

The History of Shere Manor Estate, and its achievements

Speech to Albury History Society

November 2011

This speech is going to be a bit like a Grand National race - a series of leaps and bounds when great things happened, with wide gaps in between when nothing momentous happened at all, as far as we know - so we'll gallop over the flat bits, and concentrate on the heights.

REGINALD BRAY AND KING HENRY VII

We start with the Battle of Bosworth, in August 1485, when Richard III was defeated by Henry Tudor. At the climax of the battle he was knocked off his horse and his crown rolled into a thornbush, where it was found by Reginald Bray who handed it to his master Lord Stanley, who crowned the victorious King Henry VII and the Tudor dynasty began.



The crown in the thornbush may be legend (*though not to the Bray family!*), but it is certainly true that the victory at Bosworth was the founding of the Bray family fortunes. Reginald Bray had previously been in the service of Henry Tudor's mother, Margaret Beaufort, and was one of the most trusted members of her household, and under Henry he rose to a position of power and wealth.

A new biography of Henry VII describes Sir Reynold Bray (*Reynold is the medieval version of Reginald, and was my father's name*) as "the mastermind behind Henry's financial policies", and "one of the chief architect's of his reign.... With no formal office, no formal appointment by letters patent, he sat at the top of the tree, the king's chief executive."

He was made a Knight of the Garter, and became "pre-eminent among those in Henry's inner circle", and "in the process, made himself enormously rich."

I only recently learned quite how rich. His manors extended from Northamptonshire to Sussex, from Somerset to East Anglia. In modern terms, he was a multi-millionaire. And all this - the king's trust and friendship, and Sir Reynold's rise to eminence, dated from Henry's childhood. "Of Henry's small group of intimate advisers, Bray was the man of whom he had earliest memories." When Henry was aged 11, in the care of a Yorkist (ie, enemy) guardian, he was visited by Reynold (his mother's steward), who "brought the boy a present of a bow and a quiverful of arrows." Never can a kindly present have been so magnificently rewarded.

EDMUND BRAY



But Reynold died without children of his own, so his property was divided between his brother's two sons, Edmund and Edward and it was Edward who inherited the manors of Shere, which have remained in our branch of the Bray family ever since.

Sir Reynold left much of his money to St George's Chapel, Windsor, for the completion of the nave (which had been left unfinished during the Wars of the Roses). St George's Chapel was duly grateful, and when you go there you will see the Bray crest carved in wood and stone 175 times throughout that glorious building. The crest is a "bray" - a pun on the family name - a flax bray or hemp bray, for threshing flax or hemp. Sir Reynold died in 1503, and is buried at Windsor, in the Bray Chantry Chapel.

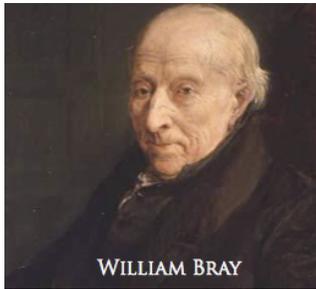
BRAY CREST



We now come to the first of the gallops. Almost nothing notable happened in the 16th century, except that the Brays extended their landholding in Surrey by acquiring the Manors of Gomshall Netley and Gomshall Towerhill, and Sir Edward Bray came to live in Towerhill Manor House. His son Reginald married the granddaughter of Sir Thomas More, to add a touch of saintliness to the family inheritance! (PHOTO of Margaret Roper, Thomas More's daughter and mother of Elizabeth Roper Bray.)



MARGARET ROPER



The next great leap forward is to William Bray, the renowned Surrey historian - who has recently become even more famous as the author of the first written record of playing the game of Base Ball - on Easter Monday, 1755, when he was 18. (He is now in the American Baseball Hall of Fame, and has a Shere pub named after him!) He played that game of Baseball with a group of friends,

including Miss Molly Flutter, and he recorded it in the first volume of his diaries - which he kept throughout his long life, and are now in the archives of Surrey History Centre. He died in his 97th year, as the memorial in Shere Church proclaims, "after a life as useful and honorable as it was long".

And goodness, how useful it was!

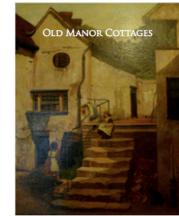
William trained as a solicitor and practised as an Attorney in London, but his passion was antiquarian and architectural research, especially in the county of Surrey. In addition to his exploits at Baseball, he's best known for completing the first great Surrey history, in partnership with The Rev Owen Manning - **Manning & Bray's History of Surrey** - for which he travelled to every corner of the county, and collected and commissioned countless illustrations. In his 80s he also completed the editing and publication of the Diary of John Evelyn - whose family estates adjoined William's at Shere.

He seems to have had boundless energy, and a huge zest for life. Perhaps the fact that he was the younger son and didn't inherit Shere Manor Estate until he was well into his 60s meant that he wasn't bowed down by the responsibilities of the Estate, but he became actively involved in Estate management while his brother, The Rev George Bray of Towerhill, was still alive, and bought several of the cottages that the Estate still owns in Shere.



William himself lived in what are now Old Manor Cottages in Upper Street, just east of where the footbridge used to be. The house looks rather undistinguished, with an apologetic low middle section in

between the outer wings, but that's because - when the current Manor House was built in 1840, the Lady of the Manor (Frances Bray), complained that the Old Manor House spoilt her view of the Tillingbourne stream, so she had the central roof and first floor demolished!



But William's other major achievement was to introduce Scots Pine to the Hurtwood, and transform that part of the heathland landscape of the Surrey Hills. You'll be hearing more about the Hurtwood a little later on.



William's son Edward predeceased him, so he was succeeded by his grandson Reginald, who built the Manor House (*originally called Fir Hill*) on the hill above Shere - and it was to get from the Manor House on the hill to the walled fruit and vegetable garden on the south that the footbridge was originally built.

It was William's granddaughter, Louisa, who was responsible for the next important addition to Shere - the village school. Louisa was a spinster, but she was no wilting violet, she was a strong-minded lady who believed passionately in the importance of education, and she had a like-minded ally in her friend Laura Lomax, who lived at Netley House. They were supported by the curate, but not by the then Rector, who disapproved of the working classes being given ideas above their station. But Louisa and Laura persevered: Louisa persuaded her brother to give the land and the stone for the school building and the adjoining schoolmaster's house, and Edmund Lomax added an oriel window to give it a touch of architectural distinction. Like her grandfather William, Louisa kept a diary, so we have a vivid account of the school's early days.



"Shere School is not like ordinary schools, and was built under rather singular circumstances. There had never been anything but Dame Schools in Shere, and Mr Duncombe (the Rector) had no

desire to have anything better....but it entered into Laura's and my head that a schoolhouse might be found or built, and a School maintained by the subscriptions of Parishioners.

Our beginning was humble. A Sunday School held in the Church with only Laura, myself, and Mr Handforth (the Curate) to teach. Then we found a Cottage belonging to Mr Edmund Lomax with two goodsized rooms, and we got a Master and Mistress for a weekday school.

Then I had the boldness to suggest building a School house, and I was thought out of my mind. Where were the funds to come from? Laura offered £100, and I £40, and from this beginning we proceeded by the kind help of my Brothers and Brother-in-law. Edward (Bray) gave the ground and the stone. Edmund Lomax some of the Timber, and subscriptions were found for the workmen. We did not beg out of the Parish or have a Bazaar, but had a Government grant to help. It was done with no help from the Rector of the Parish except £2. Aunt Kitty helped to fit up the Kitchen, which as she disliked schools was more than could have been expected. Edmund Lomax added the Oriel window in the Upper School Room to gratify his taste."

The foundation stone was laid on 25 May 1842, and the church bells - which were then only heard at Christmas and on royal occasions - were rung in celebration. The school expanded rapidly - by its 50th birthday there were 259 pupils on the register - and in 1856, the Shere Reading Room was opened for adults (open every evening except Sunday), and "some people paid 3 pence a week to attend an Evening Class for reading and writing, taught by Mr Evershed of Gomshall." There was a Baby Class (from 1884-1905) for children from the age of 3 - and one child even younger, aged 2 1/2.

In the 1890s, Shorthand was taught at Shere School. The school was always an example of the very best innovations, and highest standards of education - a magnificent legacy of two indomitable maiden ladies!

For the rest of the 19th century, the Estate concentrated on practical improvements in the village, and building more cottages - two of them designed by Lutyens early in his career, as he was a friend of the family and courting my great-aunt Nellie.



My great-grandfather, Sir Reginald More Bray, installed a pumped water supply, that was originally put in to serve the Victorian Manor House, and was eventually extended to serve the whole of Shere village, plus some of the properties in Gomshall and most of the large houses in Hook Lane. Prior to that, the water supply in the village was from shallow wells.

My grandfather describes "The Shere Waterworks" in his memoirs. He was a boy of 9 when the pumped water supply was inaugurated in 1889, and he helped to raise the sluice to start the wheel. The pumping station was in Lower Street. The Tillingbourne was dammed at the bottom of the Kitchen Garden, and laying the water pipes took the best part of the next 5 years, but a long frost in the winter of 1894 froze some of the pipes, and people complained that "in winter the pipes were frozen, in spring they were being mended, in summer there was a drought, but they did get a little water in the autumn."



To increase the supply, the Tillingbourne was dammed above High House, creating the large pond you can see from Shere Surgery. An overshot wheel and new pumps were installed, an oil engine in 11897, followed by a suction gas plant, and finally electric motors - and a new well was made in High House Farm field.



It was a major enterprise, called The Hurtwood Water Company, and it lasted right up until 1952 when it was taken over by what became Thames Water - and it is one of my greatest blessings that I didn't have to inherit it!

The family files are filled with letters of complaint - especially from the owners of large gardens, complaining about shortage of water in the summertime, or from my great-uncle Reggie, bemoaning the

REGINALD ARTHUR BRAY



irresponsibility of gardeners who wantonly wasted water on their herbaceous borders, or - even worse - motor cars, whose weight cracked the precious pipes. **"I am afraid I cannot allow another car at Coneyhurst. The wear and tear on the road is much too large already. Nothing wears a road so much as a car in wet weather."**

That letter was written in 1926, by which time cars had become the Estate's worst nightmare, and led to the creation of Hurtwood Control.

Some of you will have heard Mark Beaumont, the Hurtwood Ranger, speak at the Albury Trust AGM last summer and describe the history of Hurtwood Control - so you will know that at the turn of the 20th century, the two great threats to this area were cars, and gypsies - but the dangers they caused were the same: fire.

I spent much of the summer of 2010 researching in the Bray archives at the Surrey History Centre, and I was staggered to learn the extent of the damage - much of it caused by deliberate arson. There's a letter from Lord Allen of Hurtwood in 1928, describing the problems on Reynards Hill (on the Albury/Ewhurst border):

The fires before the recent spate of bad weather ... could have been rather alarming. We had 5 within 48 hours, three of which were put out after much labour by my staff and myself. One would I think almost certainly have consumed a larger part of Reynards Hill if we had not all made a fierce fight for it. I have very little doubt it was purposely lighted. Then came the rain, but last Saturday another fire became visible which I and my weekend guests dealt with - I think I shall consider this weekend amusement for my friends!

PS We have found a number of curious objects like bombs! hear one of the fires.

And a similar complaint from a weekender who lived at Winterfold Cottage, writing about **"the very serious fires on Winterfold Heath.... The setting on fire seems to be done by a candle burning down till it sets light to a rag soaked in paraffin."** The villainous arsonists were the local gypsies.



The gypsy problem wasn't new, and wasn't confined to our local area. In 1910, things had become so bad in Surrey that my great-grandfather, Sir Reginald, who was a High Court judge with a seat in the House of Lords, got together with his lordly neighbours, Lord Onslow and Lord Lovelace, to form an Association to control the gypsies, with the splendid name of **The Surrey Anti-Vagrant and Prevention of Heath Fires Association.**

They employed 3 men to patrol the common lands “that are frequented by vagrants...and take steps to prevent and extinguish fires”, but the Patrols had to be disbanded during the First World War, and the gypsies became even more troublesome. Sir Reginald submitted a formal complaint to **The Inspector of Nuisances, Byfleet** - and sent an impassioned statement to Parliament, which ends: **“As regards the evils to the people living in the neighbourhood...it is no exaggeration to say that the gypsies are regarded as a terror and a nuisance - and that they deprive the inhabitants of some of their enjoyment of this beautiful district.”**

But to no avail - Parliament was unmoved. So when Uncle Reggie inherited the Estate in 1923 he tried completely different tactics. He established a Gypsy Camp, near Wickets Well on the heathland at Winterfold.



Cranleigh WI described it in a splendid scrapbook in 1949:

“Mr Bray, in the kindness of his heart, allowed a maximum of 100 to stay in what became known as ‘the camp’. He issued a 5/- (25p) licence to each head of a family, which allowed them to stay, contingent on good behaviour, proper disposal of refuse, etc.

The gypsies spent their money on drink and there were subsequent fights - so much so that the Windmill Inn was forbidden to serve them, as it was the practice of the men to encourage the women to fight each other outside, and this resulted in overcrowded cases at the local courts in the following week.”

The camp didn't - it couldn't - solve all the problems. And at least one local resident complained to the Ministry of Health, because he felt that the Gypsy Camp was lowering the tone (and value!) of the area. **“Winterfold Heath...is a delightful tract of pine-covered heathland, but the formation of the encampment of some hundred persons, including a large proportion of young children renders the landscape a disgusting and disgraceful spectacle.”** But the Ministry promptly sent an Inspector, who was quite impressed, and didn't consider the camp to be a hazard to public health. An analysis of the water from Wickets Well showed it to be **“an excellent water for all domestic purposes.”** And in his opinion the lack of **“sanitary arrangements”** was unlikely to cause a nuisance **“as the camp is situated in such a large tract of open country.”**

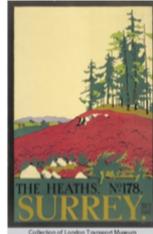
So in 1926, Uncle Reggie was able to write: **The Committee I formed are dealing very satisfactorily with the gypsies. The licence system works well. We keep them to 2 spots. We have a gipsy school run by the Council.**

It was the first gipsy school in England, with 60-7- children, and evening classes for adults (59 adults on the books). The schoolmaster reported that progress in literacy was rather slow, but maths was much better. **“Every one of the children could give the correct change for half a crown or a one pound note” !**

So he'd succeeded in getting the gypsies more or less under control. But by this time, a far greater menace were motorists - cars and motorcycles - and the environmental catastrophe they caused.

The great British public were becoming motorised. London Transport was actively encouraging them to come out from the suburbs and explore the beauties of the countryside - and in the process they set fire to hundreds and hundreds of acres of the Hurtwood. Uncle Reggie was devastated - as he described in an anguished letter to the Secretary of the Commons & Footpaths Preservation Society.

THE
HEATHS
LONDON TRANSPORT POSTER



I wonder if your very useful society can do anything to make the general public think not only of their rights, but of their duties in respect of the Commons. At present, they come only to disfigure and to destroy.

The so-called Beauty Spots at times, with their litter of paper and broken bottles, resemble Peckham Rye after a Bank Holiday. But much worse than this, by their reckless carelessness in throwing down lighted matches and cigarettes, or by lighting fires to boil water, they are steadily devastating the Commons. During the last few years, they have burnt over 600 acres, most of which was covered with young trees which have either been planted or protected at considerable cost. The last of the fine trees on the south slope of Holmbury Hill are dying as a result of fire in 1921, and will have to be cut. Pitch Hill has already been laid waste, and the work of destruction is proceeding northwards. Reynards Hill further to the west is now being gradually burnt, and the fires are invading the plantations on the private lands adjoining. In a relatively short time, the lands will be bare of trees, and in the state they were 100 years ago when planting first began. I am afraid we regard the general public as destroying angels who arrive in motor cars.

What saved the situation was the **Law of Property Act 1925**.

This Act allowed him to dedicate land to the public - giving them a **right of air and exercise** throughout the Hurtwood, on foot or horses or bicycles, but giving the landowner the right to ban vehicles from driving onto the Common, to restrict them to designated car parks, and to make byelaws to control their behaviour. So **Hurtwood Control** was born.

The Hurtwood was one of the first privately owned Estates to be dedicated for public access, and I am immensely proud of the pleasure it has given to so many thousands of people over the years. As I'm sure you know, the access is now managed by a registered charity, which recently changed its name to the Friends of the Hurtwood - to give it a more friendly image(!) But the aim remains the same, to manage it in the best interests of its visitors, its wildlife and the environment.

I think of Hurtwood Control as Uncle Reggie's greatest legacy, but it was by no means his only achievement. He cared equally passionately about the welfare of people - and their happiness. It was under his stewardship that the Barn Theatre flourished in the Long Barn at High House Farm in the 1930s, and actors such as Peter Ustinov and Dirk Bogarde began to make their name.

SIR JOCELYN



Reggie died in 1950 and was succeeded by his younger brother Jocelyn, who had previously managed the Lovelace estate at Ockham, and been Chairman of the Thames Conservancy, for which he was knighted in 1946.

He continued Reggie's practical concern for his tenants, and embarked on a major programme of cottage modernisation, so that by the time he died in 1964 all the cottages had indoor bathrooms - a great leap forward! And it was Jocelyn who provided most of the land for the building of the Shere Bypass on the A25 in 1960, and I sat beside him on a dais as he cut the ribbon to inaugurate the Bypass, and then drove down the road in a grand limousine doing a royal wave - to absolutely nobody!

Jocelyn died in 1964, which meant 2 sets of death duties in 14 years (1950 & 64), so the Estate I inherited is very much reduced - but we still own about 40 cottages, almost all let to local villagers as affordable housing - to help to keep the village alive, and the school thriving.

We've also been able to provide land - and the stone - for the building of Shere Surgery (opened in 1993) and its adjoining car park.



On the subject of car parks, one of my proudest moments was the opening of the Public Car Park in Shere Recreation Ground in June 2010, after 30 years of campaigning for a car park in Shere - not an Estate achievement, but the culmination of a personal quest, as one of the Rec's Trustees.

Last year also saw the transformation of the High House Farm Barns into a suite of prestige offices , preserving their architectural heritage, and giving them a new lease of life. What my family call "my legacy".



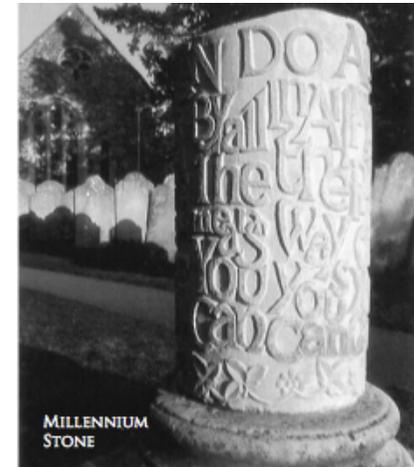
But I hope my legacy will be much more than that : that I will be handing on to a new generation an Estate that is very modest in size when compared with its grand Albury neighbour, but one that has justified the Bray family motto "**Seray Come a Dieu Plaira**" (*I will be as God pleases*) in 500 years of service to the community of Shere.

526 years at last count - and, I hope, many more to come!

Millennium Stone - engraved with John Wesley's Rule

John Wesley's Rule

Do All The Good You Can
By All the Means You Can
In All the Ways You Can
In All the Places You Can
At All the Times You Can
To All the People You Can
As Long As Ever You can



Given to the village by the Bray family, Lords of the Manor of Shere

COAT OF ARMS

