

## DALLINGRIDGE'S BAY AND BODIAM CASTLE MILLPOND —ELEMENTS OF A MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPE

by Christopher Whittick

*Contracts between Sir Edward Dallingridge and his monastic neighbours allow Dalyngreggesbay and its attendant leat to be conclusively located. The dating and purpose of this great water-engineering effort enhance our understanding of the context of Bodiam Castle.*

By letters patent of 20 October 1385, the crown granted Sir Edward Dallingridge licence to crenellate the manor of Bodiam. The enrolment presents few difficulties of interpretation; the castle still stands as manifest evidence of Dallingridge's subsequent action. More enigmatic, however, is the text of a further licence obtained by Sir Edward, which was enrolled on 3rd February 1386. That licence permitted him to divert a watercourse from *Dalyngreggesbay* in the vill of Salehurst to power his watermill in the vill of Bodiam.<sup>1</sup>

The texts of both patents were published in 1857 by Lower, who suggested that the water-supply to the castle moat was uppermost in the grantee's mind. That suggestion was dismissed somewhat brusquely in 1926 by Lord Curzon, who seemed blind to the possibility that a leat, if taken sufficiently far upstream, could bring river-water to a level above that of the stream of the Rother at Bodiam Bridge.<sup>2</sup>

In 1955 F. C. Clarke devoted a lavishly illustrated but poorly argued publication to an attempt to show that the river to be diverted was the Kent Ditch and not the Rother (as both Lower and Curzon had correctly supposed) and that the mill to be powered was that still standing at Peters Green on the northern boundary of the parish, near the moated site usually taken as the castle's predecessor.<sup>3</sup>

The text of the patent and topography of Bodiam have until recently been the only clues to the whereabouts of Dallingridge's elusive water-engineering; but this article presents evidence from two contracts between Sir Edward and his neighbours at Bodiam which relate specifically to the building and maintenance of the watercourse, and allow its location to be precisely determined.

Each contract makes it clear that both the dam, or bay, in the Rother, and the watercourse leading to the mill, were to follow the line of the existing

boundary ditches<sup>4</sup> which divided the demesne lands of Sir Edward's manor of Bodiam from the land of Battle and Robertsbridge Abbeys; indeed the establishment of the future liabilities for their maintenance is the major purpose of each deed.

The first of these contracts, with the abbot and convent of Battle, survives in the form of a badly damaged original, and is dated 20 July 1386. The agreement with Robertsbridge is represented by a mid 16th-century translation with a date—Saturday in the feast of St Bartholomew, 20 Richard 2—which is impossible; in that year, 1396, St Bartholomew (24 August) fell on a Thursday. In Richard's reign St Bartholomew fell on a Saturday in 1381 (4 Richard 2), 1387 (11 Richard 2) and 1392 (16 Richard 2), and it is tempting to see the middle year as the correct one, and to ascribe the error to the misreading of *xj* as *xx*.<sup>5</sup>

The holdings of both abbeys in Bodiam lay along the northern bank of the Rother, which forms the southern boundary of the parish between Bodiam Bridge on the east and the boundary with Salehurst on the west. Both holdings were the result of pious grants by former lords of Bodiam of low-lying marshland which they lacked either the will or perhaps the resources to exploit. Battle's holding, called Battle Meads, lay to the east and that of Robertsbridge to the west; both houses had been granted an apparently identical right of way from the highway to their meadows through Bodiam manor's demesne and tenant land.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the documents already discussed, there are no medieval sources which have a direct bearing on the leat. But details of the early topography of the area can be reliably traced from a number of documents, principally a 1567 survey of Robertsbridge manor, including the demesne, a map of the same estate in 1811, and from a court of survey of the demesne, free and copyhold land of Bodiam manor illustrated by a map, completed in

1671. These documents enable us to determine the boundary between the demesne of Bodiam and the monastic land to the south, and thus establish the course of the leat.<sup>7</sup>

The area to be discussed may conveniently be broken down into five sections: the dam or bay itself and the diverted course of the Rother immediately to its east; the boundary with Robertsbridge's meadows; the boundary with Battle Meads; the course of the leat in Dallingbridge's own grounds before it entered his millpond; the pond and the site of the mill itself (Fig. 1).

Both contracts immediately clarify one point—the dam is stated to be 'in the river called Limenc', the ancient name for the Rother.<sup>8</sup> The contract with Robertsbridge is largely concerned with the maintenance of the dam and the assumption by Dallingbridge of the liability to scour the former boundary ditch, into which he had diverted the Rother, which had hitherto been the responsibility of the monks. The agreement was to last for as long as the mill continued to operate. As well as maintenance of the dam itself, the contract ensured that the monks would not obstruct the flow of the Rother by *any manner of trenches, ditches, guts nor other subtleties* on their land above the bay, and that they might use the new channel to bring *all manner of victuals and necessities* from Bodiam Bridge by boat to the bay.

The bay or dam, referred to in the contract as a *sluice called Pollydebay*, was constructed of timber and earth. It was bounded by the abbey's meadow called Long Marsh to its south, and Sir Edward's demesne to the north. The 1811 map shows two fields called Upper and Lower Bay Brook which lie north of Long Brook; it is clear from the 1567 survey that the boundary between Udiam's land and the demesne of Robertsbridge lay between them and it is suggested that the same division also marked the pre-diversion course of the river (Fig. 1, B–E). In 1567 Long Brook was called Long Mead, which may readily be identified with the Long Marsh of 1387; its western boundary was then described as a wall, or embankment, leading to Bay Brook. Bodiam Park was said to lie across the river from Bay Brook, and indeed that area is marked on the 1671 map as former demesne.

The line of the dam which forms the western boundary of Upper and Lower Bay Brook is clearly visible on the ground (Fig. 1, A–C). It takes the river

almost at a right angle out of its predominantly east–west course to head due north for a little over 300 metres, at which point (Fig. 1, C) an equally sharp bend leads the stream eastwards again. The course of the river before it reaches the bay forms the boundary between the parishes of Salehurst and Ewhurst, but the boundary with Bodiam to its north was disputed, perhaps as a result of the diversion. With the river in its ancient course the dam, as the patent says, lay in the parish of Salehurst. The Rother does not regain its accustomed course until a point immediately west of Udiam Farm (Fig. 1, E).<sup>9</sup>

In 1811 the land of the Robertsbridge estate north of the Rother consisted of a block of seven pieces of brookland; that was also the extent of the holding there in 1567. The fields across the entire northern boundary of the block were marked as former Bodiam demesne on the 1671 map and in 1811 formed part of the land of Park Farm.

On the ground, the ditch which now forms the boundary between the two estates leaves the Rother (Fig. 1, D) in a fairly wide channel but soon narrows. Halfway along the boundary, the ditch is joined by a footpath which leads from Park Farm towards Higham; the path is raised on a slight embankment which also retains the ditch on its north side (Fig. 1, F–G).

East of the Robertsbridge holding lay Battle Meads, which in 1688 consisted of 65 acres.<sup>10</sup> They are shown on the 1671 map lying south of two Bodiam copyhold tenements called Tomsetts and Bines, and a parcel of demesne land which had been sold. It is only along the central portion of the boundary south of Bines that the course of the leat followed the boundary between these two estates. To the west it is most likely to have run south of Oasthouse Brook, the most northerly field in Battle Meads. In 1526 the abbot of Battle granted a lease of a field called *Snepyswisshe* otherwise *Snepysmede* which contained five acres, to John Mores of Bodiam. Other fields in Battle Meads lay to the east and south, the abbot of Robertsbridge's land to the west and to the north lay a stream called *The Mylryvere*. Although the field cannot be precisely located, the other boundaries must place it at the north-western extremity of Battle Meads, quite consistent with the suggested course of the leat. The description of the mill river as a stream suggests that in 1526 it retained its function as a leat to Bodiam Castle mill.<sup>11</sup>

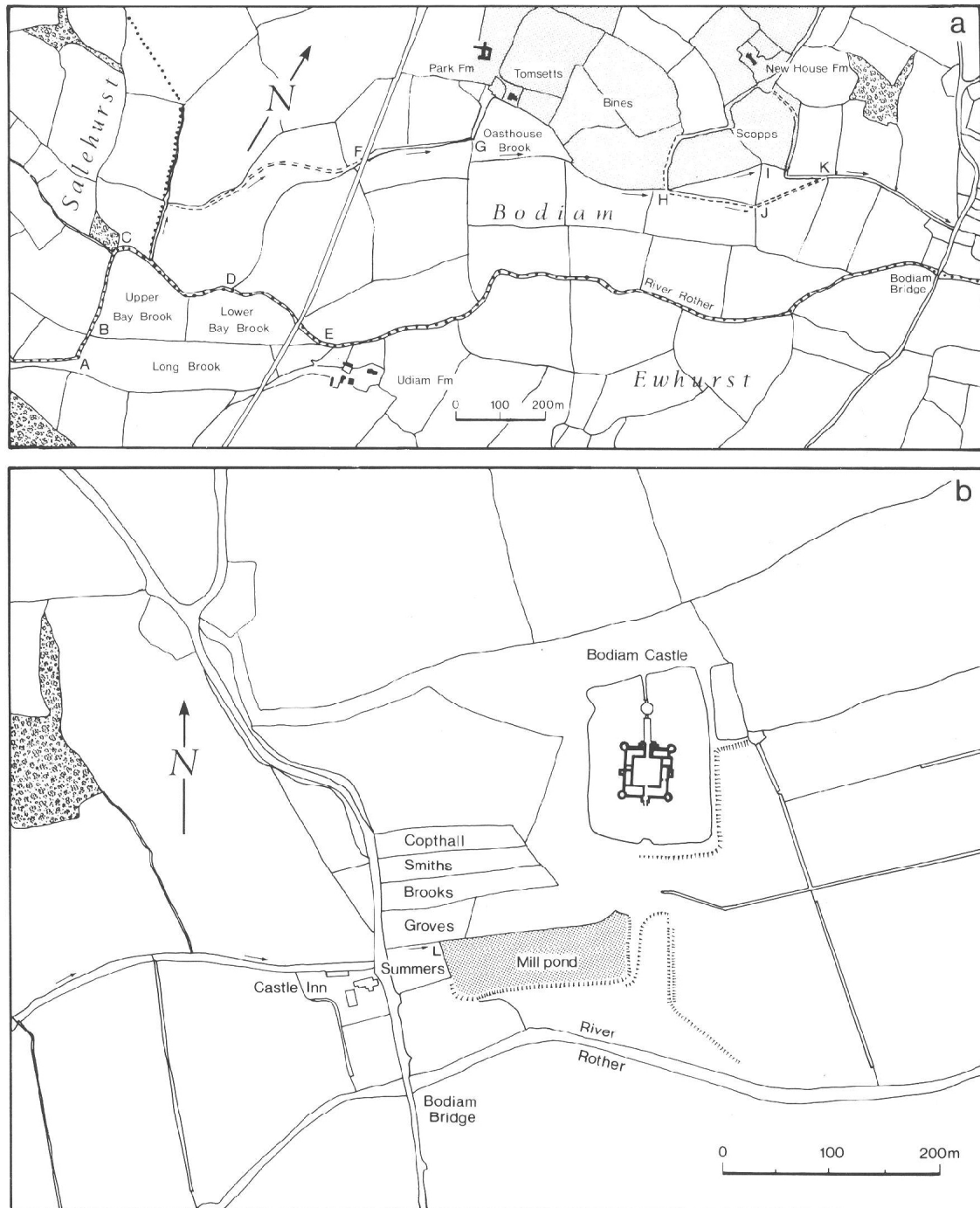


Fig. 1.: 1a: The Course of the River Rother and the mill leat between Dallingridge's Bay and Bodiam Bridge;  
1b: The course of the River Rother, the mill leat and the elements of the medieval landscape at Bodiam.

To the east of Bines two courses are possible: the more northerly follows the boundary between a copyhold called Scopps and a triangular piece of Bodiam demesne (Fig. 1, H–I–K); that to the south is marked by a field boundary (now removed) and a footpath which formed the boundary between the Bodiam and Battle estates (Fig. 1, H–J–K). The former course would account for the otherwise curious intrusion of a piece of Bodiam demesne between Bodiam copyhold land and the Battle demesne; the tenement may have been created after the construction of the watercourse and adopted it as its southern boundary, leaving a piece of demesne isolated on the southern bank. A faint suggestion of a bank was observed in the newly ploughed field in 1983, but that could have been the vestige of the former field boundary rather than of Dallingridge's leat. Neither does any sign remain of the drainage system called *Wallgripp* which according to the contract was to be constructed by Sir Edward on Battle's land.<sup>12</sup>

It is fortunate that the topographic evidence for the leat's final section (Fig. 1, K–L) is so clear since no documentary evidence survives to suggest its route. The track leading from above the Castle Inn westwards towards New House Farm (which is built on Scopps tenement) is carried until it turns north by a pronounced bank which has a deeply cut drainage ditch to the north. That this bank continues after the divergence of the footpath outlining the putative southern course discussed in the last section, is further evidence in support of the northern course.

There is no evidence to show how the leat traversed the road; a ford or bridge is possible. It entered the millpond, a depression erroneously known since Curzon's time at least as the Tilting Yard, between two copyhold tenements called Groves and Summers; a gap in the western wall of the depression at its northern end is clearly visible at that point (Fig. 1, L). It is to be regretted that the

recent removal of large pieces of timber from the ground in that area was not subject to archaeological observation.<sup>13</sup>

The agreement with Robertsbridge states that Dallingridge had built a new mill at Bodiam; it is clear that it lay on the bay which forms the eastern end of the millpond. In 1567, 'the watercourse leading from the millshot' formed the eastern boundary of the Robertsbridge manor tenement called *Frerenmead*, which straddled the Rother; 'the bank of Bodiam millpond' formed its northern boundary.<sup>14</sup>

The evidence advanced proves the course of the diversion of the Rother licensed in 1386 conclusively. That the work of the new mill at Bodiam followed so closely on the licence to crenellate implies a conception far wider than has previously been suggested. Three years earlier Dallingridge had obtained the grant of a market and fair at Bodiam, one of the last such grants to be enrolled for any Sussex manor.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we see in these three grants evidence for the plantation of a planned, almost model village on the bank of the Rother—moated castle, mill, cottages and market-place. If, as Hohler has suggested, Bodiam as we see it is the realisation of an old soldier's dream, it was perhaps a far more ambitious dream than he imagined.<sup>16</sup>

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1385–1389*, 42; *ibid.*, 98, calendaring P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice) C66/621, m.38.

<sup>2</sup> *Suss. Arch. Coll.* 9 (1857), 290–91; Lord Curzon, *Bodiam Castle* (1926), 26–28.

<sup>3</sup> F. C. Clark, *Bodiam Castle, Sussex, Did its builder also construct Dalyngrigge's Bay* (Rye, 1955); for a report of excavations at the moated site, see D. Martin, 'Three Moated Sites in North-East Sussex, part 2: Hawksden and Bodiam', *Suss. Arch. Coll.* 128 (1990), 89–116.

- <sup>4</sup> Pace Charles Coulson, 'Some Analysis of the Castle of Bodiam, East Sussex', in *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, 4, 103–4, n. 84.
- <sup>5</sup> H(enry) E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, New Acquisition 870; for a photocopy, see E(ast) S(ussex) R(ecord) O(ffice) AMS 5789/9 (Battle); C(entre for) K(entish) S(tudies) (formerly Kent Archives Office) U1475 E57 (Robertsbridge).
- <sup>6</sup> H.E.H. BA vol. 29, ff. 124v–125 (Battle cartulary); *Report on the Manuscripts . . . Preserved at Penshurst Place*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (Historic Manuscripts Commission 77 (1925)), 66–7, 120–21; deeds of Battle Meads at C.K.S. U813 and Accession 3118 (Morland of Lamberhurst, calendar at E.S.R.O.); for the grants of rights of way by William de Bodiam see H.E.H. BA vol. 29, f. 125, charter number 4 and *Penshurst Place*, 66.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Survey of the Manor of Robertsbridge*, R. H. d'Elboux (ed.) (Suss. Rec. Soc. 47, 1947), entries 295–329; E.S.R.O. BAT 4435, map 20; British Library Add. MS. 66,693 (court of survey, 1671), microfilm E.S.R.O. XA15/1, with E.S.R.O. AMS 5691/3/1 (map by Thomas Russell).
- <sup>8</sup> A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Sussex* (English Place-Name Society, vol. 6) 1 (1929), 7.
- <sup>9</sup> W(est) S(ussex) R(ecord) O(ffice), Ep II/5/6 ff. 242–43, 245–47 and 249–50 for depositions *Bathurst v Hawes* in the court of the Archdeacon of Lewes in 1600.
- <sup>10</sup> C.K.S., U813 T47/4–6, and Accession 3118/3–8 (Morland).
- <sup>11</sup> H.E.H., BA 55/1606 (detailed calendar at E.S.R.O.).
- <sup>12</sup> A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements* (English Place-Name Society, vol. 25) 1 (1956), s. v. *grype*.
- <sup>13</sup> Mrs Vivienne Coad, personal comment.
- <sup>14</sup> d'Elboux (op. cit.), entry 93 (pp. 32, 33).
- <sup>15</sup> *Victoria County History*, Sussex 9, 263.
- <sup>16</sup> Christopher Hohler, 'Kings and castles: court life in peace and war', in J. Evans (ed.), *The Flowering of the Middle Ages* (1966), 140, followed by Charles Coulson, 'Structural Symbolism in Medieval Castle Architecture', *Jnl. Brit. Arch. Assoc.* 132 (1979), 76 and 'Some Analysis of the Castle at Bodiam', 51–107; but see D. J. Turner, 'Bodiam, Sussex: True Castle or Old Soldier's Dream House?' in W. H. Ormrod (ed.), *England in the Fourteenth Century* (1986), 267–77, dubitante.