

NOTES

A MOATED SITE AT BOWER WOOD, BEACONSFIELD

Introduction and Acknowledgements

A small moated site with associated fish pond in Bower Wood, Beaconsfield (NGR SU 9534 8850) was first noted by Mr. M. Farley and Mr. C. Reid during a field visit to the area in March 1980.

Thanks are due to the Portman Burtley Estate for permission to survey the site, to Mrs. J. Elding of the Buckinghamshire County Museum Archaeological Group for her help in the field, and to Mr. M.E. Farley, County Field Archaeologist, for continued help and support. The original survey is filed at the County Museum, ref. CAS 4696.

Situation and Description

The site lies at the bottom of a small north-west to south-east aligned valley which divides Bower Wood from Burtley Wood approximately 2 km south-east of Beaconsfield (Fig. 1). The bulk of the site lies on the south side of the small valley stream which runs through the north-east side of the moat. The site is within a thicket of coppiced birch and oak and the surrounding area of the valley bottom is under conifer plantation.

The surviving earthworks cover an area approximately 65m east-west and 50m north-south and fall into two parts: the moated site to

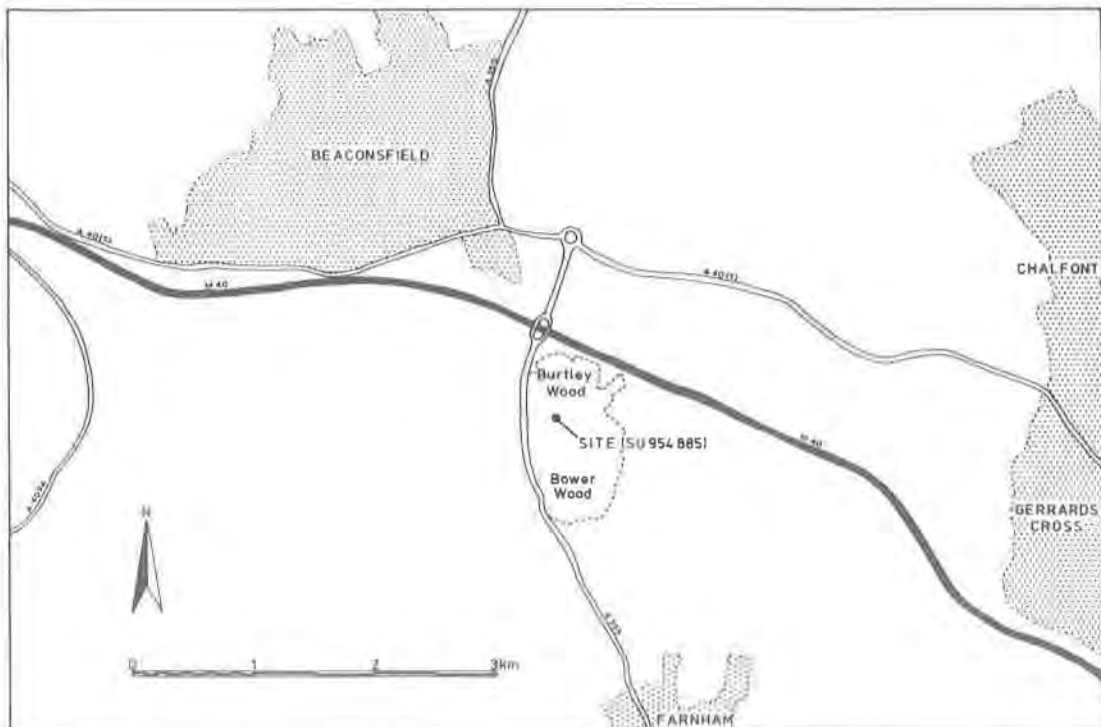


Fig. 1. Moated site at Bower Wood, location.

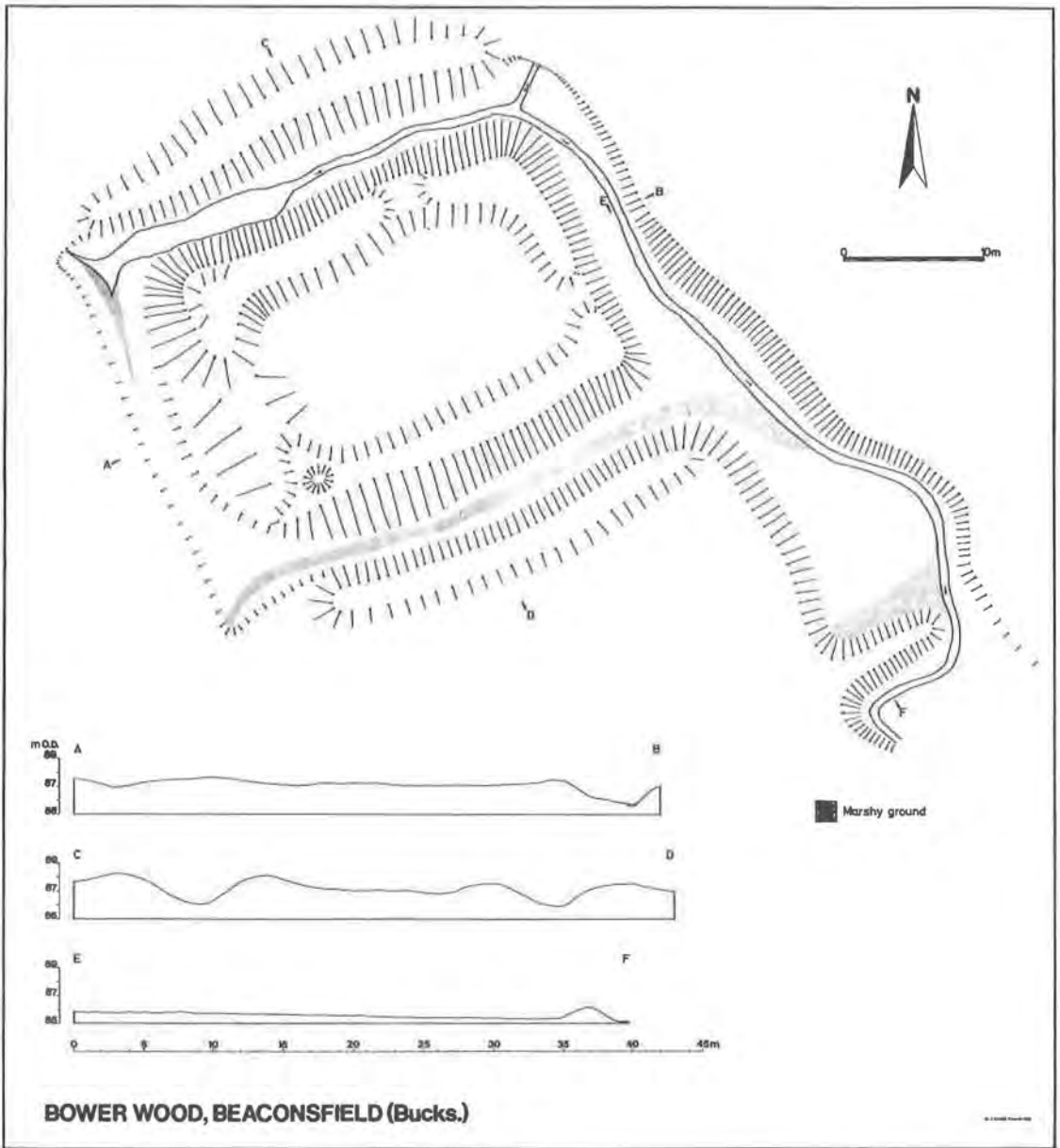


Fig. 2. Moated site at Bower Wood, plan.

the north-west and the 'fish pond' to the south-east (Fig. 2). The moated site consists of a central sub-rectangular platform with its long axis lying west-south-west to east-north-east and with internal measurements of 20m by 11m. This platform is quite flat with only slight surface irregularities and no visible evidence of structures. It is surrounded by a low bank averaging 4m in width and between 0.5m and 1.0m in height above the level of the central platform. There is a 7.0m break in the west side of this bank and smaller, 2.0m to 3.0m, wide breaks in the north and east sides. A roughly circular depression 2.0m in diameter and 0.5m deep is visible in the west end of the south side of the bank.

The platform and bank are surrounded on three sides (north, south and east) by a well defined ditch averaging 7.0m in width and 2.0m in depth below the inner bank. To the west the ditch is very insignificant, appearing only as a slight depression. To the north and south, the ditch is bounded by outer banks approximately 5.0m wide and 0.5m high above the surrounding land. Such banks are absent to the east, where the ditch is bounded by a forest track, and to the west.

The 'fish pond' area forms a south-easterly continuation of the east side of the moat and consists of an 18.0m long, 12.0m wide and 1.0m deep depression, dammed at its south-eastern end by a bank 3.0m wide and 1.0m high. The present day stream flows through this dam by way of a 3.0m wide gap at its north west end, possibly marking the site of a former sluice gate. The area appears to represent the natural profile of the valley, which continues downstream, widened and emphasised by excavation.

The main water supply to the system is via a small stream entering the moat at its northern corner from a culvert under the forest track, flowing through the east side of the moat and the 'fish pond' area, to leave through a gap in the dam. Smaller and apparently intermittent water supplies enter the system from springs at its north-west and south-west corners, run through the north and south sides of the moat,

and join the main stream at its north-east and south-east corners respectively. At the time of the survey water was flowing in the north and east sides of the moat with marshy ground in the south side. The west side was dry. Flooding of the 'fish pond' to the present height of the dam would not give rise to any significant increase in the depth of water in the moat, but assuming that some erosion of the dam and silting of the moat has taken place, then the dam could well have served this purpose as well as creating a pond.

A simplified isometric reconstruction of the earthworks is given as Fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Moated site at Bower Wood, isometric view.

Dating and Function

There is no direct dating evidence for the site and a medieval date can be suggested only on the evidence of other similar sites. For example, of thirty-five moated sites in Yorkshire, twenty-eight can probably be dated to between the mid 12th century and early 14th century (Le Patourel 1973). The flora and fauna of the site indicate a long period free of disturbance (Reid 1980).

The present site would be classed as a Valley Moat under Roberts' classification, i.e.: in a valley bottom with a natural stream flowing through the moat (Roberts 1965); and as type A1a according to the classification used by the

Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in Cambridgeshire, i.e.: a single sub-rectangular moated enclosure of less than 0.5 acres (RCHM 1968). In common with moated sites elsewhere (Taylor 1972, Le Patourel 1973), construction of the present site for drainage or primarily for defensive purposes can be discounted; the site actually seeks out water, and the defences would have been unable to keep at bay anything but a single casual intruder.

A more convincing explanation of the function of this and other similar sites, is that they were constructed as symbols of prestige and social status, apeing in a small way the

moats surrounding the great castles being built at the time, and, as a bonus, providing a certain level of security and privacy and a useful supply of water (Farley 1973).

In view of its isolated and remote position, the site in Bower Wood may be connected with the park mentioned at Beaconsfield in the early 13th century (Cantor and Hatherly 1977) and thought to have been centred south of the modern town at NGR SU 944 895 (approximately), although no positive link can be established.

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A SECOND PENN TILE KILN SITE

During the last three years, the Dancer family of April Cottage, Penn (SU 90749366), have been digging up decorated tile wasters similar to previous Penn tile finds, suggesting the existence of a second Penn tile kiln some 500 yds. north-west of the previously discovered waster heap (*Records of Bucks.* Vol. XV Part 5, 1951-52). They have kindly given their collection of finds to the County Museum.

Apart from fragments of plain red (un-glazed), black, brown and yellow (slip coated) floor tiles, there are examples of P.50, P.67, P.74, P.125, P.138 and P.145 (Hohler's Classification, *Records of Bucks.* Vol. XIV Parts 1 & 2). In addition to the normal preponderance of roof tiles, there are a number of fragments of

slip-decorated rimmed bowls of the late 16th century.

Three interesting points arise from an examination of the fragments:

1. The example of P.74 is very similar to those found at the other site, but the impression is much more blurred, suggesting that the same block was used but that it was wearing at the edges. Tile-built kilns become vitrified after repeated firing and begin to crack, and this seems to support the theory that when a kiln had to be replaced, the same band of tilers moved westward to a new site near to fresh sources of clay and timber for firing.

2. No less than three of the patterns were also

found in the cache of all-different perfect tiles found in 1939 at Stratfords Cottage, Penn, close to the other site. These were thought to be trade samples kept at a dwelling adjoining the site. If the dwelling was retained when the move was made to the new site, the samples could have been made at either and the second may have been the last before the trade died out in the late 1360's.

3. Two of the fragments have the usual minutely thin layer of slip, but the pattern is deeply recessed below the general level of the tile while the sides of the depression show little traces of slip. This seems to establish that some form of printing technique must have been used.

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WEST WYCOMBE ROMANO-BRITISH CEMETERY: RADIOCARBON DATES

Buckinghamshire's claim to an *early* Romano-British inhumation cemetery at West Wycombe has to be withdrawn.

Two radiocarbon dates obtained from skeletal material excavated at this cemetery and published in *Records of Bucks*. Vol. XXI (1979), 81-89, have had to be revised owing to a systematic error recently discovered in the equipment used at the Sydney University Radiocarbon Laboratory. The revised dates are:

Lab. No.:	SUA-1115A	SUA-1115B
Correction:	-340 yr	-300 yr
Revised Age (yr b.p.):	1580 ± 120	1580 ± 90
Revised Date:	a.d. 370 ± 120	a.d. 370 ± 190

These dates bring the cemetery into line with a number of other Late Roman inhumation burials.

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