle planting from pasture areas of North West Germany as single stems that either form one joint stem or remain as single stems in a dense tuft-like population. The number of stems appears to vary ; according to Pott "several individuals, usually seven, were put into one planting hole". Possible bundles have been recognised from several sites in the Buckinghamshire Chilternes, suggesting far greater variety, with groups of from 2–3 stems to 9 stems.

The patterns of bundles at Cadsden Wood and other Buckinghamshire sites appear to include:

- Large bundles of 7 + trees either side of old track-ways.
- Individual large bundles of 5 + trees.
- Circular group plantings of bundles.
- Bundles of 2–3 trees in groups.
- Bundles of various sizes on old banks.

The growth forms are equally varied and include:

- Joint stems up to 2m before dividing into individual stems.
- Tuft-like populations.
- Tuft-like populations with basal regrowth 0.3–1.2m up stem.

The examples of bundle planting in the area around Princes Risborough appear to be limited to Beech. However bundles of mixed species, including Oak and Ash have been reported at the National Trust Ashridge Estate.

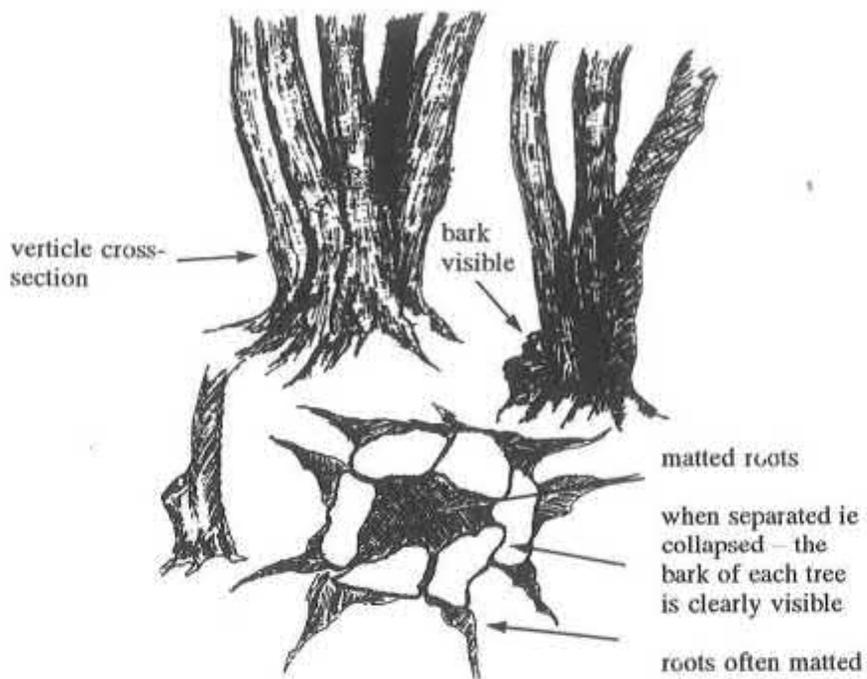


Fig. 1: *upper*: Bundle planting. *lower*: Cadsden Wood.

The variation on growth patterns and the old age of the trees offers a range of habitats that are the equal of some contemporary pollards. This includes good quantities of dead branches, collapsed trunks, damaged bark, rot holes and rain tracks, ariel root systems and good tree humus collection where stems separate. The presence of a high number of these older trees at Cadsden Wood (the smaller trunks being estimated at over 170 years old), suggest that they may be of interest for their dead wood flora and fauna and worthy of further investigation.

It has been suggested that this method of planting was used to produce an "over developed" crown for the production of mast areas in pasture woodland, or for increased small round-wood production for firewood or the furniture industry.

The possibility of bundles forming naturally has also been considered, especially in an area where the former chalk grassland of the escarpment has gone through a dramatic decline owing to scrub encroachment. Many of the areas where such a loss has been noted are characterised by Hawthorn scrub going through to Hazel and Ash woodland. An exception to this is found on the south-west facing chalk-scrub slopes of Pulpit Hill where Tansley (1939) noted Hawthorn/Juniper scrub with Beech regeneration. It is possible that these scrub trees protected groups of young Beech during establishment.

To look at the wider aspects of bundles in the Chilterns an account needs to be given of the history of the landscapes. Bryant's map of Buckinghamshire (1824) shows the area to the east of Whiteleaf Cross as woodland, while to the south and west is an area shown as Green Hailey Common. Cadsden Wood is an Ancient Heritage Woodland (Hornby Welsh, 1990) and forms part of an area known as Whitecliff Woods on the 1839 Enclosure Award for Monks Risborough. At that time the famous Whiteleaf Cross chalk figure was referred to by the Enclosure Award (allotment. 572-1839):

"The same may not be planted or enclosed but forever remain open".

Photographic evidence from 1910 shows the area to be extensive open downland. It has now

been encroached upon by scrub and secondary woodland (including maiden Beech).

Within the Cadsden Wood area are several pockets of remnant chalk grassland, with many good chalk grassland indicator species including Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), Wild Thyme (*Thymus praecox*) and Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*). Their distribution is fragmented and can be found in association with many of the bundle plantings. Wild candytuft (*Iberis amara*) is also found in areas of older unmanaged and windthrown beech woodland, with little or no other ground flora.

H. J. Massingham (1940) gives an account of "the back door" to Whiteleaf, and "Beech in juxtaposed variations" in three forms:

"Dwarf beech on the crest exposed to the full onset of the sou'-westers make up in width and density of foliage for what they lack in height;

The "fasciated" form is to be seen just below the crest and several of the trees have a "dozen or more trunks"

The third occurs in the woodland to the south of the cross. Here the trees grow "bunched" with slender boles and crooked and irregular in shape.

Hepple and Doggett (1992), provide considerable evidence on land use of the strip parishes of the Chiltern escarpment in this region, including the origin of Hillwork on the escarpment as open sheep walks and the use of the clay plateau as wood pasture for cattle and pigs. This is further substantiated by historical maps indicating commons at Bacombe Hill and Coombe Hill above Wendover, and Green Hailey Common, Princes Risborough.

The area of Whitecliff Woods (now known as Whiteleaf Hill and Cadsden Wood) areas of both woodland and grassland, undefined by any clear boundry ditch or banks. Some or all the area may have been used for "common" grazing, possibly as part of Green Hailey Common.

While there is no conclusive proof that land was subject to common grazing or that the area now

known as Cadsden Wood was included, the presence of both species-rich grassland and many ancient-woodland indicator plants (Hornby & Walsh 1990), as well as historic references to woodland do suggest the area may constitute a historic wood pasture on the Chilterns escarpment.

Further work needs to be carried out to identify the ecological value of these trees, and more importantly how they can be preserved for the future. Unlike pollards or coppice they do not appear to have been subjected to the rejuvenatory practices of being cut back. Many are now splitting and prone to wind damage. Their location on the edge of the Ridgeway National Trail means they will be subject to assessment for public safety, which they are sure to fail.

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POTTERY MOLE TRAPS

Mole traps in the form of wooden tubes with a wire noose or snare suspended at each end have already been well documented and their mechanism clearly described.^(1,2) Such traps and variations of them were probably often made by the mole catchers themselves and for only one, that which activated by a strong metal spring and named the 'Perfection Mole Trap', has a known commercial manufacturer.⁽³⁾ Nowhere however does there seem to be any published reference to the use of a pottery tube to take the place of the one made of wood. The purpose of this brief note is to record the use of pottery mole traps by three generations of mole catchers in the north-west of Buckinghamshire.

Thomas Turner was a mole catcher who was born in Preston Bissett, and he lived there until his house burnt down in 1895. He then moved with his wife and children to the nearby village of Gawcott where he continued his profession as a mole catcher. Both he and his wife died at Gawcott in the 1940s.

His pottery traps were made at the Preston Bissett Brick Works until it was closed. Later traps were made at the Calvert Brick Works. They were almost certainly made during the process of producing land drainage tiles since they were of simi-

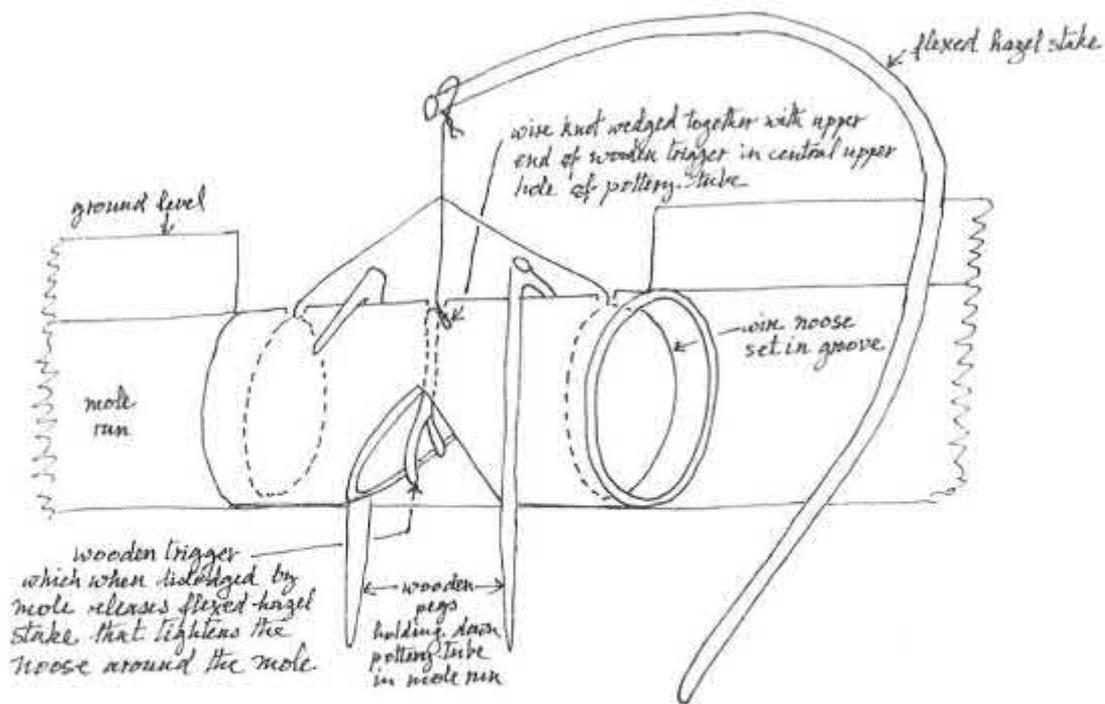


Figure 1: A "Turner" pottery mole trap set ready for action.

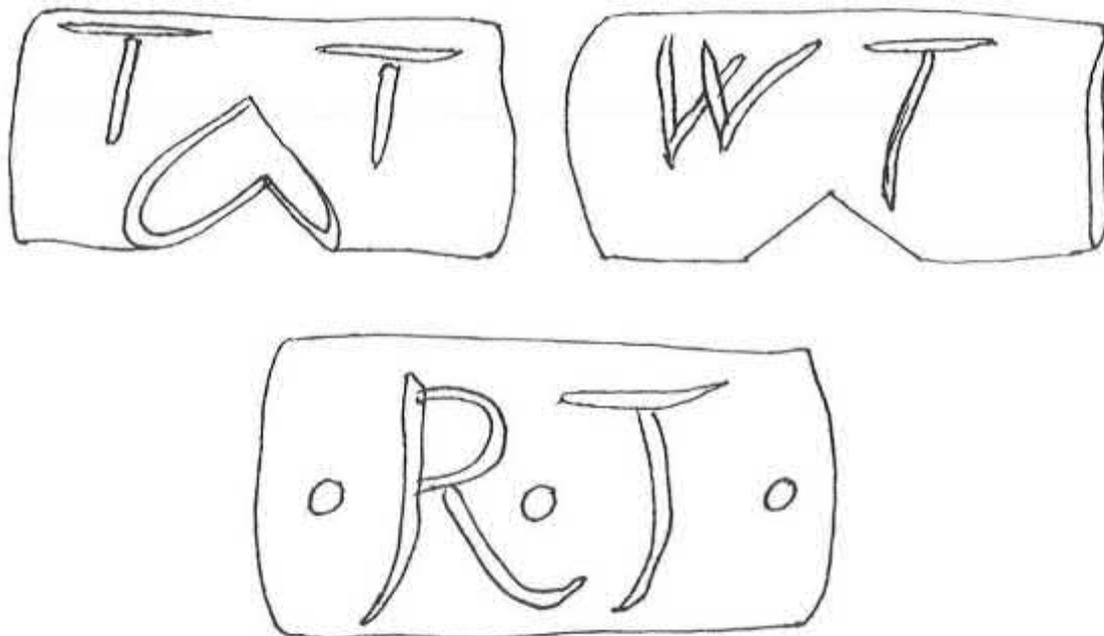


Figure 2: "Turner" pottery mole trap tubes with the incised initials of their owners.

lar dimensions (6–7cm in external diameter and 13cm in length) and all that needed to be done to turn the clay tubes into tubes for mole traps was to cut out three small circular holes on top, a much larger hole underneath and grooves inside each end to accommodate the snares. Such modifications would of course have had to be made between the formation of the clay tube and its eventual firing. It seems probable that Thomas Turner would have attended the brick works himself and made the necessary changes to the tube, especially as his initials TT were incised on the side of each of his mole traps.

The use of a pottery tube for his traps meant that Thomas would have had to use the traditional springy hazel stake from which to suspend the two snares. In addition the tube would have had to be pegged down to prevent it from rising up into the air when the trap was sprung. The way that one of his traps would probably have had to be set for action is shown in Figure 1.

Thomas's father, William Turner was also a full time mole catcher who lived for much of his professional life in Preston Bissett. The National Census records him there as a 'Mole Ketcher' in 1851 and as a 'Mole Catcher' in 1861 and 1871. William however was born at Goddington just one or two miles away over the border in Oxfordshire and was living there in 1845 at the time of his marriage, when both he and his father, Robert Turner, described themselves as labourers.

Since a pottery mole trap, with the initials RT inscribed on it, is still in the possession of the

Turner family, it seems likely that it was Robert Turner, even if not a full-time mole catcher, who started the family tradition of using pottery traps. Unfortunately neither Robert nor his son William is recorded at Goddington in the first National Census of 1841. It is worth noting however that of the 117 inhabitants of this small village at this time, no less than twenty were named Turner, including one brickmaker.

The initials of the three Turner mole catchers incised on their traps are depicted in Figure 2. Some similar pottery mole traps are known without incised initials, so it is possible that such traps were also made and used elsewhere.⁽⁴⁾

I am indebted to Trevor Bateman for introducing me to Pat Turner, grandson of Thomas, and to Pat Turner for telling me about his grandfathers and their pottery mole traps and for allowing me to publish the information. Pat has given one of his Grandfather's signed traps to the Buckinghamshire County Museum.

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4. Single examples of unsigned pottery mole traps are present in both the Buckinghamshire County Museum and the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading.

David Drummond

GREAT MISSENDEN: A FAILED BOROUGH?

All that is known about the medieval boroughs of Buckinghamshire is summarised in the *Making of the Buckinghamshire Landscape* (Reed 1979, 109). At the time Reed wrote sixteen boroughs were known in the county. It is now possible to add a seventeenth.

The evidence for the existence of a borough at Great Missenden is tenuous, but quite robust: there is not much of it, in other words, but if it is trustworthy it will bear quite a lot of inference. It is limited to two documents in the PRO containing references to burgage tenure ('The touchstone of a borough' says Reed). One is among the records of the Court of Augmentations, which administered former monastic lands while they were in the King's hands. It lists rents formerly payable to Missenden Abbey, and now due to the crown. (E315/405/f27). It names one holder of a burgage tenement: William Wyer, who in 32 Henry VIII (1542) paid 2 shillings a year for it. The other is an undated rental of crown lands of the early seventeenth century, in which Richard Edkins is recorded as claiming to hold freely, by virtue of a free charter of William Edkins, a "tenementū vocat a messuage sive a burgage cū p̄tin̄ jaē in Missendē Magna" (LR2 210/ 260). The same document records

"inveniamus etiam unū Burgagiū terr customari modo in tenura de Rogeri Stirke iaceñ inter "(...abutments given...) "et sup̄jdc Burgagiū sunt scituat due stabule de tribus bayes et ij hovells")

There seem to be two burgages here, though only one in 1542, and their presence can be taken as proof positive of the former existence of a borough, or at least of a *belief* in the former existence of a borough.

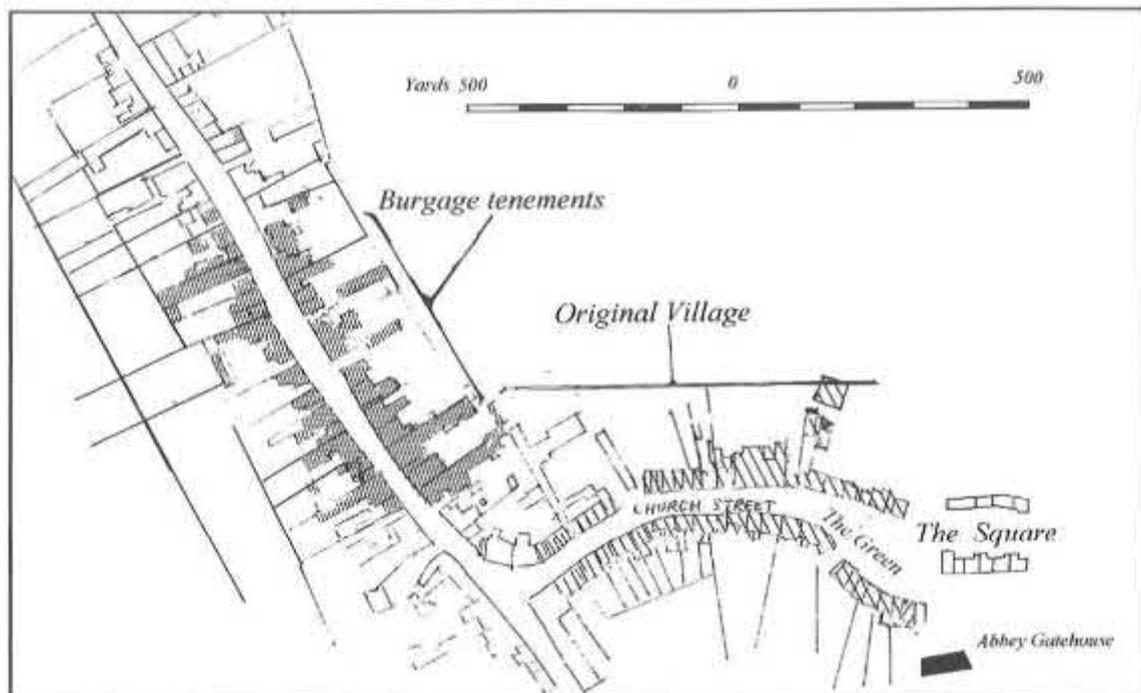
It was evidently a seignorial or manorial borough, and not a royal foundation, though this can be asserted only on the basis of negative evidence: the absence of evidence for its ever paying tallage. Two shillings is a perfectly possible annual rent for a burgage, though comparanda are hard to find. Burgage rents in Buckingham at the time of the Domesday Survey are known (Baines 1986, 57), but hardly relevant. A fragment of a compotus roll

for the Abbey, for 20 Hen VIII, has survived, but contains only outgoing (Lincoln R.O. Box 92/ Religious Houses 6/1/6)

Further evidence, though inconclusive, can be found by studying the map. On purely morphological grounds it may be suggested that the 500-yard stretch of the High Street indicated by shading represents twenty eight burgages, each about 22 yards (one chain) wide and exactly eight chains deep (176 yards). On the same grounds it may be suggested that the western stretch of Church Street represents the original village, classically having a Green at one end. The Green will have become a Square when the Abbey Gate House was built on its S side; it may have been the market Square of the borough. The axis of this village was the old road from Chesham to High Wycombe via Peterley, Little Kingshill and Hughenden (Hitchenden), but where this axis crossed the road from Amersham to Aylesbury it turned through a right angle, presumably on a judgement that this would bring more trade to the new foundation. If so it was a disappointment: Great Missenden never became prosperous.

Who founded the borough, and when? A manorial borough was initiated by the lord creating burgages and setting their rents; the burgages then became copyhold of the manor. William de Missenden was lord when he founded and handsomely endowed Missenden Abbey in 1133 (VCH I, 369), and it must have been by the gift of William or one of his successors as Lord of the manor that the Abbey came into possession of the burgage rents; the abbot was never lord of the manor of Great Missenden, which remained with the heirs of William de Missenden (or de Noers). No such gift of burgage rents is recorded in the Missenden Cartulary (BRS 1938), which includes no benefactions connected with the foundation.

Had it been made by a later lord the chances of its being recorded in the cartulary are very good. A lord who must theoretically be regarded as a possible borough maker is Joan de Sandford (d. 1252 (VCH 2, 348)) great granddaughter of William the founder, on the grounds that she was granted a market in Great Missenden



by Henry III. The date of the grant is not known, but Joan's *floruit* was a hundred years after the date of the earliest charter in the cartulary. By then the likelihood of an important benefaction being missed is negligible.

We may therefore regard William de Missenden, the founder of the Abbey, as the most likely founder of the borough. His motivation would be a wish to maximise the value of his endowment.

But is the evidence for the existence of the borough trustworthy?

If we did not have manor court rolls and proof of its continuance in the shape of copyhold it might be hard to prove the existence of villeinage. Burgage tenure was the urban counterpart of villeinage, and manor court rolls in other urban centres attest its continuance. But we have no manor court rolls for Great Missenden. We therefore have to ask whether it was in anybody's interest to fabricate

evidence for burgage tenure. It was not: burgage tenure conferred low rents on the burgesses but restricted their ability to enrich themselves, and hence the lord's scope for profit.

We may conclude that Great Missenden was one of the places that had borough status conferred on them but like Winchelsea lost the wherewithal to profit by it.

John Chenevix Trench

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