



# Bucks Earth Heritage Group

*Circular walk:*

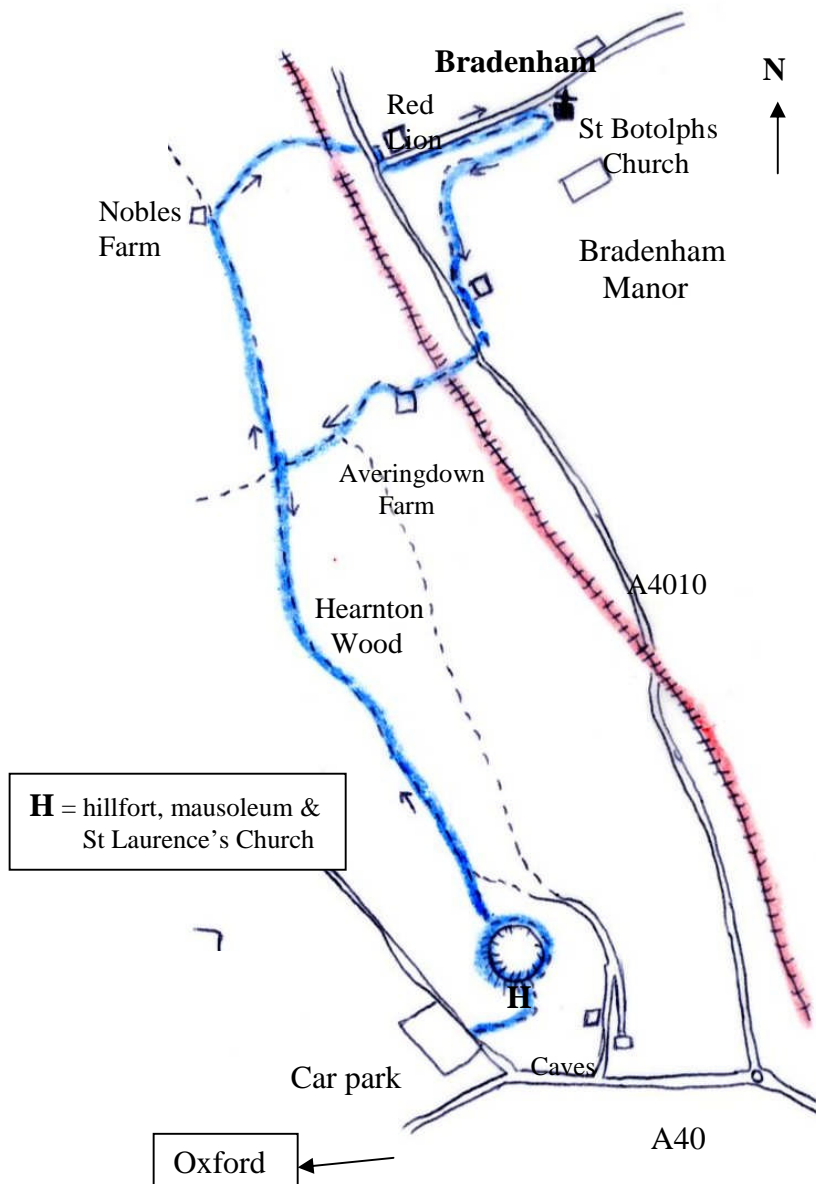
## West Wycombe to Bradenham

### Park:

Park at the West Wycombe Garden Centre, in Chorley Road, just off the A40 in West Wycombe, SP 825 948. **Refreshments:** Garden Centre, Red Lion (closed Mons), caves

### The route:

From the car park cross the Chorley Road and take the steep uphill footpath to gain access to the Mausoleum, hillfort and St Lawrence's church at the top of the hill. On leaving the church take the exit on the north side (keeping left of the car park, and west of the house after this). Walk the Bledlow Ridge to Hearnton Wood and Nobles Farm. At Nobles Farm take the right-hand footpath to Bradenham, passing under the railway. **Time:** about 2 hours.



Cross the A4010 Bradenham Road (the Red Lion could be a lunch stop) and walk through Bradenham to St Botolphs church on the right. After St Botolphs and the Green turn back in the A4010/Red Lion direction, but turn left and walk up the lane the other side of the Green (cricket pitch). This leads to the A4010 near the Old Rectory where you will turn left for only c. 150 m before taking the right-hand path to Averingdown Farm. Keep on this path until you come to the path you walked out on, turning left here takes you back to St Lawrence's Church and hillfort. If you would like to visit the caves, follow the road to the left from the St Lawrence's Church car park, veering right and not directly on through buildings in front. A visit to the caves can be made with a café stop here or back in the Garden Centre Tea Rooms, which you find by turning right out of the caves and right again onto the A40.

## What you will see:

### The Mausoleum, Iron Age hillfort, and St Lawrence's Church

**St Lawrence's Church** is on top of the hill and displays the local landmark of the Golden Ball in the tower. The church, the graveyard and the mausoleum all lay within a circular **hillfort** of almost 3 acres. Pottery and other finds indicate that this was inhabited during the early Iron Age c. 2,500 years ago.

The **Mausoleum** was built in 1763-4 with a bequest of £500. It echoes Constantine's arch in Rome and principally commemorates Dashwood's wife. Local building materials feature such as large amounts of flint (undressed and knapped), as well as Portland Stone from Dorset. Note the native yew trees around this area and the Ridge.

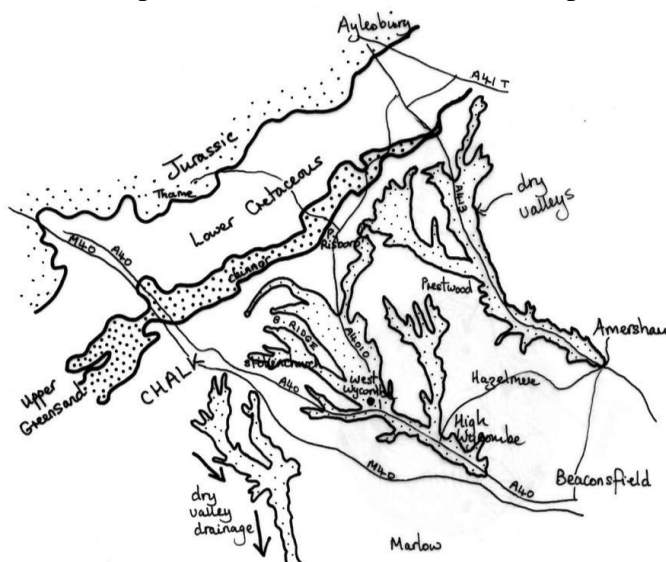
The **church** uses local building materials – mostly flint with some sandstone sarsen and pebbly sarsen stone. The sandstone variety of sarsen is the Denner Hill type probably obtained from nearby Naphill or Walters Ash; the pebbly sarsen is known as the Bradenham Puddingstone. The gravestones also contain a variety of rock types – granites, sandstones and limestones are amongst the most common.



Close-up detail of the minerals within granite and sandstone gravestones.

### The Dry Valleys

With your back to the Mausoleum gate, and **looking southeast towards High Wycombe**, you are looking at a landscape carved by melt-waters during the Ice Age. Both the A40 Oxford Road and the A4010 Bradenham Road, joining it from the left, both show good evidence of being cut by water. This evidence is the shape of the valley and also the alluvium lying at the bottom, which is encountered during building works. This dry valley is only one of many cut into the chalk of the Chilterns, and indeed shapes the beautiful Chiltern landscape.

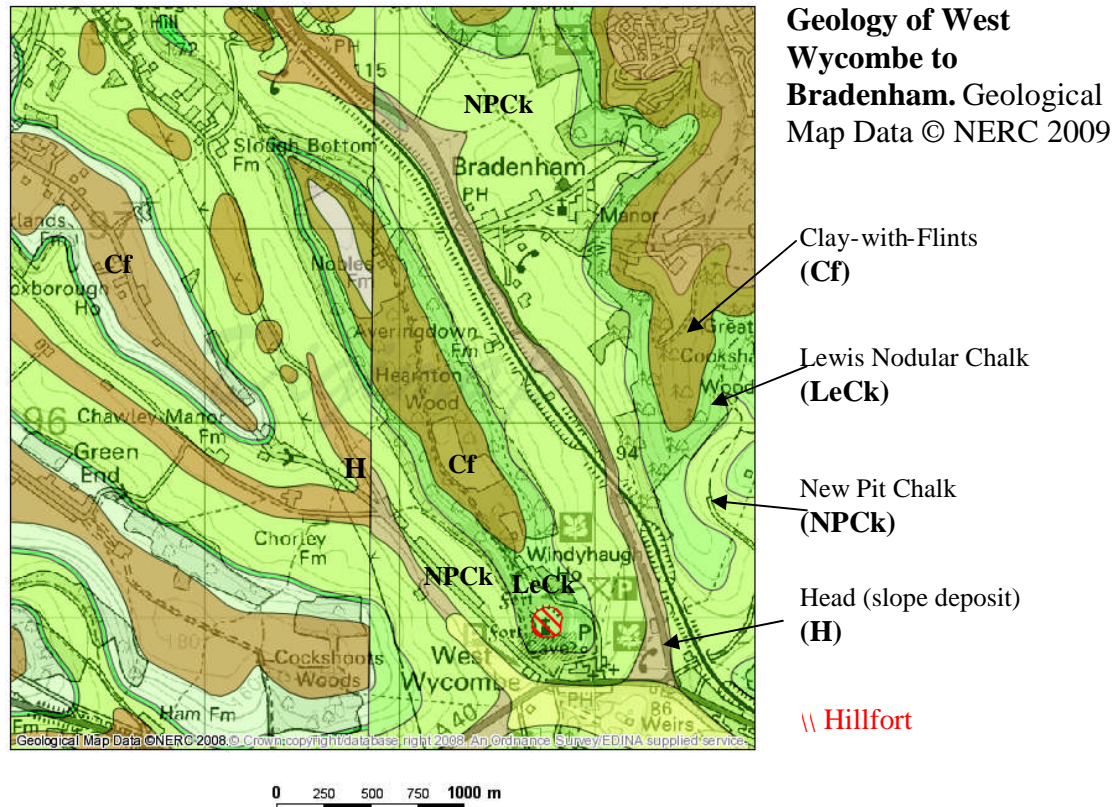


**Sketch of the dry valleys of the High Wycombe area.** Note that many of the main roads follow these valleys. From the Mausoleum two intersecting valleys are seen – one SE and along the line of the A40 Stokenchurch to High Wycombe road, and one draining southwards from Princes Risborough (the line of the A4010).



The dry valleys were cut at a time when the porosity of the Chalk was blocked by ice – frozen rock will not let water pass through it. Melt-water that formed at the end of glacial periods ran over the surface as rivers, cutting valleys as it flowed.

As you walk along the **Bledlow Ridge**, away from the church, you are walking on a high ridge left behind after the melt-waters had eroded valleys either side of it! This has left a capping of Clay-with-flint on the hill tops (hence often muddy), but eroded deeper and deeper into the chalk in the valleys (see the geology map below).



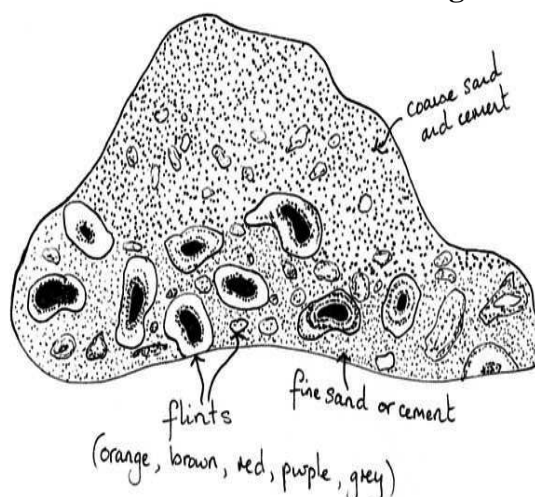
**Bradenham village** is situated on the Middle Chalk. The hill rising sharply to the west and north of the village are both formed of Upper Chalk and capped by Clay-with-flints. The valley sides and bottoms of Bradenham, as well as nearby Naphill and Walters Ash, are littered with sarsen stones.



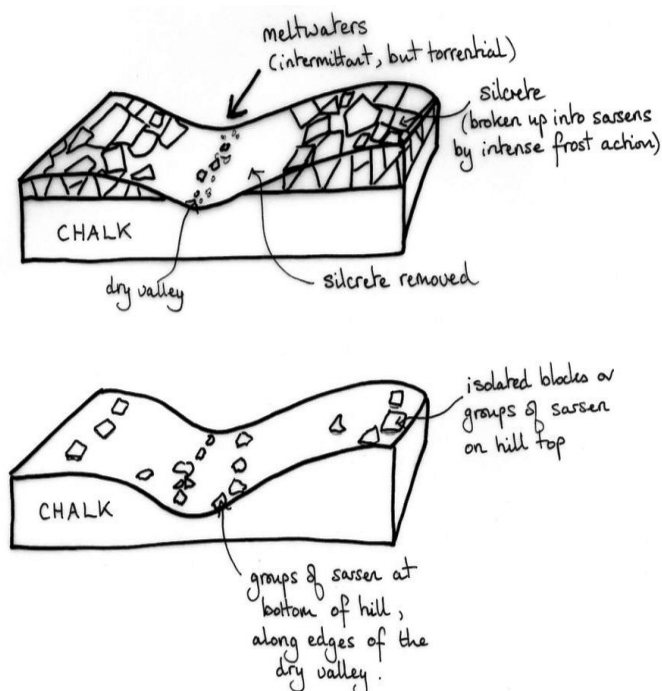
The conglomerate, known as **Bradenham Puddingstone**, can be seen as loose blocks around the cricket pitch and grass area in front of the church. There is also a field full of them up the road in the Naphill direction, their presence being due to this field never having been ploughed.

## A sketch of the Bradenham Puddingstone.

The sarsens represent an ancient river deposit and they are made of a rock called silcrete. Silcrete forms in semi-arid climates and these specimens are dated to c. 20 million years old, when Britain was under a much warmer climate.



## The formation and movement of the Bucks sarsens.



This is a very tough rock consisting of quartz sand or flints with a quartz cement. As quartz is one of the hardest minerals rocks made from it are very hard and resistant to weathering. Where they came from has been one of the great mysteries for geologists; none of the sarsens are in the place they were originally laid down, although they may not be far from it. These blocks once formed a large and continuous outcrop, but due to the freeze-thaw activity of the ice age the rock became fractured and, as the dry valley was cut by meltwaters, the blocks simply sludged their way down-slope (a process called solifluction).

## St Botolph's Church

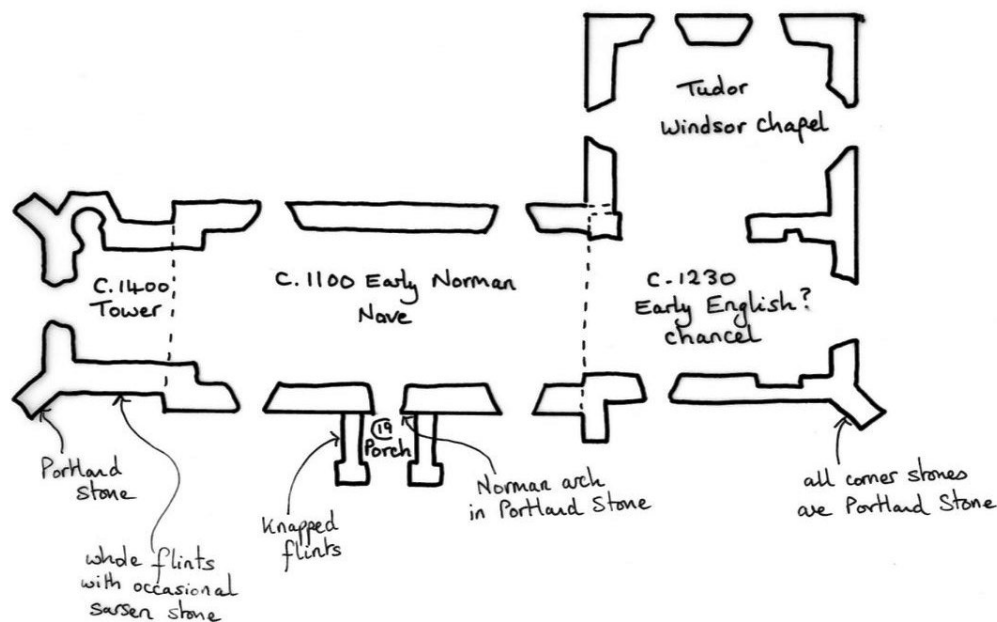
The church is dedicated to St Botolph, the patron saint of travellers. The building stones used in the construction are nearly all local. Flint is used both in the undressed and knapped form – undressed in the older areas (such as the 12<sup>th</sup> century nave and the 15<sup>th</sup> century tower) and knapped flint is used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century porch. Flint is abundant in the local area and is a common local style in old buildings, often teamed up with 'clunch' or Portland Stone. However, the Portland Limestone seen here (the large blocks of the cornerstones) is not the local type, but has been brought in from Dorset. These are no doubt Victorian or more recent repairs as this was a common source for this stone, once the local stone was not longer quarried. Look closely and you can see lots of tiny spheres of calcite called 'ooliths' and also lots of broken shell.



### St Botolphs Church showing puddingstone surrounded by Portland limestone

The local variety is a darker colour (a mid to dark beige) and often has a poorer cement. Local sarsen is also used in the building structure – look for the ‘sugary’ textured sandy one (Denner Hill type) and a small piece of the local Bradenham Puddingstone.

Although the sarsens are abundant locally the stonemasons did not choose to use them and this is no doubt because they were too hard – sarsens used for building have to be worked soon after digging out of the ground. Those at the surface are hugely tough to work and are used whole.



**St Botolph's floor plan showing features and rock locations**

### The Manor House

The Manor House occupies a prime position overlooking the valley and village. This was the childhood home of Benjamin Disraeli. It is now a Management Centre, but sometimes opens its doors to the public for the Open Gardens scheme.

### The caves

The caves were cut by the Dashwood family during the years 1748-1752. The quarried chalk went into the construction of the A40 West Wycombe to High Wycombe road. The caves then served as a meeting place for Dashwood's club, which became known as the 'Hellfire Club', although Dashwood himself called the club the 'Knights of St Francis of Wycombe' or 'Dashwoods Apostles'. They met twice a year and devoted their time to drink and women! There is a tour around the caves which are open to the public.