



Local History Collection

18 - Braywood and How it Developed

April 2023

Researched & written by Sarah Grace

I have recently been looking into the history of two 15th century cottages in Fifield, preparing articles for future OGAFCFA magazines. I find it surprising how many houses/cottages exist in our local area from that period - Fifield Farm Cottage, Deep Meadows, Yew Tree Cottage, Old Lodge Farm, Bishops Farm Manor, Old Malt House and the Thatched Cottage (Forest Green Road).

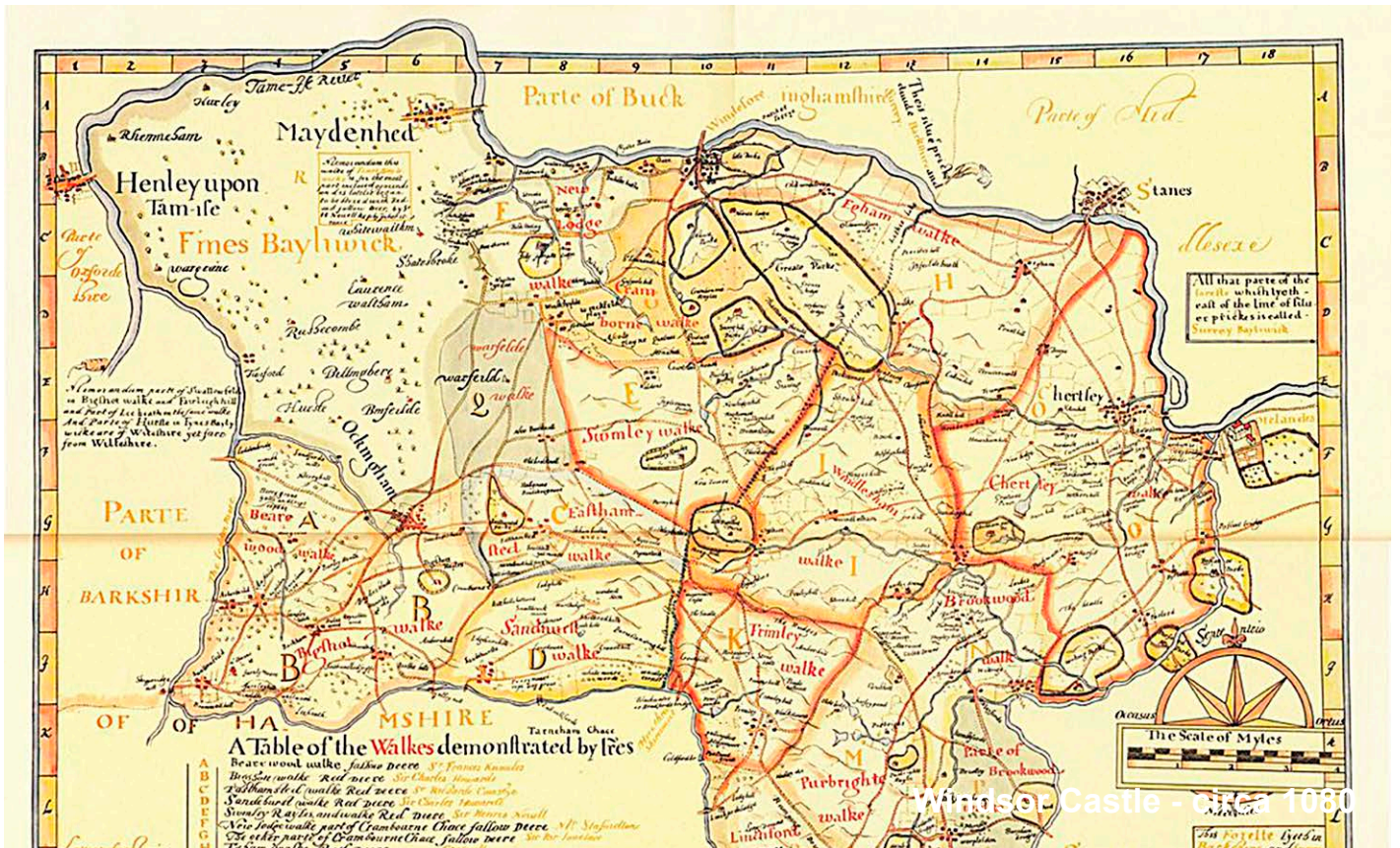
I was invited to join the Year 4 students at Braywood School in March to talk about local history and we searched for clues to confirm how the local area had developed.

We started with the Romans, who divided Britain into Provinces. Our area was in the Province of Wessex. There were 2 local settlements at Braywick and Oakley Green. When Bray Marina was excavated in the late 1960s there were skeletons and coins found dating from 320-400 A.D. The Drift Road is thought to originate from this time and a record of a road that ran from Silchester to London by Windsor Forest. After the Romans left Britain came the Anglo Saxon period(410-1066 AD) and Fifield was called Ffyfhyde (later Fifhyde and Ffifield) from the Old English which means an estate of 5 hides of land. Oakley Green was called Aukeley (later Acle, Ocle, Okle, Ockley and Okeley) which means an Oak clearing.

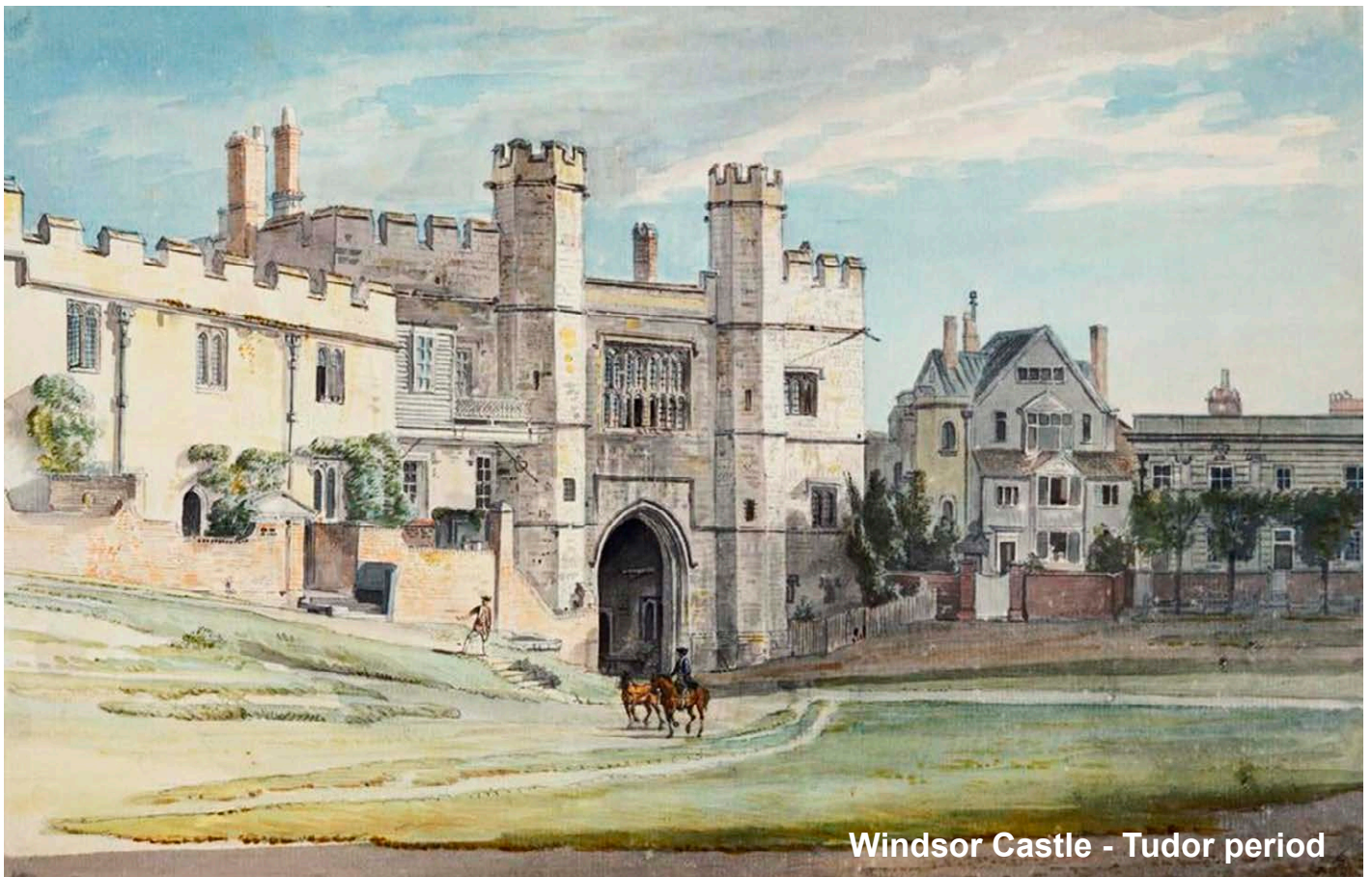
In the 9th century Wessex was divided into Shires and Berkshire (Berroscir, which means wood or wooded area) was created. Berkshire was then divided into 'Hundreds', which is an area of 100 hides, similar to the current day local Parish. Our local area was in the Royal Hundred of Bray which remained a royal Manor and only part of the land was subject to taxation. Each Hundred had Manors that oversaw the local agriculture, fishing, mills, meadows and forests. Windsor Forest is recorded at this time as a hunting ground with no major roads. During this period the King of Wessex, Aethelwulf, won the Battle of Aclea (Oak Field) against 350 Viking ships that had sailed up the Thames to Water Oakley.

The next major historical influence on the local area was in 1066 when William the Conqueror defeated the Anglo Saxon King Harold and by 1070 had started the 16 year build of a wooden Windsor Castle, which was later developed into a stone castle. During 1085 William ordered a survey of Britain to ensure that each Manor was taxed correctly. This culminated in the Domesday book of 1086 which showed *Berroscir* was made up of 22 'Hundreds' and 192 Manors. The Royal Hundred of Bray included Braywick, Moneyrow Green, Touchen End, Hawthorn Hill, Stud Green, Water Oakley, East Oakley, Oakley Green and Fifield.





One of William's favourite pastimes was hunting and he developed the Great Park to supply Windsor Castle with wood, deer, boar and fish. The Great Park covered most of the areas we know as Fifield, Braywood, Oakley Green and Water Oakley and beyond and at one time the park had a boundary stretching for 120 miles. By the Tudor Period, Windsor Castle was a Royal Court and centre for diplomatic entertainment and has been the home of more than 39 monarchs.

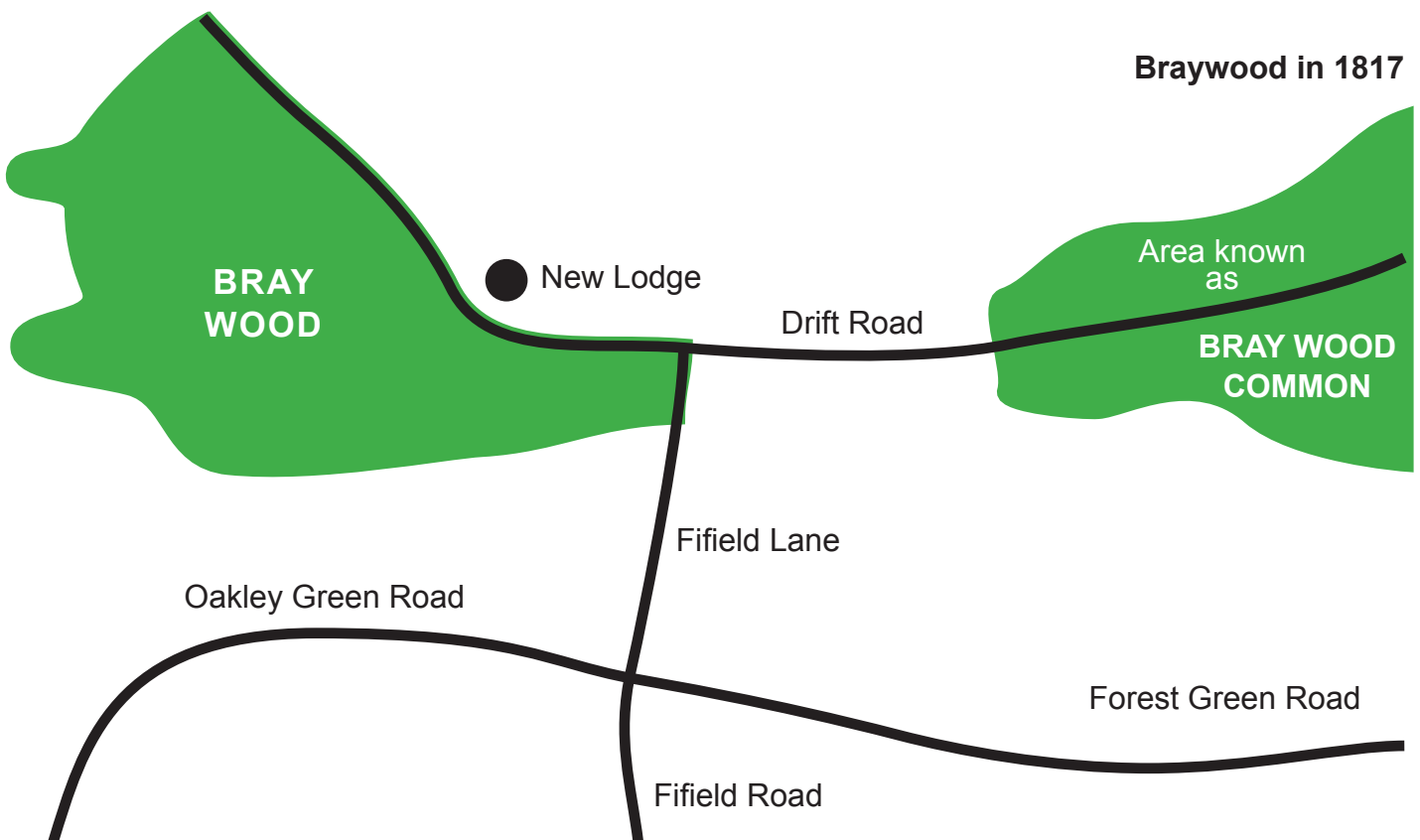


Windsor Castle - Tudor period

The road from Windsor to Reading was a Packhorse and Drovers route. It came along the Oakley Green Road and was used by Drovers to graze their sheep whilst driving them to market and the village grew up around the grazing land. Mills Farm in Oakley Green was reputed to be a Packhorse Inn for travellers. The local population was mainly involved with agriculture, forestry, milling, blacksmith and fishing. As late as 1800 the area was still mapped as heavily wooded. The trees were mainly Oak or Beech and pigs could be fed all year round on the acorns or beech mash.

As the importance and further development of Windsor Castle grew then many Royal Officials, Knights and tenants in chief who served the Monarchs built homes in the neighbourhood as it was a 'commutable' distance by horse or carriage to get to work at the Castle or the hunting grounds of Windsor Forest/Great Park. Certainly there was a Fifield House/Manor in existence in the 15th Century and in the 16th century the Norreys family were living in the house. One Norreys was the MP for Windsor, another was Gentleman Usher to Black Rod and I shall write about the Norreys family in another magazine in the future.

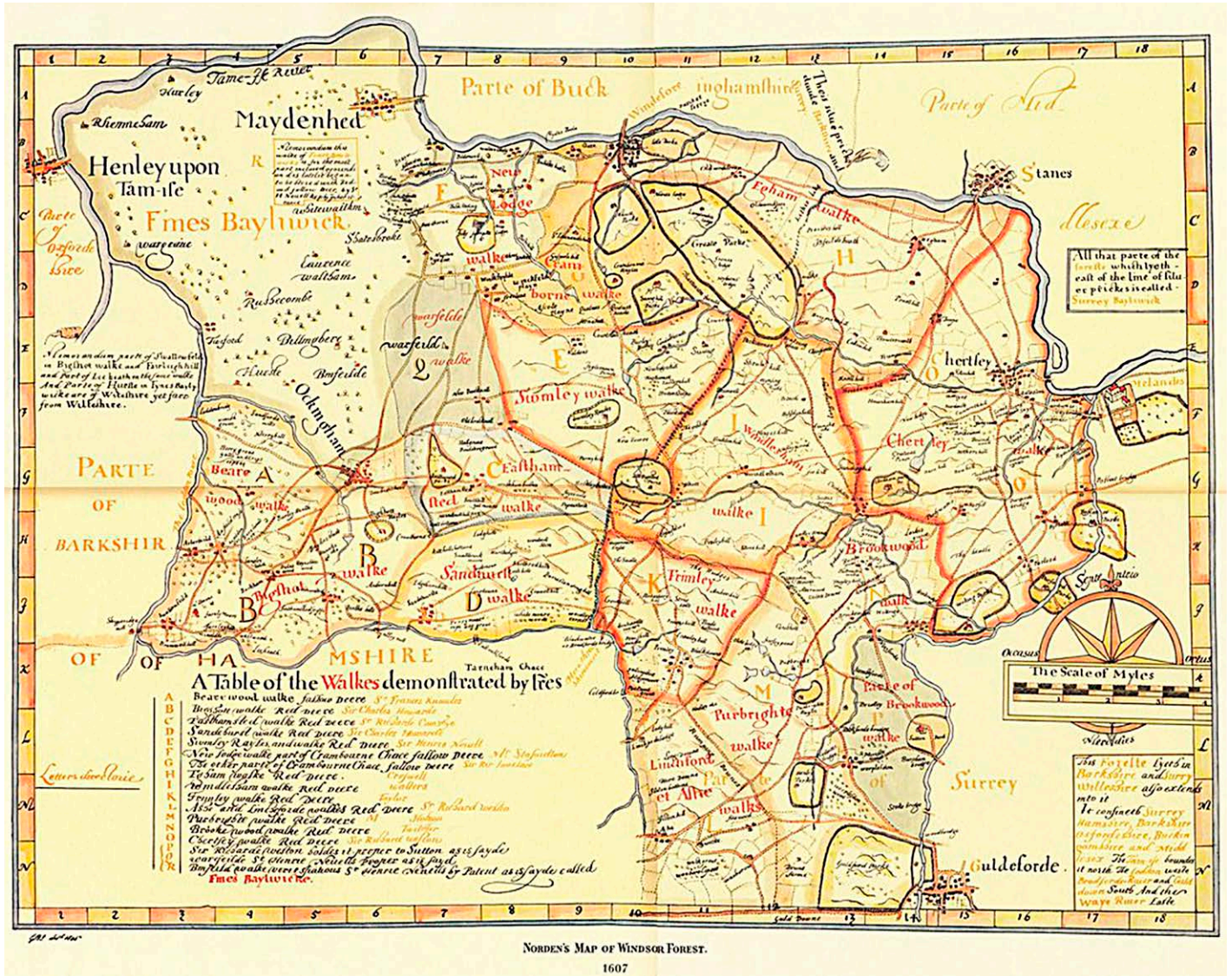
With the Year 4 students from Braywood School we talked about exactly where Braywood was situated as there was not a street sign showing 'Braywood'. Their School, along with the local cricket club, village Hall and several houses (Braywood Linn) carried the Braywood name. During our walk I was able to show them the area that Braywood covered and that it was only 'formed' in 1871 when Queen Victoria created the Ecclesiastical Parish of Braywood after the building of All Saints Church, Braywood. This was located at the top of the hill between Braywood School and New Lodge, home of the Van De Weyer family, who built it.



We discussed the importance of Bray wood as a resource for ship building, cart building, house building, casks for storing ales and wines, heating and cooking and charcoal. Charcoal was an essential fuel in the production of steel for armour, swords, horse shoes, nails, arrowheads, knives, jewellery, locks, keys, chains, torture devices, arrowheads and

lances as it produced a great heat for the smelting done by the blacksmith. The location of the village Blacksmith was right opposite Braywood school for many years.

To summarise, the number of 15th century houses in the local area is closely entwined with the development of Windsor Castle and the Royal Court and the natural resources produced by surrounding woodlands. In later magazines I will cover the history of Yew Tree Cottage and Deep Meadows.



Norden's Map of Windsor Forest - 1607

At this time ...

- Fifield was called **Fyfeld Grene**
- Oakley Green was called **Okeley Grene**
- Water Oakley was called **Walter Okely**
- Holyport was called **Hollyporte**