

Edward Neville Bray (1872-1954)

Of Kings & Crowns

The story starts over 500 years ago in 1485, when Henry Tudor the Earl of Richmond's, army met and defeated the army of Richard III. The King was knocked off his horse and forced to try to fight in heavy armour on the ground. According to William Shakespeare, he is supposed to have said "My horse, my horse, my Kingdom for a horse". The King's wore a crown which was a gold coronet that fitted over his helmet. He wore it so that his troops would know that he was fighting alongside them. The coronet had fallen off and had been lost in the heat of battle. Richard III was killed (This is the king whose remains were found recently under a Leicester car park!) and the crown was literally lost.

Along comes Sir Reginald Bray who has been fighting for Henry Tudor. He finds the crown in a thorn bush and presents it to the Henry. He puts the crown on his head and is acclaimed as King Henry VII. He is the first Tudor King and the father of Henry VIII and the grand-father of Queen Elizabeth I.

After his official coronation, Henry VII appointed Sir Richard Bray as Knight of the Bath and, later, a Knight of the Garter. He also became Treasurer and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. As such, he was part of the small circle of trusted advisors around the King and one of the most powerful men in England.

The Manor of Shiere Vachery (Shere)

The first Parliament of Henry VII, in 1486 granted the manor to Sir Reginald Bray, kt., reserving to himself the right of easement when staying within the lordship of Shiere. ‘

Although, the manor had been granted to Reginald Bray it was in the actual possession of a Lord Audley who paid a nominal rent to Reginald Bray. However after the people of the west counties, led by Lord Audley rose against the King and marched on London in 1497 and were defeated at the battle of Blackheath, possession of the manor passed to Sir Richard Bray. Over the following centuries, the Bray family fell in and out of favour with various monarchs but managed to survive as Lords of the manor of Shere. The present day manor comprises some 2000 acres.

Enter Edward Neville Bray

Below – a Google image of 17, The Boltons, Kensington



Nearly 400 years later, in 1879, a Solicitor, Reginald More Bray inherited the manor of Shere after the death of his father. At that time he and his wife had four children: Reginald born in 1869 , **Edward** born in 1872, Lilian born in 1877 and Olive born in 1879. They later had another son, Jocelyn, who was born in 1881.

In 1911, the family, with the exception of

the oldest son, are living at 17, The Boltons, Kensington. This is a very prestigious property set in a curved terrace overlooking the church and grounds of St Mary, The Boltons, Kensington.

At this time, the head of the family was Reginald More Bray who was the Recorder (Judge) of Guildford. At his Kensington Home he has a domestic staff consisting of: A Ladies Maid, 3 Parlour Maids, 2 House Maids, an Under House Maid, a Kitchen Maid and 2 Cooks. (See appendix)

Maverick Or Black Sheep?

What is particularly interesting is Edward Neville Bray's occupation as an Electrical Engineer. At the time, this was a very unusual occupation for the son of a Judge and a member of an old aristocratic family. Both his older and younger brothers (Reginald & Jocelyn) went to Public School and then University but in the 1891 Census, Edward, age 19 years is living with his birth family and listed as a Student Electrical Engineer.

In fact, he was the second member of the family to deviate from the family norm. His older brother: Reginald (1869-1950) was educated at Harrow School and Trinity College, Cambridge and graduated in 1891. He became interested in socialism and moved to south London where he took part in philanthropic work in Lambeth and Camberwell.

He had a great interest in education and was co-opted onto the London School Board in May 1903. Reginald Bray was elected to the County Council in March 1904 as a Progressive Party councillor representing Camberwell (North). He served on the county council's Education Committee, and wrote two books: *'The Town Child'* (1907) and *'Boy Labour and Apprenticeship'* (1912). In 1904, he took over the management of his father's estates in Surrey. He retired from the LCC at the 1919 election, and moved to the Manor House in Shere. He became a member of Guildford Rural District Council and chairman of Shere Parish Council. He never married and died in July 1950, aged 81 years,

An Extraordinary Electrical Engineer

In the 1901 Census, Edward was still living with his birth family in Kensington and was listed as a (Working) Electrical Engineer. I next learnt of him in 1911 when, age 39 years, he is a partner in an electrical engineering company called Bray, Markham & Reiss (E N. Bray, F. E. Reiss and F. R. Markham) in Black Horse Road, Walthamstow. At that time, he is living at 6, Hempstead Road in Walthamstow. This property was very near to the forest, near what later became the Waterworks roundabout and at that time it was a very 'good address' and a nice place to live. He was single and had a Cook and a Parlourmaid to look after him.

The company seems to have had progressive ideas with regard to its employees, as we know that they operated a work incentive bonus scheme where they set aside one-quarter of their final profits with which to pay a dividend on wages. For the purposes of distribution each man's wages were calculated as increased by 0.2 p.c. for every year's service. *Colin Weedon*, the son of a former company employee, informs me that, according to his father, a similar system was in operation at the E N Bray company.

Edward Bray was an inventor and innovator in the field of Electrical Engineering and we know that a patent was applied for in 1909: *'for improvements in and relating to speed indicators for motor vehicles'* by *Bray, Markham & Reiss Limited* (inventors)

Now, the time line gets complicated. I believe that sometime after 1920, the company moved to St Albans, Herts and it wasn't wound-up until 1971. It seems likely that Edward Bray sold his share of Bray, Markham, Reiss, but allowed his name to still be used by the company. He possibly used the money to start his new company because he opened another company **E N Bray** in Wood Street, Walthamstow

A former employee says that he believes that the company started in 1922 . However, based on the first time that the company name appears in the London Telephone Directory (I find it difficult to believe that an electrical switchgear manufacturer would operate without a telephone) I believe that it actually was in 1923 (See a copy of the London Telephone Directory entry below)

Walthamstow 941 Bray E. N. Ltd., Electrl Switchgear Mftrs Wood st Whipps X E.17

This was also the year that his father died and his brother Reginald Arthur Bray became the Lord of the Manor of Shere.

The E N Bray Company

Practically everything that I know of the company comes from ex employees and I am immensely indebted to Len Hall, a regular contributor to the *Walthamstow Memories* site for most of the information and to information from former employees *Colin Weeden's father* and *Denis Cooper*. However, any errors in this article are my responsibility.

The Manufacturing Facility

This consisted of a house and factory building situated on near the corner of Wood Street and Whipps X Road. The main part of the factory was on one level and at one end there was a two story Office block that could be accessed from Wood Street. It was quite a big house and at one time it was partly occupied by one of the firm's caretakers with the company using the lower floor as an annexe to the factory.

Near to the office block was a raised glass walled workshop office. This was occupied by Mr Chalmers who was the workshop manager at that time. It was Mr Chalmers who interviewed sixteen year old Len Hall for a job in the factory. "How many degrees are there in a circle" he asked, "360 degrees, sir" was Len's reply and the job was his.

Mr Chalmers was elderly and had an appropriate nickname. He was called 'wing nut' because he had two very big ears that stuck out and the back of his neck was creased like a metal threaded bolt.

The Factory Floor

Len Hall says "In the centre of the factory floor there was a raised up cubicle where the shop foreman, Ernie Willis would sit and survey his minions busily working away on their lathes and drills etc. I was only 16 years old and Ernie always seemed old to me. He had a hunched back and always wore a long brown coat whereas us workers wore a bib and brace overall"

The machinery was all driven from a main overhead shaft that had belts running from it that were used to drive lathes and other machines. There was also a Press shop where the sheet metal items were made with fly presses

There were assembly benches where all the components were made into the finished products, which were all designed for the control of electric motors in ships and on land. The Admiralty was one of the principal customers. Edward Bray's designs were still being used when Len Hall left the firm around 1963.

Most of the very complex wiring of these motor control panels was done by a team of women who followed the wiring diagrams that had been prepared in the drawing office by the draftsmen (Including Len Hall) The women were often the wives and girlfriends of factory workers.

Working Conditions

The factory was heated during winter by "several huge pot belly stoves and these were great for toasting sandwiches during lunch breaks". As an apprentice, one of Len's tasks was to go to the café in Whipps X road and fetch a billy full of strong tea for his mates.

There was a bonus system in operation that enabled operatives to earn more money by doing their work in less than the normal time. When operatives needed to use the toilet they would have to ask the foreman for the key. He would sign this 'in and out' in a book.

Upstairs in the house, there was a fully functioning bathroom and it was not unknown for a worker, if he had a date that night, to leave the factory completely clean and in his best clothes. Many of the workers cycled to work and there was a bike shed on the Whipps Cross Road side of the factory. If you upset somebody during the course of the day it was not unknown to find your bike on top of the building!

Perks Of The Job

Like most manufacturing companies, the job had some 'perks' (Perquisites). It was not unknown for some workers to occasionally 'divert' materials and skilled labour to manufacture purpose made articles for their homes.

Such work was known as 'foreigners' and included jobs like spraying cycle frames, making an aquarium and steps for a caravan and the construction of a garage door. In these instances the materials and labour were inadvertently supplied by *E N Bray*.

On one occasion, a worker 'misappropriated' two tins of paint, one white and one black, from the paint shop His 'mates' got to the paint and when he arrived home he found that he had two tins of 'grey' paint but he never gave them the satisfaction of complaining.

The Luck Of The Draw

Len Hall remembers that "the staff were like one huge family and it was common for people to be related by marriages that had occurred between workers (mine for instance) and every year there was a Christmas Draw that we paid into all year long.

At the end of the year the draw would take place when the fare such as poultry and other items were distributed by being 'Drawn,' names from one hat and prizes from another until it was all gone. One year you could win lots and another year you could win nothing."

From Walthamstow to Waltham Cross

According to Denis Cooper, the *E N Bray* company was 'taken over' In 1958, by the *United Molasses* . company for 'tax 'reasons. Denis said that company used to make buses at Weybridge.

In fact, by then, the *E N Bray* company had outgrown the Walthamstow premises and they removed to a larger premises in Britannia Road, Waltham Cross. As they relied heavily on the job expertise of the existing workers, they purchased two big double decker buses. Every day they would pick up the workers who wanted to stay with the company and transport them to work at Waltham Cross. They continued to do this for years until either new workers were trained or the old ones moved to local areas in Cheshunt and Waltham Cross. Len Hall continued to cycle to work from his home in Markhouse Road and met his future wife at the new factory. (Len Hall's life story is on the *Walthamstow Memories* in the 'Personal' section).

By that time, a new regime had taken over the management of the company. A Research and Development group were creating newer types of equipment for many uses eg: lift controllers and control cubicles for buildings and factories. Today, when you see a large metal cabinet with handles etc. it is usually full of switchgear. Nowadays of course, electronics play a major part in all aspects of present day life.

When Len Hall finally left *E N Bray* around 1965, he worked freelance for other companies until he emigrated to Australia. After a few years, he started working on computers and his job title was that of an Electrical & Instrumentation Designer. It was still the same sort of job but there wasn't any more back- breaking drawing boards.

Epilogue

I believe that the company continued at the Waltham Cross address until c1987 when, I suspect they merged with or got taken over by another company. The relic of the company seems to exist as *Enbray Contactors* but they seem to have lost all memory of their roots.

Edward Neville Bray



Left: *The Bray family church - St James, Shere*

Neville Bray, as I believe he called himself, was from a wealthy old aristocratic family (The first member of his family that we know was William, Sieur DeBray who came from Normandy with William the Conqueror!) His ancestors include a Judge, an antiquarian, the daughter of Thomas More and the Chancellor to Henry VII. He was born in the ancestral village in 1872 and baptised at Shere.

He grew up in a very prestigious houses in Hyde Park and Kensington and was part of a family that had: two cooks, a Ladies Maid, three Parlour Maids, two House Maids, a Kitchen Maid and an Under House Maid. (See appendix) to serve them. The work force of EN Bray would have known that he 'had a few bob' and

was a real 'toff' but would not have any idea just how 'posh' he was.

A Real Gentleman & A 'Proper Charactor'

Without any doubt he was a pioneering innovative electrical engineer at a time when this was a comparatively new science. He was also a kindly slightly eccentric autocrat. He cycled to work with his gauntlets attached to the handlebars from his house in Hempstead Road. This was situated close to the forest by the Waterworks where he employed a live-in Cook and Parlour Maid to look after him.

Colin Weeden writes "My Dad, now aged 87, worked for **E.N. Bray** in Walthamstow for 25 years, having started there in his teens in the late 1930s. He remembers Mr Bray, often telling how he would arrive at the factory in the morning on his bicycle and walk through the factory saying 'good morning' to the employees as he went. Dad says that Mr Bray had encouraged some of his workers to join the Territorial Army, and when they were mobilised, kept their jobs open and sent them regular food parcels. My Dad was one of the few people who knew about this because he had the job of going to buy some of the supplies that were sent in the parcels. Dad started out in the stores at the factory. Although his given name is William (Bill) he says that acquired his working name of Joe, by which he has been known to all his workmates, and even my mother, when he went to work there and was told "You can't be Bill because we already have a Bill here; you can be Joe"

Denis Cooper recounts that E N Bray always wore plus fours and smoked a meerschaum pipe. He tells the story of how E N Bray 'Once came down to the factory floor and said to Dennis "Boy" and Dennis said "Sir". He then said he wanted Dennis to go to the shop and buy him a ½ oz. of St. Julian pipe tobacco and he gave Dennis 1s and a penny. When Dennis took the tobacco up to his office he gave it to E N Bray and was about to leave when the old man said "You are forgetting something". He wanted the ½ penny change'.

Apparently, he had a yacht and used the local Sea Scouts as crew. He retired in 1947 when he was 75 years old. However there is a mystery concerning him and his family.

The Mystery

When his father died in 1923, his older brother succeeded him as Lord of the Manor of Shere. His brother died in 1950 and Edward Neville Bray should have succeeded him as Lord of the Manor. However, this didn't happen and his younger brother became Lord of the Manor. The only reason that I can come up with for this situation was that in 1950, E N Bray would have been 78 years old and perhaps didn't want the position. His younger brother was 69 years old when he succeeded.

Before his death, Edward Neville Bray returned to live at Pilgrims Garth in his family village of Shere. He died on the 18th April 1954 and his effects of £7,487 12s 6d , 'save and except settled land', went to Geoffrey Elston who was his nephew in law.

BRAY Edward Neville of Pilgrims Garth Shere near Guildford died 18 October 1954 at Mount Alvernia Harvey-road Guildford Probate (save and except settled land) London 23 December to Geoffrey Frank Elston assistant secretary. Effects £7487 12s. 3d.

Bill Bayliss
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Appendix

The Bray family in 1901 at 17, The Boltons, Kensington

Name	Status	Age	Year	Occupation	Birthplace
Reginald M Bray	Head	58	1843	Recorder at Guildford	London, Marylebone
Emily O Bray	Wife	53	1848		Surrey, Dorking
Edward B Bray	Son	29	1872	Electrical Engineer	London, Tooting
Lilian E Bray	Daughter	24	1877		London, Tooting
Olive Bray	Daughter	22	1879		London, Tooting
Jocelyn Bray	Son	20	1881		London, Streatham
Marie L Guillaud	Servant	42	1859	Lady's Maid	Switzerland
Emma Edwards	Servant	26	1875	Parlour Maid	Hants, Liphook
Eliza Allrand	Servant	35	1866	House Maid	Herts, Hatfield
Florence C Kenny	Servant	21	1880	Parlour Maid	Herts, Hatfield
Bessie Hoursome	Servant	21	1880	Kitchen Maid	Sussex, Midhurst
Beatrice M Perrett	Servant	16	1885	Under House Maid	London, Pimlico
Sarah E Bachford	Servant	42	1859	Cook	Surrey, Bletchfield
Harriet Butcher	Servant	29	1872	Cook	Suffolk, Mildenhall
Anne E Williams	Servant	23	1878	House Maid	Cardigan, Tregaron
Mary J Dolley	Servant	32	1869	Parlour Maid	Surrey, Wimbledon

Some Sources

I have researched various Genealogy and history sources for this article and it is a matter of regret to me that I haven't been able to find and pictures of the factory.

However, without any doubt, it is the contributions from some of the ex employees of *E N Bray* who have provided the most useful and interesting information. These include the indefatigable Len Hall, who not only has provided much valuable information but also has been the impetus for me to research and write the piece, Denis Cooper and the father of Colin Weeden. (Colin Weeden, like myself seems to have a love of historical research)

They gave much of their working lives to the company and I hope that they will feel that their work and contribution will be recognized and remembered.

Bill Bayliss

