

OUR NEW FOREST

A Living Register of Language and Traditions

Report on New Forest Traditions

by

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Introduction

It is a sad but true fact that we only start to take notice of our traditions when they are threatened or in decline. Whilst we are in the midst of life we just live it, and then look back on it – our childhood, or our youth – and say how good it was, how much we regret its passing. Things today are just not so interesting, life today is shallow and too easy, much of what was meaningful has been lost.

The New Forest has clung on to its traditions more tenaciously than many other parts of England, but with each year we are aware that they are fading fast. With each passing generation we lose something: the language that we use each day changes; the events which trigger the assignation of a place name are forgotten; and the traditional activities and group memories shared by a community fall into decline.

The present project has been set up to record what remains, and the memories of what has gone, before even more of it is lost. As the older generations die and their cottages are sold, as village shops close and land is turned into ‘agri-business’, much of traditional culture that has underpinned a way of life has gone with them. The main purposes of the project have been to collect New Forest words and expressions, local places names that may not appear on the Ordnance Survey map, and the stories that have led to them, and the traditions that are local to the New Forest as a result of its unique history.

This report is particularly concerned with the last of these purposes. It sets out a range of New Forest traditions: some are unique to the area, while others are New Forest versions of customs, activities or beliefs that are more widespread across the country. However, the present project has been limited by time, and what is recorded here should be looked upon as a small start in the development of what we have called the Living Register of New Forest Traditions and Language.

Moreover, the articles in this report are the views of the author, supported by personal research. Many stories have more than one version: was William Rufus killed at Malwood, near Minstead or at Beaulieu? Was his death the result of the hatred of the clergy for the newly imposed Forest laws, or a hunting accident? The Register is designed to be a ‘Living Register’ and its contents are open to addition, enhancement and revision by all who chose to look at it.

The present report is divided into sections which deal with aspects of the New Forest’s history and present culture. Some include very few entries. But it is hoped that they will form a structure which can underpin the continued development in the public’s interest in the true cultural history of the New Forest.

Economy

The agricultural system in the New Forest

Verderers of the New Forest¹

The Court of Verderers is a corporate body set up under the New Forest Act of 1877. It is one of the last remnants of the old form of Forest government which was at one time found in many parts of the country. Although greatly modified since the days when the Forest Law



fulfilled its original purpose, the Court's authority is based on an unusual blend of ancient and modern statutory powers. It was reconstituted in 1877 and again in 1949. The Verderers are charged with regulating commoning on the Forest and inquiring into unlawful inclosures. Subsequent Acts have added to the Verderers' powers and they now have wide

responsibilities in respect of development control and conservation. The present Court, which has the same status as a Magistrates' Court, consists of ten Verderers. Five are elected by those commoners whose names appear in the Forest's own electoral register.

The qualification for inclusion on the register is the occupation of not less than one acre of land to which rights of common over the Forest attach; and for a candidate, the occupation of not less than one acre to which a right of pasture attaches. Elections take place every three years, with two Verderers being elected at one time and three at the next. The office is entirely unpaid. They serve on the Court for six years. The other five Verderers are appointed, one each by the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, the Forestry Commission, the National Park Authority and the Countryside Agency. The Official Verderer is the Chairman of the Court and is appointed by the Queen. Appointed Verderers serve for periods determined by their appointing authorities.

The Verderers of the New Forest regulate development on the Forest as well as overseeing commoning. They work in conjunction with Natural England and the Forestry Commission which manages the Forest on behalf of the Crown, as well as with owners of other areas of common land within the perambulation. Any proposed development which will affect the Forest has to be considered and approved by the Verderers before it can go ahead. The Court has to consider proposals for new roads, telephone and electricity lines, car parks, exchanges of land, camping sites, recreational facilities, improvement of the grazing, timber inclosures, playing fields and numerous other matters. Different sections of the various Acts

¹ The following four sections are largely based on the text in the booklets 'Verderers of the New Forest', 'Agisters of the New Forest', 'Stock of the New Forest' and 'Commoners of the New Forest' published by the Verderers of the New Forest, Lyndhurst.

of Parliament govern each of these matters and the complexity of the Verderers' affairs increases annually.

Much of the work of the Verderers is connected with ensuring the health and welfare of the commoners' animals. The Verderers have a set of byelaws which can be enforced in the local Magistrates' Courts. The byelaws help to ensure that commoners act in a responsible manner in the exercise of their rights.

Common rights

The common rights which apply the New Forest are as follows:

- o **Common of pasture:** commonable animals – ponies, cattle, donkeys and mules are turned out onto the Open Forest;
- o **Common of pasture for sheep:** although some of the large estates have this right, it is infrequently exercised;
- o **Common of mast:** the right to turn out pigs in the autumn to devour the acorns – this provides food for the pigs and reduces the threat to ponies and cattle from the poisonous acorns;
- o **Estovers (Fuelwood):** the free supply of a stipulated amount of firewood to certain properties;
- o **Common of marl:** the right to dig clay to improve agricultural land - this right is no longer exercised;
- o **Common of turbary:** the right to cut peat turves for the Commoner's personal use.

These rights are established in law and are set out in the Atlas of Forest Rights, published in 1953, and held at the Office of the Verderers of the New Forest, in Lyndhurst. Some of them (notably marl and turbary) are not generally exercised. Additional rights, relating to the Northern Commons which came under the jurisdiction of the Verderers at the time, are recorded in the New Forest Act of 1964.

Agisters

The Agisters are employees of the Verderers of the New Forest. They are often commoners in their own right, and as such depasture stock themselves, thus giving them an intimate knowledge of the area and the workings of the Forest. The word 'agist' means to take in to graze for payment, and this explains part of their role. The post of Agister is medieval in origin. In the 18th and 19th centuries, they were also known as 'marksmen'. As officers of the Crown they were required to collect grazing fees from 'strangers', those who wished to depasture animals but had no right to do so. New Forest commoners with rights of pasture did not have to pay a fee at that time.

To be an Agister a person must be adept at handling all types of livestock, an excellent rider, and able to work, very often on their own, in the rough and tough conditions found out on



the Forest. The hours are long, and they can be called out at any time and in any weather to deal with an emergency. They also have the general public to deal with, and are required to be good ambassadors for the Forest in general, and commoning in particular.

Their work is to assist in the management of commoners' stock on the Forest, and carry out instructions given to them by the Court of Verderers. Much of their time is spent out on the Forest, often on horseback, observing the

conditions of both land and stock. They are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to any problem involving the stock on the Forest. In the spring, they collect the 'marking fee', which is the payment a commoner has to make for each animal he wishes to turn out onto the Forest. This helps to offset the cost of their employment. They are also required to report to the Verderers any breaches of the Verderers' byelaws, which could include such things as unbranded or unpaid for animals.

Commoners

Commoners are people who occupy property to which attaches one or more rights over the Forest and/or the adjacent commons (areas brought into the Forest under the New Forest Act of 1964). Many commoners are descendants of families who have been commoning for many generations. Commoning today does not provide a living. Some commoners are also farmers who use the Forest for some of their stock for a part of the year. Many commoners nowadays are employed in other industries, some work for the Forestry Commission whilst many others are employed in local businesses and a few even commute to other areas. Many commoners continue to turn out animals because they have always done so and enjoy the social contact it provides. A number of others have come into commoning simply for the interest it provides.



Commoning, although a way of life to many, has seldom provided the total means of subsistence for any commoner. Today, few children of commoners find it easy to continue the system because of the poor return involved, particularly in the pony market and a major difficulty is the lack of affordable back-up land (land needed to graze animals when they are not on the Forest) and housing in or close to the Forest. Many properties with common rights are purchased as retirement or holiday homes or by people who work out of the area and many new owners have no intention of maintaining the old traditions. In recent years it has become evident that commoning is at serious risk of decline.

New Forest stock

Forest stock comprises ponies, cattle, donkeys, pigs and a few sheep. The New Forest ponies are a major attraction particularly for the many visitors who come to the Forest every year. The breed is a native one - the largest of the British native pony breeds - and has a long history of employment as a useful and economical draught animal, as a pit pony, and for riding and driving. Although, in the past, Thoroughbred and Arabian blood was introduced



into the Forest herds, every effort is now made to ensure that the New Forest ponies are of a type and build to thrive on the open Forest all year round. Only stallions which have been passed by the Verderers are allowed onto the Forest, in an effort to ensure that the best and strongest foals are bred.

Traditionally, the cattle on the Forest were small dairy herds that returned to their holding each day to be milked. However, there are no dairy cattle left on the Forest today, and all the animals depastured

are beef cattle: cows with calves, heifers and store cattle. There are various breeds of cattle on the Forest including Angus, belted Galloways, Dexters, Charolais, and Herefords. Smaller, native breeds and cross bred animals do better in the tough Forest environment. Unlike ponies, cattle cannot live out on the Forest all year, and many are brought in to the commoner's holding during the winter – or come back each day to be fed there.

Pigs are allowed onto the Forest during the autumn pannage season which lasts for a minimum of 60 days. The pigs eat the fallen acorns which can be poisonous to other stock if eaten in quantity. Some sows which are in pig are allowed on the Crown land after the pannage season with written permission from the Forestry Commission. These pigs are known as privilege sows. The exception to this is on the Northern commons which are subject to rules set out in 1964 when these commons were brought under the control of the Verderers Court, allowing the depasturing of any animal that is normally reared on a farm in the UK.

Many of the ponies, cattle and donkeys live on the Forest all year round, grazing the Forest lawns in summer and browsing on gorse, holly and heather in winter. The animals live an almost natural life and the Forest provides them with plenty of cover and shelter during the winter months. However, if an animal loses condition, the owner will be expected to remove it from the Forest, and feed it on his holding until it gains sufficient weight to be returned there. Animals are regularly checked by the agisters, and owners who fail to remove poor stock will be ordered to do so by their local agister.

Drifts

New Forest ponies run free on the open wastes and, as a result, have to be rounded up and caught when the need arises. This may be for routine inspection, branding or marking, veterinary procedures (such as worming), or when an owner wishes to sell an animal or its progeny. If a single animal or small group is needed, a commoner may arrange with a few

others, to round the animals up and bring them into a yard or pound. This is called 'colt hunting' and is most often carried out on horseback.

However, there are also a series of organized round ups carried out through the autumn each year, which are aimed at corralling and marking as many of the free ranging ponies as can be caught. This series of organized round up are called drifts. While it is widely assumed that the drifts are a long established commoning tradition, information from older commoners and agisters reveals that they have only been carried out in their present form directed by the Verderers since the 1960's.



Certainly the ponies have been rounded up by their owners for many years. In the late nineteenth century De Crespigny and Hutchinson write that 'August is the time for this, when Lyndhurst and Britford fairs are on. The colts come thundering along, in a dense, terrified band, pursued by the West Saxons With the cracking of whips and the stampeding of horses, you seem to be at an *al fresco* entertainment arranged by Buffalo Bill. But the rider use neither the lasso nor the corral – herding them into a

corner is the nearest approach they make to the latter plan. They use the natural peculiarities of the Forest by way of a kind of corral..... The immediate object of all this herding is to drive the ponies into a big paddock or enclosure hired for the purpose, where they remain in readiness to be taken to the fairs.²

Retired agisters, interviewed about the management of the commonable stock have described how the system of drifts as they operate today was established by the then senior agister, Ron Ings, in the 1960's. At that time there were thought to be a number of ponies on the Forest that were unmarked and not paid for. Mr Ings decided that only by arranging a round of organized round ups or 'drifts' could all the animals running on the Forest be identified and their owners charged.

Pony sales

There has always been a market for the New Forest pony, but not always a good one. In the years before motorized transport they were widely used for driving and riding and, with the development of industrialized coal mining in the nineteenth century, as pit ponies. With the decline in the use of horses for transport in the early part of the twentieth century, much of the steady trade was lost, and the market for meat was relied upon to maintain the sale price. The introduction of minimum values for live horses and ponies sold for export in 1937, largely brought this to an end, although into the 1980's and 90's the presence of the meat man at the sales was viewed as a sign the prices would be good.

² *The New Forest*, R. C. De Crespigny and Horace Hutchinson. John Murray London, 1895.



The earliest recorded sale yard for New Forest stock was at Swan Green, on the western boundary of Lyndhurst. The sales were started in the 1840's by cattle dealers Isaac Trowbridge, Henry Davis and Henry Cheater. The sales were later moved into the yard at the Swan pub, while the green was used for fairground attractions. Babey and Roberts note that 'In the last year on the site, 1921, the largest fair ever included steam roundabouts, shooting galleries and swing boats which kept the villagers amused well into the

night.'³

The following year the sales were moved to the race course, to the north of the town, where it was managed jointly by the New Forest Pony Association and the Burley and District Pony and Cattle Association. The two societies merged in 1937 and continued to organize the sales, which were moved to their present location at Beaulieu Road. The location at Beaulieu Road was chosen because of the proximity to the railway station through which the animals could be transported away from the yard. Originally the yard was built on the side of the road adjacent to the station, but shortly after WW2 it was moved to its present location on the east of the Beaulieu to Lyndhurst Road.

The sales have continued to the present day under the auspices of Southern Counties Auctioneers. However, in 2002 the New Forest Commoners Defence Association joined forces with the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society to form the New Forest Livestock Society which took over the management of the sale yard. With funding from a number of local and international sources, the yard was completely rebuilt to incorporate modern Health and Safety standards, using a design which closely followed the previous construction. The traditional timber construction with earth and gravel floors, considered to be the safest and most humane for its purposes, has been retained and the sales continue much as they have for many years.



Forestry

Forestry and timber management

Tubbs writes that the first record of interest in the exploitation of the New Forest woodlands dates from the fourteenth century when 109 acres of timber and underwood were the subject of a sale, indicating that 'there is an implicit acceptance that the periodic

³ *Lyndhurst: a brief history and guide* Georgina Babey and Peter Roberts, Nova Foresta Publishing, 2003.

enclosure of woods to obtain natural regeneration after cutting was of much great antiquity’.

⁴ He goes on to say that the crown’s interest in the New Forest was transferred increasingly to its silvicultural resources in the fifteenth century, and that ‘Timber production for ship-building finally gained precedence over cash-cropping for underwood in the 17th century and resulted in 1698 in the first Act for the enclosure of Forest land for growing timber.’⁵

The seventeenth century saw the start of the widespread exploitation of the Forest’s timber for ship building. A massive increase in the scale of ship building along the Hampshire coast led to a demand for large volumes of oak within economic distance of the docks. The New Forest, as well as a number of other oak woodlands in Hampshire, was widely exploited for this industry. So great was the use of oak timber in the New Forest during the succeeding centuries that, according to a survey carried out in 1978, it led to a change in the ratio of oak to beech from 3.2 to 1 in 1707 to 1 to 1 in 1978⁶.

In the nineteenth century, the importance of the king’s deer was supplanted by the importance of timber to the nation, and an act of parliament was introduced to dispose of these animals which were doing so much damage to the Forest’s ecology. The Deer Removal Act of 1851 included the right to enclose 10,000 acres of Forest land for timber growing, as well as a ‘rolling power’ which Pasmore notes ‘was exercised to a limited extent,’ and ‘was the process of throwing open timber inclosures when these were safe from browsing animals, and then taking in a further equivalent area, with the process repeating itself to an extent only limited by the size of the Forest.’⁷

By the early nineteenth century the introduction of steel in ship building meant demand for New Forest timber declined, and the 1877 New Forest Act, which restricted enclosure to



16,000 acres, brought some respite to the area. However, over the ensuing century, successive management programmes replaced large areas of broadleaved trees with conifers; a situation that was only halted in 1971 with the introduction of the Minsters Mandate which ‘declared that the unenclosed woodlands were to be “conserved without regard to timber production objectives” and conversion of broadleaves to conifers in the inclosures was to cease.’⁸

To the present day the Forestry Commission still exploits the New Forest for timber, now under the control of the Ministers’ Mandate, as well as the watchful eyes of the many conservation bodies which operate in the New Forest. On its web site it records that

⁴ *The New Forest: History, Ecology and Conservation* Colin Tubbs. New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, 2002, p84.

⁵ Tubbs *op cit.* p84

⁶ Tubbs *op cit.* p 201-202.

⁷ *Verderers of the New Forest* Anthony Pasmore, Pioneer Publications, Beaulieu, 1977, p7.

⁸ Tubbs *op cit* p 102.

'The New Forest has 100 inclosures which results in an area of 8,500 hectares, and today they are not only important for producing timber but also for their conservation and recreation value.'

There are 100 inclosures in the New Forest covering 8,500 hectares from which the Forestry Commission produces timber, but must also have regard to their conservation and recreational value. Timber extraction results in approximately 50,000 tonnes or 2,000 lorry loads of timber each year, either from tree thinning or the clearance of inclosures. Much of the conifer cut is used to make fencing products, while the hardwood, which is mainly oak, is used for green oak buildings and beams.

There is a 5 year harvesting cycle based on clearly drawn up plans for timber extraction, which also include provisions to minimise the disruption to visitors and impact on the environment. However, the heavy machinery used for some of the work causes considerable damage in certain areas which inevitably leads to complaints against the Commission from conservation bodies within the Forest.⁹

Open Forest management

Despite the 'wilderness' qualities for which the New Forest has long been famous, the open heath, bogs and grassland has always been a managed landscape. The main management techniques have traditionally been burning, scrub clearance and drainage. Tubbs dates the organised use of these practices to the mid 19th century¹⁰, although the commoners have

undoubtedly carried out their own management for generations before that.



Burning is used to rejuvenate stands of bracken, which provide poor forage when over grown, and eventually die if not burnt back on a regular basis (about every 10 years). It also maintains the open grassland by destroying birch and pine seedlings which progressively invade the Forest's lawns and open heath. However, the extent and frequency of burning has always been a contentious issue, with keepers and commoners arguing for more burning, while conservationists prefer

what they consider 'a proper scientific basis'.

Extensive drainage works were carried out in the mid 19th and early 20th century to improve the grazing for stock by channelling water away from lawns and woodlands¹¹. Some streams were straightened and drainage channels cut into bogs, to assist the flow of water through the Forest to the sea. It is now argued that these works have seriously damaged some of the

⁹ Based on information from the Forestry Commission website <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/inf-d-6c2fdh>

¹⁰ Tubbs *op cit*, p269

¹¹ Tubbs *op cit*, p275.

Forest's fragile habitats, and in several areas, works have been undertaken to repair the damage, restore the streams to their original courses and infill ditches. However, the effects of some of these recent works remain contentious.

Coppicing in the New Forest dates from the medieval period, when 'underwood, mostly hazel, was cut on a short rotation for fuel, faggots, wattle and other essentials, and standard trees, mainly oak, provided structural materials.'¹² Tubbs notes the recording of 29 coppices in the New Forest, of which the location of 28 is known, covering a total area of 713 hectares. Only a small number were operational at any time, protected by 'boundary bank and pale, with an external ditch, a substantial structure which excluded deer as well as stock.'¹³



Pollarding was employed for much the same purposes as coppicing, but entailed cutting the tree above browse height, to produce abundant cut branches for deer to browse, and for firewood. Both bark and leaf become especially palatable a few days after cutting, and was common practice until the deer were removed from the Forest in the mid 19th century and has been re-introduced recently to provide browse for ponies.¹⁴

Other forms of traditional forest management and exploitation have been part of the commoning and forestry way of life for hundreds of years. De Crespigny and Hutchinson list a number of activities which were particular to the New Forest at the turn of the 20th century. These include the cutting of bracken for bedding, gathering leaf litter for garden mulching and gathering holly to sell at Christmas time.

Forest keeper, Jack Humby recalled how, when he was a child in the early 20th century 'old Vince Witt used to come over for holly cutting with three or four of his boys and one or two more besides. They had horses and carts and they would come across from Frogham to Linwood, Roe and all round here. So they had three or four miles of common to cross before they started cutting, and those winter days are short.

They would start cutting on about the 15 November. They bundled it up and took it away to store it until about the first week of December. Then they'd put it on the train and send it up to Nine Elms Yard in London. Vince would go up with the holly and stay to sell it, while the boys and the other men kept on cutting it and sending it up to him by train.'

'There was a time for everything, and it had to be done at that time. Take the sedge grass that grows in the plantations. In the spring it dies off and goes white: we used to call it white litter. The Witts and the Loaders had strawberry fields in Frogham. They would come across and get this white litter in the spring. They'd rake it up and take

¹² Tubbs, *op cit* p 84.

¹³ Tubbs, *op cit*, p195.

¹⁴ Tubbs, *op cit*, pp196-7.

*it away for putting between their strawberries. It was better than straw because when it rained it would go down, but when the sun came out, it'd come up again. It didn't rot down like straw.*¹⁵

Other traditional resources gathered from the Forest included gravel, sand, faggots, moss and turves. They formed part of the annual round of seasonal jobs and means of earning a living for the commoners. Such activities were closely controlled by the Forestry Commission (or Office of Woods) whose keepers were authorized to sell 'tickets' or permission to extract a certain weight or volume. The great majority of such exploitation is now forbidden. Although common rights still include the provision of cord wood to certain commoners, the only remaining harvest of other resources, now granted via tender, is that of collecting holly for the Christmas trade.¹⁶

Present day Forestry Commission management of the Ancient & Ornamental Woodlands and the open Forest¹⁷

On their website, the Forestry Commission describe their current management of the Ancient and Ornamental woodlands of the new Forest (or pasture woodland) which cover some 3,692 hectares of the Open Forest as follows:

policies in these areas are generally for minimal intervention and to allow the natural processes to continue. However there are occasions when management actions are required such as for tree safety where there is high public pressure. Other operations include the cutting of holly that can form dense thickets suppressing some of the rare lichens, and removal of exotic species such as rhododendron and some unwanted tree species.

Regarding the open Forest, they write:

The heathlands of the New Forest, often referred to as the Open Forest, cover approximately 18,000 hectares. It is made up of a variety of habitats from areas of dry heath to wet valley mires. In order to maintain its traditional character and value for the grazing commoning stock there is an extensive Open Forest management programme which includes:

- *Controlled burning*
- *Bracken management*
- *Mowing and swiping*
- *Birch and pine clearance*

In order to promote the regeneration of fresh young growth, the Forestry Commission undertakes controlled burning of gorse and heather, and the harvesting of bracken.

Burning of gorse and heather encourages new growth which is beneficial to a variety of flora and fauna, and creates food for commoning stock. It also results in a mosaic of different aged habitats which

¹⁵ *Keeping the Forest: The Life Story of Jack Humby, Forest Keeper*. Jo Ivey, NGK Press, Lymington, Hampshire, 1995, pp19-20.

¹⁶ However, the Forestry Commission is presently trying to re-introduce the collection of bracken for bedding amongst the commoners.

¹⁷ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-69VJHL>

creates effective fire breaks to protect large areas of heathland, woodland and private property from wildfire. Burning starts on the first working day in November and ends on the last working day of March each year.

Bracken is a vigorous and dominant plant that can create a tall, dense canopy up to six feet in height. When it collapses each autumn, the understorey plant species can be smothered. It encroaches onto the open heathland areas and it is here that the Forestry Commission controls the growth by sniping it down, chemically treating it or cutting the foliage and turning it into garden mulch which is sold in local nurseries and garden centres. All bracken control takes place during the summer.

Much of the vegetation actually benefits from cutting or burning as vigorous new growth helps to create a diverse Open Forest environment.

Industry

Although the New Forest is widely viewed as an area of open countryside surrounded by urban developments, it has been the home of a number of industries, some of which, like boat building, survive to the present day. All of these industries have used the area's natural resources and location to manufacture for local use, as well as for export within the UK, and even across the world. Writing about Lymington, James relates how, in the nineteenth century 'ships were ... plying to the West Indies, the American colonies and to Ireland. Occasionally journeys were made to France with bricks, tiles, wheat and salt.'¹⁸

Ship building

The importance of ship building in the New Forest grew out of its proximity to the sea and the availability of mature oak. In the 1720's Bucklers Hard was destined to be a major port when the second duke of Montagu developed it as 'Montagu Town', intended as a free port for the import of sugar from the West Indies. When the venture failed as a result of the threat to trans-Atlantic trade posed by the American War of Independence and the instability caused by the French Revolution, the port was rented out for ship building.



The town was developed as a double row of workers' cottages with a broad working area, or 'hard', between them that led down to the river. From the 17th century onwards all prime timber was reserved for the Navy and much went to Portsmouth and other naval dockyards. However, many British naval vessels, including a good number of Admiral Nelson's fleet, including HMS Agamemnon, were built at Bucklers Hard. Agamemnon was a Royal

¹⁸ *Lymington, an Illustrated History* Jude James. The Dovecote Press, Wimborne, 2007.

Navy third-rate ship of the line with an armament of 64 guns. She was launched in 1781, and served until 1809 when she was lost after running aground on a shoal in the mouth of the River Plate.

Gilpin, on his travels around the New Forest in the late eighteenth century, came upon the ship yard at Bucklers Hard and wrote, 'While we were admiring these close landscapes, the woods on the right suddenly giving way, we were presented with a view of the river – Bucklers Hard beyond it – the men of war building in the dock there – and the woody grounds which rise in the offskip.'¹⁹

The importance of shipping to the area can be imagined from Wise's description of the view from Calshot in the 1860's: 'Here is a view which should be remembered. In one sense the world cannot show its equal. Far away to the East stretches the East Hampshire coast, ended by the harbour of Portsmouth and its forest of masts. To the south, towards Spithead, rides the long line of battle-ships: and round the harbours of the two Cowes sail fleets of yachts ... Steamers, with their black pennants of smoke, hurry down the narrow strait, carrying the news or the merchandise of the world.'²⁰

Although ship building declined at Buckler's Hard in the nineteenth century, the tradition is not entirely lost, with a company building motor yachts now occupying the Agamemmon Yard. At the time of the decline of Buckler's Hard the town of Lymington became known for yacht building when Thomas Inman set up a yard on the Lymington River. The largest yacht built at the yard was the 366-ton Fortuna, built in 1876. The yard was so successful that it enabled the owners to buy the land along the river between Bath Road and Kings Saltern road which remains the centre of the town's yacht building and sailing area to this day.²¹

Rope works



The Rope making factory at East Boldre, a few miles distant from Bucklers Hard, is likely to have had a close association with the ship building industry. In his book Comyn's New Forest, James writes that '*The rope factory has been established by Mr William Westbrook of Beaulieu (where he also had a rope factory) in 1816 or '17. It comprised a small industrial complex with the factory buildings, rope walks and a brick terrace of four cottages for workers. These still survive in a modernised condition, as does the main part of the factory building. Rope, Twine and*

¹⁹ Gilpin, William *Remarks on Forest Scenery and other Woodland Views* The Richmond Publishing Co, 1973.

²⁰ Wise *Op cit.* p55.

²¹ James *op cit.*

*sacking were produced, presumably from flax and hemp grown on the Beaulieu Estate farms. Undoubtedly the Bucklers Hard shipyards provided a ready market for the rope.*²²

Brick making and cob as building materials

The New Forest stands on a variety of clay beds, with London clay in the north and Barton clays in the south. The areas around Fordingbridge have a long history of brick making due to the London Clay deposits which stretch from Sandleheath to the west of Fordingbridge in Hampshire, to just north of Wimborne in Dorset.

Sandleheath is a village one and a half miles to the west of Fordingbridge. It has a long history of brick making and clay working. The village is built on a seam of blue clay, in place over 50 feet thick, topped by fine brick earth and sand, which gives the village its name.

Workings dating approximately from 100 A.D. have recently been discovered in one of the old brickyards, and box flues and tiles found on excavating Rockbourne villa, two miles away, which would appear to have been made from this local Sandleheath clay.²³

The clays of the Beaulieu River were the source of numerous small brickworks based in the communities such as Beaulieu, Baileys Hard and Pitss Deep. These used a variety of clays to make bricks, including the fashionable 'white' bricks. The original brickworks was based at Hilltop until clay began to run out in the late 18th century. The Baileys Hard works operate for over a century between 1790 and 1935, making bricks and tiles. Although it was owned by the Beaulieu Estate, it was let to tenants, apart from the period between 1828 and 1877.



Along with ironworks at Sowley, the brickworks provided employment for the families who squatted along the boundary of the Beaulieu estate at Beaulieu Rails (now East Boldre). When describing the employment of such people in the 18th century, Gilpin notes that they 'commonly cut furze, and carry it to the neighbouring brick kilns; for which purpose they keep a team of two or three forest horses;....'²⁴

Brickmaking remained an important export from the area until the widespread expansion of coal mining in the midlands and north of the country made charcoal redundant as an industrial fuel and, with the railway network, 'the brickyards moved away from the coast towards an easy supply of coal and to the growing railway towns.'²⁵

²² *Comyn's New Forest*, Jude James. Newsome, Ringwood, 1982.

²³ Text from Fordingbridge Museum display

²⁴ *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, William Gilpin, 1791 quoted in *East Boldre; a New Forest Squatters' Settlement 1700-1900* by Jude James The New Forest Research and Publication Trust 1994.

²⁵ *The New Forest Clive Chatters* 2006?

Cob

The architectural history of the New Forest has been based on a cottage economy in which small holders built their own houses and farm buildings from the materials that they found around them. As noted above, there is also a long history of squatting on crown common land and the New Forest Commission of 1801 records hundreds of encroachments. The houses built by squatters had to be built quickly and surreptitiously.



As a result many New Forest cottages were built from locally worked clay or cob. James records the method of building from cob which 'is produced by digging quantities of loam and clay from shallow pits close to the proposed dwelling. This material once dug is mixed with water and some binding material, commonly chopped straw, heather or horse manure, until it attains the consistency of putty.'²⁶ The clay was worked by trampling by 'men and boys' or, according to one local, by building a race and driving ponies through it.

Some cottages were built on foundations of brick or stone, while others were built straight onto the ground. The walls were erected according to the plan for the cottage by one of two methods. The first was achieved by 'throwing' the cob mixture onto the foundations and building up a layer of about 1 to 2 feet thick and 18 to 30 inches wide, which was then banged down with spades and left for a week to ten days to dry before a second layer was added, and so on until the required wall height was reached. The effect was rough, though, and needed some smoothing to finish the building. The second method employed timber shuttering to act as clamps to define the shape of the wall, each layer reaching a height of about 2 feet. The shutter was removed when the cob was sufficiently dry, and used to build the next layer, and so on.



There is a natural taper on cob walls from the base to the eaves, with lower walls some nine to twelve inches thicker than those at the top. Lintels and door jambs were built into the structure as it rose and the roof timbers were made from Forest trees such as larch or, at a later date, from sawn softwood. Thatch was the usually roofing material, although some roofs were later replaced by slates as the family's finances allowed.

²⁶ 'Vernacular architecture in the New Forest: domestic building in cob from c.1750 to c.1900' Jude James Hampshire Field Club and Agricultural Society Section Newsletters, New Series, No 24, Autumn 1995.

Salt manufacture

Salt has always had great importance to human culture for the preservation of food and tanning of animal hides, as well as in cooking. In his booklet 'The Salterns of the Lymington Area'²⁷, Lloyd notes that 'there is no doubt' that salt was being evaporated from sea water in the New Forest area at least since the Iron Age.



He writes that the first reference to the production of salt in the New Forest area appears in the Domesday Book. The salt pans were recorded as far west as Hordle and to Hayling in the east. Lloyd concludes that the reference to Hordle, which is not on the coast, refer to the fact that, at that time, the parish stretched eastwards to include Hurst Spit, or else the salt pans were on a manor away from the parish.

Records of a large number of salt pans at Lymington appear throughout the medieval period when salt was included in the list of tithes paid to the church and the rental of salt pans, although nothing is recorded about the method of extracting the salt. The first information that Lloyd records about the manufacturing process dates from the sixteenth century when he notes that 'iron pans were shipped to Southampton from northern Europe in 1565 and experiments were being made in Holland with windmills.'²⁸

A detailed description of the production of salt at Lymington was recorded by Celia Feinnes at the turn of the eighteenth century. She described how sea water was drawn through trenches into ponds and left to evaporate in the sun. When it had reached the required concentration of salt, the liquor was then drawn off to be boiled in iron or copper pans. When visiting Lymington shortly after this description was written, Defoe wrote that 'this town is chiefly noted for making fine salt, which is indeed excellent good, and from whence all these south parts of England are supplied as well by water as by land carriage, and sometimes, tho' not often, they send salt to London...'²⁹

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the government imposed an increasingly high rate of tax on salt, so that by 1817, at its highest was recorded as being sold at 40 times its real value. The exorbitant tax, coupled with competition from other manufactories, both in the UK and abroad, forced the Lymington salt pans into decline and, although the duty was abolished in 1825, the industry never recovered. Lloyd quotes from E. King's *Round Lymington and through the New Forest* (1877) which states that 'On the site of the latest that were kept in work (up to 1865), there is now an oyster breeding establishment, in connection with ponds for the preservation of salt water fish for the inland markets...'

²⁷ *The Salterns of the Lymington Area: a history of coastal salt production in the Lymington area* Arthur T Lloyd St Barbe Museum, Lymington, 2003.

²⁸ Lloyd *op cit.* p3.

²⁹ Lloyd, *op cit.* p5.

Charles St Barbe, who owned 48 salt pans in 15 saltworks in the early nineteenth century recorded the manufacturing process in detail. He was the most important banker in Lymington at the time, and Lloyd assumes that he acquired the salterns as recompense for mortgage debts at the time when the industry was in decline.

Charcoal burning

Charcoal burning is thought to be one of the most ancient industries in Britain, dating from at least 4,000 B.C., and to have been closely related to the process of smelting iron before coal was widely available for the purpose. Hutchinson assumes that, when the Romans came to the New Forest, they made use of the charcoal produced in the area to fire their pottery. He also mentions the story of the death of Rufus whose body was said to have been carried to Winchester on the cart of a charcoal burner, by the name of Purkiss.

The production of charcoal was closely linked to the practice of coppicing woodland that was widespread in the New Forest until the fifteenth century. Then, through the 16th and 17th centuries, it became increasingly difficult to lease coppices, as the market for charcoal was lost to coal. By nineteenth century De Crespigny and Hutchinson describe the charcoal burners of the New Forest and their huts as ‘A quaint feature of the Forest almost hidden beneath the tangle and the greenwood tree, in the midst of a circle of blackened, charcoal strewn earth...’³⁰



The account goes on to describe the charcoal fire ‘...for ever smouldering, covered over with turves through which the smoke perpetually is oozing; and all round and about are stacks of oak and beech piled ready for the burning’.³¹ In an article for Hampshire magazine, Halliwell points out that beech is the best wood for charcoal, although oak and birch are also used. He writes that ‘in olden days whole forest were levelled to meet the demand, logs about two foot long being burned in stacks, covered with bracken or earth the damp-down the rate of burning’.³² However, he also notes that, during the Second World War small circular metal kilns were designed and made to improve the charcoal making process.

Smuggling

Despite its importance to the area for up to five centuries, there are only stories and scraps of information about smuggling in the New Forest. It was an industry in which almost every inhabitant had some kind of financial interest, and became profitable after the 1671 Customs Act placed duties on certain imported goods, particularly wines and spirits.

³⁰ De Crespigny and Hutchinson, *op cit.* p 199

³¹ Ibid.

³² ‘The charcoal burners’, R T Halliwell in *Hampshire*, January 1966, p30.

Ridley Wood, near Burley is said to have been a favourite meeting place for smugglers to meet their customers, who brought their booty east from the Avon valley, after it had been brought ashore off Hengisbury head and, via Christchurch, into the Forest. Kenchington writes that 'Well-beaten runs were operated up the narrow wooded combs by which streams such as Beckton Bunny and Chewton Bunny pierced the cliffs about Barton and Highcliffe, and up the Gangway. Often in a single night, "runs" of a hundred or so tubs each containing four gallons of spirits and worth several guineas each (bigish financial transactions for a petty rural area like this) would be operated.'³³

In the early 19th century Lovey Warne was one a small number of Forest women who joined with the men in the thrill and profit of smuggling. In his book on New Forest traditions, O'Donald Mays quoted a Forester who said she '*would hitch up her skirts, jump on her horses and join her brothers Peter and John in a contraband run*'. *She would wrap silks and laces round her body under her voluminous dress and ride home to the family cottage at Knave's Ash, between Crow and Burley. Her chief task was to warn the free-traders during the daytime of the presence of the Riding Officer who was Abraham Pike in 1803. Dressed in a cloak of the brightest scarlet, she would stand, whenever danger threatened, at the top of Vereley Hill, close to Picket Post, from where she was clearly visible to the smugglers at almost every approach to Burley.*'³⁴

Smuggling was an important part of the economy of Lymington, and was widely – if discretely - supported by the local community. One woman who lived in a cottage at Buckland, wrote in a letter dated 1823, that she was so used to the nightly disturbance caused by poachers and smugglers that she did not hear anything unusual when her own house was broken into. The trade resulted in the accumulation of considerable wealth and the building of several large houses in the town. In his book on Lymington³⁵ James notes that Monmouth House, opposite St Thomas's church, and Woodside Manor House may be the only remaining examples of these properties.

The reduction of import duties and better policing of the coasts led to the end of large scale smuggling in the mid nineteenth century, although, with the large numbers of small craft that sail between the New Forest coast and the continent, there is doubtless scope for it to continue on a small scale to the present day.

Poaching

Poaching has been as much a part of the Forest's economy as smuggling since at least the times of the Norman Conquest. In the mid 19th century Wise noted that 'as recently as thirty or forty years ago, every labourer was either a poacher or a smuggler, very often a combination of the two.'³⁶ The hard life endured by the small holders living in the Forest, coupled with a abundance of the king's deer made poaching an obvious choice for those who sought additional income. De Crespigny and Hutchinson wrote that 'everyone had a lurking sympathy for the poacher – except the game preserver; and where the preserver, as

³³ Kenchington, *op cit*, p62.

³⁴ *New Forest Book: An Illustrated Anthology*, James O'Donald Mays. New Forest Leaves, 1989, p219.

³⁵ *Lymington: An Illustrated History*, Jude James. The Dovecot Press 2007

³⁶ *The New Forest: Its History and its Scenery*. John R Wise (Fifth Edition) Gibbings and Co, London, 1895, p170

in the New Forest, is merely a vague abstraction, like the Crown, one is scarcely ashamed of the sympathy.³⁷

In the 18th Century the number of deer was such that Wise reports that they ‘died in the winter in their hundreds from starvation.’³⁸ Whilst they were clearly a source of food and income for the local population, they competed with the commoner’s livestock for grazing and, from the Crown’s point of view, with the increase in interest in timber for the navy, they were a threat to seedling and young trees. In 1848 a Select Committee was appointed by the House of Commons to look into management of country’s ‘Woods, Forest, and Land Revenues of the Crown’³⁹. It decided that deer not only caused considerable damage to the property of local landowners and the Crown, ‘They were also held to demoralized the poor population by tempting them to poach’. The result of the findings of the Select Committee and a Commission in the following year was the introduction of the Deer Removal Act of 1951 and the decimation of the Forest’s deer population in the years that followed.

However, the removal of much of the Forest’s deer population in the 19th century failed to bring all poaching to an end. Speaking of her childhood in the 1930’ and 40’s, one local woman said that her father regularly caught rabbits with his dog. She continued, ‘He was a good rabbitier, he caught 13 rabbits one weekend. Thirteen! And of course we knew how to cook ‘em. We used to skin the rabbits and grandfather used to take the (skins) into Lymington and sell them: tuppence each.’ Rabbits remain the main game of the New Forest poacher to the present day. A local keeper said that there is little evidence of deer poaching in the Forest, but there are always ‘a few men after rabbits with the “long dogs”’.

Culture and religion

New Forest Gypsies



Nothing is known for certain about the early origins of the Gypsies of the New Forest. However, it is recorded that, by the nineteenth century there were large numbers living in the Forest, or nearby. In the middle of the century Wise notes that ‘They live chiefly in the various droves and rides of the Forest, driven from place to place by the policemen, for to this complexion have things come. One of their favourite halting places is amongst the low woods near

³⁷ De Crespigny and Hutchinson, *op cit.* p 238

³⁸ Wise, *op cit* p 45.

³⁹ Kenchington *op cit* p 88

Wootton, where a dozen or more brown tents are always fluttering in the wind, and as the night comes on the camp-fires redden the dark fir-stems.⁴⁰

He goes on to observe that the reduction in the number of deer in the Forest with the Deer Removal Act meant that they were forced to live on stray poultry, or else hedgehogs and squirrels, and earned money by using heather to make mats, brooms and beehives. Hutchinson writes more fulsomely about them, saying the 'The sense of family is very strong with the gipsies, and it is here that we see their kindly virtues most eminently displayed. Their children are bright and happy, their animals, though somewhat starved, which is the result of the gipsy not having much hay or corn to give them..... show that affection for their masters which is the best proof of fair treatment.'⁴¹

Hutchinson also notes that 'They are really clever makers of briar mats and baskets; and rushwork of various kinds, and clothes pegs for use in hanging washed linen to dry, are among the handiworks that they practice, and of which they sell the product to any buyers they may chance upon. Broom and brushes are another staple industry to them'⁴²

An article written for the Hampshire Field Club in 1893⁴³ notes that they had regular camping grounds across the Forest:

North – Godshill Wood, Whinyates, Crock Hill Copythorne,

East – Ipley, Pennerley, Lady Cross, Norley Wood.

West – Poulner Pits, Picket Post, Burley, Thorny Hill.

South – Bransgore, Shirley Holmes, Pennington, Setley.

Central – Rufus Stone, Bartley, Buskett's Lawn, New Park.

Smith notes that 'The first visitors to the Forest regarded the Gypsies as an essential part of the mystique of the scene, enhancing the overall sense of wildness and freedom that a visit to the Forest engendered.....The serious New Forest studies of the time... often devoted whole chapters to the subject....To write a book about the New Forest without mentioning the Gypsies would be like painting a picture with a primary colour missing from the palette.'⁴⁴

Besides being of interest to the visitor, Smith goes on to say that '*there was little or no friction between the Travellers and the commoners or cottagers: no more than occasionally crops up between all neighbours. Each regarded the other as simply a different type of indigenous inhabitant, and in some cases there were tenuous threads of blood connection. The shared adversity of the struggle to wrest a living by whatever means from the unforgiving environment of the then much more natural Forest and its surrounding commons, would surely have engendered a mutual respect.*'

However, by the turn of the twentieth century, as the New Forest become increasingly accessible and attractive as a place to live, the sale of many properties to outsiders who had

⁴⁰ Wise, *op cit.* p159.

⁴¹ 'The New Forest'. Horace Hutchinson, Methuen & Co, London, 1904, p205.

⁴² Hutchinson, *op cit.* p210.

⁴³ The Gipsies of the New Forest, RWS Griffith. *Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society, Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 2, pp277-82.

⁴⁴ *Romany Nevi-Wesh: An informal history of the New Forest Gypsies.* Len Smith, Nova Foresta Publishing, Lyndhurst, 2004, p115.

no knowledge of the way of life, meant that the Gypsies were increasingly viewed as a nuisance and a threat to settled people's land and property. In a report to a House of Commons Select Committee⁴⁵ Lord Arthur Cecil was asked about grievances against the gypsies. He replied, 'They are a great nuisance to everybody..... I am specially troubled by gypsies myself. I have two instances which I cannot turn them away from within 100 yards of my house.'⁴⁶

As a result of the growing tide of concern about the problems that gypsies were said to be causing, and in response to a police authority request, in 1926 the Forestry Commission set about confining the New Forest Gypsies into seven areas⁴⁷. Permits to live in the compounds were issued to each family, and the licenses which they had to sign strictly controlled what they could do and where they could go on the Forest.

A commoner, who had lived as a child close to the Gypsy camp at Longdown, lamented their confinement in the compounds and the restrictions placed upon their movements. He saw them as an essential element in the Forest's composition. They worked for local farmers on seasonal jobs and 'they were the police force. If there was anything going on that really shouldn't be, they knew about it. All these little things, like catching the rabbits and all that- well who wouldn't!' In fact, he said, the Gypsies often got the blame for things that had been done by commoners or other Forest residents.⁴⁸



The Second World War brought even tighter restrictions on the Gypsies' way of life. Wartime developments and manoeuvres were widespread in the Forest and all those who had not been settled into the compounds were gathered up, while all those living in the Forest came under tighter controls on their activities. In 1946 the Baker Report, which was commissioned by the Forestry Commission to look into the state of the Forest after the ravages of the War, pointed out that poor sanitary arrangements and lack of a clean water supply in the compounds made them health hazards, and proposed the removal of the gypsies from the open Forest.

Starting in the early 1950's, policies were introduced to move Gypsies out of the compounds and into settled housing. Some moved away from the area, while others were able to buy or rent their own accommodation, and those who had no means to provide housing for themselves were rehoused by the local authority. With pressure increasing on them to leave the compounds and live a settled life, by the late 1960's all of the New Forest's compounds had been closed.

⁴⁵ *House of Commons Select Committee on Commons (Inclosure and Regulation) 1913*

⁴⁶ Quoted from Smith *op cit*, p 120.

⁴⁷ Broomhills, Shave Green, Thorney Hill, Blackhamsley, Latchmoor, Longdown and Hardley

⁴⁸ Dan Mansbridge

St Dominic's Priory, Shirley Holmes

St Dominic's Priory was established by an order of Dominican sisters in 1998. They moved from St Joseph's House of Prayer in Ashurst, where they had had temporary residence, to find a permanent home in the New Forest.

The house which they bought, and have opened as a Catholic retreat, was formerly Shirley Holmes Manor. At the time they bought the house and a small acreage of land that came with it, it had been standing empty for two years, and had previously been used as a drug rehabilitation centre. It was in a very poor state of repair and the sisters have spent the succeeding 10 years in building the funds to renovate and enlarge the buildings on the site to make it fit for their purposes.

They originally had a 3 stage programme to undertake this work. The first stage was expected to be the extension of the main house to include bedrooms for the sisters, office space, workrooms and a laundry. The second, to build a chapel, and the third to convert a stable block into study rooms.



However, when the costs of undertaking the work on the main building were analysed, it was decided to build the chapel first. This was completed in 2002. It is built of green oak with a local stone floor. The sisters' 'enclosure' has only recently been completed and, for the 10 years since they moved into the house they have lived in various outbuildings.

The Priory is home to 8 sisters, and includes rooms for up to 7 guests in retreat. The sisters' time is divided between prayer and

work in the community. They give talks, welcome group visits to the priory and hold a summer camp for 8 to 20 year olds, as well as offering a retreat. However, as Sister Julie pointed out, when talking about the order's circumstances 'We live on God's providence.'

Mummers

Mummers and "guisers" (performers in disguise) can be traced back at least to the Middle Ages in Great Britain and Ireland, though when the term "mummer" appears in ancient manuscripts it is rarely clear what sort of performance was involved. A key element was visiting people in disguise at Christmas. De Cresigny and Hutchinson note that 'There is still one band of mummers, worthy of the name, which performs scraps from what were once mystery or morality plays' in the New Forest in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Writing in 1996, Dr Eric Jones-Evans recalled the arrival of the East Boldre Mummers to give their Christmas play in the Royal Oak, at Hilltop in Beaulieu in 1924. At that time

⁴⁹ De Cresigny and Hutchinson, *op cit*, p115.

Jones-Evans records that he was of the opinion that Mummers no longer performed in Hampshire, and was delighted to see the East Boldre players perform on a wintry Christmas Eve.

He describes how, when the pub had filled with customers, full of the goodwill of the season, the Mummers arrived 'from East Boldre in a horse-drawn covered cart. Dressed in garish costumes made from coloured crepe paper that concealed their ordinary attire, and with blackened faces, they trooped into the crowded bar-parlour to strains of "The First Noel".....'⁵⁰.

Original Mummers plays were folk dramas based on the legend of St. George and the Seven Champions of Christendom. They were originally mime shows (thus 'Mummers' from the Middle English word *mum*, meaning silent.) where all the performers were disguised and known as 'Guisers'. The principal characters are St. George, Captain Slasher, The Turkish Knight, The King of Egypt, a doctor and several men-at-arms who challenge St. George to a duel and are subsequently slain. The Doctor enters and demonstrates his skill by resuscitating the dead knights.

All the characters were played by men who kept the same part for many years. Eventually, dialogue was added, but was passed on by word-of-mouth. Thus, by the time that Jones-Evans recalled the play, St George had been transformed into King George and the Turkish Knight, combined with the men-at-arms, had become two 'Turkey Snipes'. After the resurrection of one of the Turkey Snipes, the audience was enjoined by King George to contribute 'A few 'alfpennies an' pennies (to) buy us some beer' and the evening ended with 'carols, comic songs and old music hall numbers – the audience joining in with gusto', as well as bread, cheese and ale for the Mummers.

The Hordle Shakers

In the nineteenth century, one group came to the particular notice of the public when Mary Ann Girling along with 164 followers moved to live in New Forest Lodge, Vaggs Lane, in Hordle. Previously the sect has been base din the Walworth Road, in east London and claimed that they died with conversion, and were then reborn to eternal life. They met in a rented railway arch where in 1871 'nearly 3000 people came to see the excitement caused by the dancing, prophesying and trance utterances of the sect known as the Walworth Jumpers. They were also called the Girlingites or English Shakers.'⁵¹

In 1873 Mrs Girling had a vision that they should move to the New Forest and, with the help of a wealthy patron, the property in Vaggs Lane was bought, with a small mortgage. However, because the strict rules of the sect prohibited the members from working, the mortgage remained unpaid and 'on a bitterly cold night of December 1894, in the rain, sleet and snow, 60 flimsily dressed women, 35 men and 45 children were evicted. All the furniture was left along a half mile stretch of Vaggs Lane. It included 3 pianos, 77 beds, boxes of eggs, butter and vegetables valued at about £1,000 and worthless by the end of the night.'⁵²

⁵⁰ Hampshire: The County Magazine, January 1966

⁵¹ 'The Walworth Jumpers' by Alec Tritton, Family Tree Magazine, October 2007.

⁵² Tritton *Op cit*.



The group continued to live in the Hordle area for a further 11 years, leasing fields, or camping by the roadside, and using an old barn as a chapel. They still maintained that they



were immortal, and were severely shaken by the first death in the group. However, Mary Girling's health was also in decline and, in 1886, she died of cancer. She was buried in Hordle churchyard, amongst her followers, each grave having a yew tree planted at its head. Today nothing remains of the sect except a few yew trees and a small plaque fixed to the church wall, which reads 'Mary Girling Leader of the Hordle Shakers, was buried here in 1886.'

Ringwood Meeting House⁵³

Ringwood Meeting House was built in 1727 by a group of Presbyterians. They were known as non-conformists or dissenters because they did not conform to the Church of England's Articles of Religion as laid down in the Book of Common Prayer. They wished to worship God in their own way, without the dogma of bishops, creeds etc. Their tastes were what we could term 'puritan' - plain and unadorned.

The Meeting House in Ringwood is the only dissenting Meeting House in the county of Hampshire to survive from the period before 1800 in a virtually unaltered state. Its interior is one of the best surviving examples of a small Meeting House in the country with galleries on three sides. The architectural style of the Meeting House reflects early Georgian taste in general; the building is symmetrical, with plain walls and windows. Its boxed family pews, which we now find so unusual, were very common in England during the 18th century but were removed from most churches during Victorian times.

The building was known as the Upper or Great Meeting House during the 18th century to distinguish it from the Independents who broke away to build their own chapel known as

⁵³ These notes come from the website of the Ringwood Meeting House:
<http://www.ringwoodonline.co.uk/meetinghouse/index.htm>



congregation in Bournemouth.

the Lower Meeting House (now Trinity United Reformed Church). The old registers of the Upper Meeting House show baptisms from 1748 and burials from 1815.

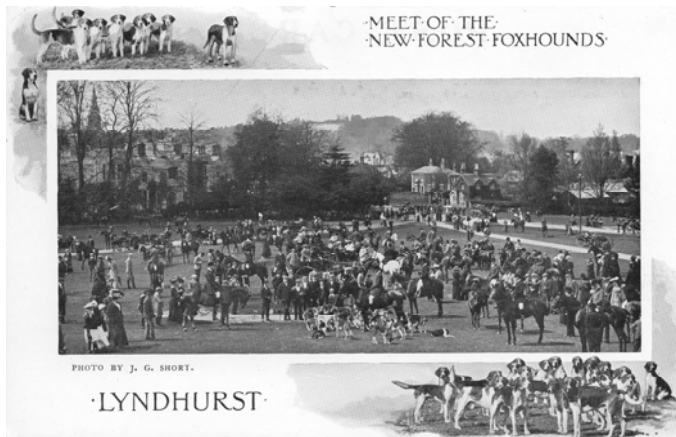
During the 19th century the congregation of Ringwood Meeting House becoming Unitarian. The building was then known as St Thomas's Chapel, until it reverted to its original name in about the 1930's. In 1976 the Unitarians found they were unable to maintain the building and combined with a

The Meeting House is now run by the Ringwood Meeting House Association, a registered charity which funds the day-to-day running of the centre. In the upper galleries of the building is a collection of old photographs of Ringwood and other memorabilia. Downstairs there is an area for temporary exhibitions. Volunteers are often able to help with enquiries about local or family history.

Recreation and tourism

Hunting

The New Forest was originally created to be a hunting reserve and, as such, hunting has remained at the core of its culture to the present day. The Forest is dotted with hunting lodges where the king and nobility stayed during hunts and, it is said that William Rufus was



out hunting when he met his death in the area. There is little information about the extent or conduct of hunting in the Forest over next centuries, although it clearly continued, and heavy penalties were imposed on those who abused the laws that controlled the Forest.

The period between the Norman Conquest and the nineteenth century saw a decline in the crown's interest in hunting and the

deer that were its subject, and an increasing pre-occupation with the production and extraction of timber. In 1851 the Deer Removal Act was passed by parliament which led to

the almost total eradication of deer within the Forest, and the start of a regime of intensive timber production.

While royal interest in the Forest's deer declined, that of local Forest dwellers increased. De Crespigny and Hutchinson relate the founding of the New Forest Buckhounds when local landowners, each of whom 'kept a few couple of hounds, and hunted for their own amusement' formed a regular pack under the mastership of a Mr. Lovell. They comment that 'No sight can be more picturesque, or in more perfect harmony with the sylvan surroundings, than a meet of deerhounds in the Forest.'⁵⁴

The first records of fox hunting in the New Forest date back to 1675, however the New Forest Hounds were formed in 1781. They were known as Mr Gilbert's Hounds, and kenneled at Lamb's Corner in Bartley. In 1789 the Hunt Club was formed.⁵⁵

The late nineteenth century was the 'hey day' of hunting in the New Forest, with horses being transported by train to the area in the spring when other packs had to stop hunting because of the growing crops. So great was the following that, in 1885 the Forest was divided into two packs – east and west – a situation which prevailed for the next ten years.

When war was declared in 1914 horses were required by the War Office for the Cavalry. Within 10 days 15,000 hunters from across the country were ready for departure. All lawn meets were cancelled and nobody wore scarlet. The biggest field seen anywhere in Britain during the 1914/15 season was 20, which included the Master and Hunt Servants.

During the Second World War, although horses were no longer commandeered as they had been in the First War, hunting was restricted by the shortage of fit men. 'Old timers' and men on service leave kept the hunt going, but the airfields at Beaulieu, Holmsley and Stoney Cross, along with the bombing range at Ashley Walk, severely restricted activity.

After the War hunting returned to normal but, over the next five decades, was increasingly affected by the growing opposition to the sport from 'anti hunt campaigners'. The hunt had to employ increasingly devious tactics to avoid the 'antis' and, when they met, confrontations were common. Despite the fact that the hunt operated under strict license controls imposed by the Forestry Commission, they were continually monitored by the 'antis'. Finally, in 1997 a Labour Government came to power with a promise to ban hunting, and following four years of protracted debate and 700 hours of parliamentary time, on 17th January 2001 parliament took the vote to start the procedure to introduce legislation to ban hunting.

The hunt continues to the present as a drag hunting club and the meets are described on the website: The hunt meets twice a week from early November to the end of February. The meet is held either in a forest car park, or by invitation at a private house, hotel or pub. These are referred to as lawn meets, and it is customary at these for participants to enjoy a small tippie before setting off.

Once the meet is over, usually after 20-30mins, the huntsman sounds his horn and moves off with hounds to the first covert where he will cast his hounds and encourage them to search for their quarry. Sometimes a the trail may be found immediately and the chase begins in earnest, or the huntsman may have to move on from covert to covert, recasting his

⁵⁴De Crespigny and Hutchinson, *op cit.*, p162

⁵⁵ <http://www.newforesthounds.co.uk/>

hounds several times before a trail is found. The unpredictability of hunting is one of the elements that adds to its appeal. Once the hounds are on a scent, they "give tongue" or "make music", and once the hounds have left the covert, the field master will lead the mounted field in hot pursuit. Once on a run the control which the huntsman has over his hounds, and the respect and trust the hounds have in the huntsman, is a pleasure to behold. A run may be brief and fast if scent is good, or it may be long and slow with hounds having to work hard to keep on the line. In any event the huntsman will re-cast and the day will go on until 3 or 4pm. depending on how strenuous the day has been - though of course anyone can pull out at any time and head for home.

Horse and pony racing

Horse and pony racing has probably been undertaken in the New Forest for many years, but few records are now in existence. The earliest records relate to the race course to the north east of Lyndhurst in the eighteenth century, when it would appear to have been well established. Babey and Roberts record that the race day was 'Very much a fair day,..... The races has a chequered history, restarted in 1858 after a lapse of more than ten years, they were still going strong in 1871, when a crowd of four to five thousand attended the day's



festivities. There seems no clear reason why the races should have ceased at this time.⁵⁶

Dionus McNair recounts how the races were to moved to Balmer Lawn between 1882 and 1905. 'In 1882 the Deputy Surveyor, Lascelles, made an application to his boss the Commissioner for Woods for permission to hold Annual Races there and to erect a stand for spectators, saying, "The races are restricted to New Forest ponies and are therefore good for the

breed." The residents of Brockenhurst protested at the number of tourists attracted, particularly bicyclists!⁵⁷

However, information from older Forest residents today reveals that other forms of racing have continued across the Forest since the apparent closure of the Lyndhurst Racecourse at the end of the nineteenth century. Len Mansbridge believes that he rode a New Forest pony called Merrylegs in one of the last races at the Lyndhurst course in 1928 or 30: a race which he won. During the late 1930's there was a racing circuit at Bratley, that ran through Pinnock Wood to Picket Post. Mr. Mansbridge also organised, and sometimes rode in, a number of pony races in different parts of the Forest until he retired from racing. He and agister Geordie Cook organised races at New Park for some years. Another commoner, Alf

⁵⁶ Babey and Roberts, *op cit* pp41-42.

⁵⁷ Unpublished research undertaken by Dionus McNair.

Newman, also arranged two races a year at Copythorne for several years. 'These were all 'Galloway Races': restricted to horses and ponies under 15 hands in height.

In 1911 the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society started a Point-to-point race on the Forest. The first one was run from Decoy Pond near Beaulieu Road Station to the Bench at Lyndhurst. McNair notes the 'The Point-to-point has been run every Boxing Day since 1911 except during the two World Wars, and sprints were held round Burley Manor Park in conjunction with the Breed Show from 1906. However, the high time for New Forest pony racing was the 1960's when the Young Farmers held annual races at New Park Buckhounds field. Regular meetings were held at Matchams and on the playing fields at Bransgore, plus odd meetings and midnight steeplechases round about. Whenever the commoners had a cause for celebration it was invariably extra races.' She notes that the first prize was £5 and the entry fee one shilling. At that time £5 was a month's wages for a skilled agricultural worker and, with ponies often racing more than once in an afternoon, 'a good race pony was a valuable possession'.

Today the prize money remains at five pounds. The course is set by a commoner with a good knowledge of the Forest and only the finish of the race is published in advance. In order to qualify for the major races, riders must take part in the drifts that have been organised throughout the previous autumn. Riders find out where the start of the race is to be by telephoning the organisers on Christmas Day, so that no-one has the chance to inspect or practice over the whole course before the race. There are a series of races, ranging from children under 12 to veterans over 50 and, although the prize money is small, high numbers of entries are received for almost all races. In recent years a large number of spectators have gathered at the finish to enjoy a walk on the Forest after the Christmas festivities and watch the riders come in.

Bartlett's Steam Fair⁵⁸

James Bartlett was a farmer from Blissford, Fordingbridge in Hampshire. He was born c



1855 the son of Robert and Elizabeth Bartlett. The original ride was built by brothers James, George and Charles Bartlett on their farm at Blissford. It consisted of a pony roundabout, turned by a small horse placed in shafts either on the inside or outside of the roundabout. The wooden horses for the ride were carved in the farmhouse loft. Two chariots were fitted to the ride as the horses were too big for smaller children.

James Bartlett converted the old pony

⁵⁸ This section is written by Steve Bailey, descendent of the Barletts' Steam Fair family, and Stephen Smith of Newcastle Under Lyme.

roundabout to a steam set of gallopers in around 1872 also adding an organ and decoration. He visited many local towns and villages throughout Hampshire with his set of gallopers. Most people would save their money up during the year just to spend at the fair.

In 1928 the ride was taken over by William Gritt but this arrangement was short lived and the ride was soon being travelled by the Bartlett's again. In 1933 the ride was put in store when they acquired another roundabout from the family of the late Joseph Smith. Bartlett's were so well respected in the area that they were the only showmen allowed to open at the New Forest Show when it was based in Cuffnell's Park at Lyndhurst. Alf Bartlett followed his father into business aged 16 and travelled "New Forest Hunters" until the Second World War. He died aged 71 at Fordingbridge in November 1955, and his funeral was held at Hyde church. The family's name is perpetuated at Bartlett's Common, Hyde.

In 1943 the "New Forest Hunters" were sold and subsequently passed through numerous hands until, around 1958 when they were moved to Beaulieu Abbey to be used as a bandstand for jazz festivals. At the 1960 'Beaulieu jazz festival', rival jazz fans rioted and set about smashing up the set of gallopers. They were damaged beyond repair and finally broken up. The only known remaining wooden horse is kept on display at the Beaulieu Motor Museum.

Visitors and tourism

For many centuries the New Forest remained a backwater. Its poor land and ownership by the crown ensured that there was little agricultural interest in the area and, its remoteness meant that few people visited the Forest for recreation except to hunt. However the nineteenth century brought a new romanticism to Britain and a growing interest in the concept of wilderness.

In 1847 the London to Southampton railway was extended to Dorchester, making the New Forest much more accessible. The first visitors were fascinated by this new discovery and wrote of its beauty and its history. As a result, over the next fifty years, the New Forest became far more widely known to the traveler, and a number of books – some learned and others whimsical – were written about it.

However, it was not until after the Second World War, with growing car ownership, that the New Forest became a popular destination of tourism. The area lies within easy access of a number of large population centres, including London and Birmingham and, with a range of accommodation alternatives, from luxury hotels to camp sites, as well its proximity to the coast, the pressure of tourism increased to levels that were threatening the fabric of the Forest itself.

In the 1960's and '70's tourism increased rapidly and, with no controls on their movement, cars frequently ventured deep into the Forest, causing damage to the fabric of the Forest as well as risk to people and animals. From 1972 a Forestry Commission management plan was progressively implemented aimed at reconciling recreation with the New Forest

environment. This included car free areas, controlled by barriers, and designated car parks (the original 142 were subsequently reduced to 134) and 18 campsites (later reduced to 10).⁵⁹

Despite these controls, such was the concern about the pressure that visitor numbers were placing on the New Forest that, in 1994, New Forest District Council published a consultation document entitled 'Living with the Enemy' in which it emphasized the importance of visitors to the local economy and sought a strategy to deal with the problems which annual influx caused.

Since the nineteen nineties, opposing sides in the struggle to exploit or limit tourism have fought a number of battles over camp site size, facilities and location, the rights of commoners in carry out their stock management, and the right of those who wish to organize recreational activities on the open Forest. At present, the Forestry Commission estimates that there are 24 million people



days spent in the forest each year with 18 million of those comprising local residents.

The arrival of the National Park Authority has thrown another player into the game. When the Authority first took over control of the Forest, there was considerable concern over the way in which it would prioritise its main National Park Purposes. These are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Park; and
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Park's special qualities by the public.

The future of the New Forest now rests in the hands of a complex network of statutory authorities, voluntary organisations and local interest groups. The interplay between these groups, and national and international value placed on the area's landscape and cultural heritage, will determine how well the pressure placed on the New Forest by tourism and recreation is handled in years to come.

⁵⁹ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6A4KPD#recreation>

History and Myth

The Origins of the New Forest

Although large areas of the New Forest were in the hands of the crown prior to the Norman Conquest, it was established as a royal hunting forest in the 11th Century, shortly after 1066.



At that time the word 'forest' had a different meaning to that in general use today, in so far as it was not a dense area of trees, but one of 'woody grounds and fruitful pastures, privileged for wild beasts and fowls of forest, chase and warren, to rest in the safe protection of the King, for his delight and pleasure.'⁶⁰ In other words, a 'Forest' is a 'Royal Hunting Ground'.

The Forest Laws prevented the fencing of private land against the deer and prohibited the cutting of any timber or undergrowth, to

provide the best habitat for the deer and other game which roamed freely across the area. The owners of domestic animals were obliged to remove them during the 'fence month', in June, when deer were calving, and during the 'winter heyning', to preserve what fodder remained on the Forest for the deer. Penalties for breaking the Forest law were extreme, and have led to William the Conqueror to be known as 'William the Bastard' in the locality.

Other restrictions on the free exploitation of open wastes of the New Forest included limiting the turning out of pigs to two months of the year in the autumn to feed on acorns, and the regulation of cutting turf and collecting fuel wood. Thus what started as restrictions on the free activities of the local population became translated over time into the rights which the New Forest commoners enjoy to this day. Tubbs notes that 'It is difficult to trace the development of regulations of this kind, but customary and regulated practices ultimately became the legally established rights of common which survive today.'⁶¹

A great many properties in the New Forest, and some that are many miles distant, possess rights of common that are exercisable over the open wastes. Most of the rights attach to land, not to buildings or people (although fuel rights: estovers and turbury attach to buildings), so it may be gained by the purchase or rental of land with rights. The most commonly held right is that of pasture, which allows the commoner to graze cattle, ponies and donkeys on the open Forest in exchange for the payment of a charge called a 'marking fee'.

⁶⁰ Manwood (1598) quoted in Tubbs *The New Forest*, p 78.

⁶¹ *The New Forest* by Colin Tubbs. New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, Lyndhurst, 2001.

Commoning in the New Forest: an historical view⁶²

The agricultural system based on the exercise of common rights has underpinned the economy and cultural history, as well as the ecology, of the New Forest since Norman times. The system has developed within the framework of the Forest Laws, through which the Verderers Court has developed and been redefined as a result of a number of acts of parliament over the intervening centuries.

The earliest register of common rights was drawn up in 1670 before a Justice Seat for the Forest. Over 300 claims were registered, but these claims covered a much larger number of holdings because the lords of the larger manors submitted single claims covering all their tenants. Holdings were between 1 acre (0.4 ha) and 50 acres (20 ha) in size.

In 1875 a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire into the causes of complaints by commoners that their rights were being eroded. A description of the Forest at the time describes the woods and heaths, with low-lying, fertile lawns and 'Here and there, a brown hamlet on high ground, or a stray cottage with its little plot and orchard, nestling in some sheltered hollow or skirting the roadside'. Well established holdings included a garden and orchard, with buildings including a 'cottage, cowpen and pigstye'⁶³

During the latter part of the nineteenth century better access to the New Forest, resulting from the development of the railway and extension of the road network meant that new residents started to move into the area. Kenchington describes this first wave of incomers as "new gentry" flocking into the district, many of them to old lodges and "service cottages" put on the estate market perhaps by the Office of Woods as "superior gentlemen's residence in beautiful and romantic surroundings."⁶⁴ In addition, the improvement of the road network allowed the opening up of the area to residential development.

Although the industrial revolution started to bring change into the New Forest with the coming of the railway and metalled roads, descriptions of commoners holdings even from the early part of the 20th century indicate that the way of life on the Forest survived in many ways unchanged up to the time of the First World War. Jack Humby, a New Forest keeper, described the cottage in which he grew up in Linwood, in the south west of the Forest just after the turn of the century.⁶⁵

When I was a boy the cottage was a simple place with no electricity or mains water. At the right end there was a small extension which we called the backhouse. It had a tall chimney built over the brick oven. In the wall which adjoined to the house there was an open fire and an earthenware sink in the corner. The well where all our water came from stood just outside the back door.

⁶² This section is based on information included in *New Forest Commoners' Housing* by Jo Ivey. New Forest Association, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, New Forest Commoners Defence Association, 2005.

⁶³ Briscoe Eyre, *op cit*, p50.

⁶⁴ Kenchington 1944: p112. Although David Stagg points out the New Forest Act of 1877 prevented the Forestry Commission from selling off its holdings in the New Forest, and that this bar remained until 1981.

⁶⁵ *Keeping the Forest: The Life Story of Jack Humby, Forest Keeper*. Jo Ivey, 1995. NGK Press, Lymington, Hampshire, pp5-6

My mother used to do her baking and washing in the backhouse. In the summer we often ate in there, and our boots and outdoor clothes were hung there. When they first moved in it was an old board place, and the creepers came through the boards indoors. And, if the creeper came through, the wind must have come through too!

Next to the backhouse there was the kitchen, where we had most of our meals in the winter time. Leading from that was a passage which led to the scullery, or what we called pantry, where we kept the food. It was quite big, and we used to keep the bread which Mother baked and our bacon in there. The sides of pork were salted and laid on a stone platform, before being smoked.



Harry Burt outside his cottage in Brockenhurst

Then there was the sitting room on the end. At the other end there was a larger extension with a thatched roof. That was the cider house. Next to the cottage there stood a big yew tree. Both the extension and the yew have gone now though.

Upstairs there were two big bedrooms, one at each end, and a small one in the middle. You went up the stairs and turned left to the big bedroom, the smaller one was along a little narrow passage. The second large bedroom was off the stairs to the right.

At the back of the cottage we had a vegetable garden. We grew mostly potatoes, runner beans, beetroots and parsnips, and a few carrots. Peas were considered a luxury, we didn't have room for them. We grew the main food crops which would keep us through the winter.

If we ran out we'd have to buy potatoes, but that was a difficult job in those days. Everybody who had potatoes wanted them for themselves. The families in the village were big and none of them had much to spare. But there we are; it was hard going.

We had about an acre and three quarters of meadow, as well as a paddock and an orchard. My father built a large pound in the yard, and a pig sty and a food store at the back. Then there was a calf shed and stables for four horses.

This cottage, and a 6 acre hay meadow, gave the forest keeper, his wife and seven children a good living with the support of his keeper's wages. There was strict demarcation of work, and all the children were expected to pull their weight.

In the years following the Second World War the area became more accessible as a result of the increasing use of the car, the expansion of Southampton and the urbanisation of Waterside, Kenchington notes that 'in most Forest villages, despite all the new building of forty years there are far fewer cottages at rents the native commoner can afford. In Bramshaw parish, to go even further, the total dwellings of all classes number quite twenty less than fifty years ago despite all the subsequent building and middle-class residents. Thus native commoners' sons and daughters are reduced to waiting for dead men's cottages, living in rooms, or living miles from their work in council-house estates at rents more than their agricultural wages can afford.'⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Kenchington *Op. cit.*: p180

In the early 1970's Janet Kiff⁶⁷ described how land values in the area, as a result of the demand for building land and 'the national trend to have a second home, and to retire to country locations in the south of England' had 'precipitated and still affects the dropping numbers of commoners in the New Forest'. Young local people were being deterred from continuing the commoning practice of their parents by the high prices paid for small dwellings, which were comparable to those paid for properties 'in the suburbs of London, and so are too expensive for would-be small-holders at the start of their adult life'.⁶⁸ This is a situation which continues to the present day.

The death of William Rufus



The death of William Rufus (the Red King according to Wise), son of William the Conqueror, is one of the Forest's most famous stories. Wise recounts the traditional version of the tale which describes how the king, out hunting with a small party in 1100, was killed by an arrow fired by Walter Tiril (or Tyrell). Tiril fled, and the King's body was carried to Winchester on a charcoal burner's cart. The next day he was buried 'unlamented, unknelled and unaneled.'⁶⁹ The place where the king is traditionally reputed to have fallen is marked by a stone, now covered in cast-iron.

However, Wise points out that 'the story reads at the very first glance too much like a romance'.⁷⁰ And it leaves many questions unanswered: 'Why, in the first place, we naturally ask, if the King was shot by accident, did his friends and attendants desert him? Why was he brought home in a cart, drawn by a wretched jade, the blood, not even staunched, flowing from the wound, clotting the dust on the road? Why, too, the indecent haste of his funeral? Why, afterwards, was no inquiry as to his death made? Why, too, was Tiril's conduct not investigated?'⁷¹

Wise concludes that Rufus was not killed by chance but through a conspiracy devised by the clergy, by whom he was hated. He notes that reading about 'the life of the Red King seems rather like reading a series of plots against it, not by the English, who were too thoroughly cowed to make the slightest resistance, but by his own prelates and barons.'⁷²

However, recent research carried out by local historian, Arthur Lloyd has thrown doubt on the location of Rufus' death⁷³. His reading of the chronicles of the time indicate that the death



⁶⁷ 'The use of common grazing land in the New Forest, Hampshire', Janet Kiff Discussion Papers in Conservation.

⁶⁸ Kiff *Op cit*: p23

⁶⁹ *The New Forest: Its History and its Scenery*. John R Wise (Fifth Edition) Gibbings and Co, London 1895, p95.

⁷⁰ Wise, *op cit*. p 100.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p101.

⁷² *Ibid*, p105.

⁷³ *The Death of Rufus*, Arthur Lloyd. New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust, Lyndhurst, 200.

occurred in a place called 'Thorougham' or 'Thruham', which Lloyd has identified on the Beaulieu estate.

Lloyd concludes that the tradition of the site of Rufus' death being near Malwood dates from the visit that Charles II made to the Forest. He also notes that, while Wise concludes that Rufus' death was the result of 'a conspiracy of his prelates, he remains of the view that it was an accident.

Mary Dore and Witchy White, the witches of Beaulieu⁷⁴

Mary Dore was a witch who lived in Beaulieu during the 18th Century. She was believed to be of humble origin, renting a house next to the Beaulieu Mill. The archives of the Beaulieu estate⁷⁵ reveal that, on her return from Winton (Winchester) Gaol, she was angered by the demolition of the house she had previously lived in, and refused to live in the house, also at the mill, which was assigned to her in her absence. However, the Beaulieu Estate Rental of 1729 shows Widow Dore occupying a house by the mill some 3 years after her release from prison.

The estate's archives do not include any information on the crime for which she had been imprisoned, and she is not generally well documented in the Beaulieu estate papers of her time. In his "History of Hampshire" (1795), Richard Warner, describes her and her grave in the Parish Church of Beaulieu, in the following way:

"Among the many 'frail memorials' of human dissolution, that have been erected within its cemetery, was one which perished a few years ago, raised to the memory of Mary Dore, the parochial witch of Beaulieu, who died about half a century since. Old John, duke of Montagu [2nd Duke of Montagu 1690-1749], who seems to have entertained a great veneration for this wonder-working female, covered her remains at his own expense, and surrounded her grave with a neat railing. On this, I understand, an inscription of a curious nature was written by his order, allusive to her magical powers. Time, however, or good sense, has removed this monument of the duke's superstition, and the remains of Mary Dore repose under a green grass turf, undistinguished by any discriminative mark from the common herd that sleep around her.

The gifted female we are at present speaking of, does not appear to have been a malignant witch, 'a black and midnight hag', that exerted her Canidian powers to the injury and discomposure of those around. Her spells were chiefly used for the purpose of self-extrication in situations of danger; and I have conversed with a rustic, whose father had the seen the old lady convert herself more than once, into the form of an hare, or cat, when likely to be apprehended in wood-stealing, to which she was somewhat addicted."

She is now remembered as a character in the New Forest Embroidery, created by Belinda, Lady Montagu in ca.1979, and in the prefix of one of the lines of New Forest ponies.

In the early nineteenth century, Mrs 'Witchy' White was a charwoman at Palace House. She was believed to have occult powers and the author of a paper entitled 'Beaulieu Abbey and

⁷⁴ Extract of the notes made by Susan Tomkins, Heritage Education Officer and Archivist at Beaulieu, April 2002.

⁷⁵ A letter from the Beaulieu Steward dated 02-01-1726/7

its Manor, with some Forest Phantoms”⁷⁶, was told a story by ‘a lady born and bred in Beaulieu, and the youngest, they say, of a “long family”’ about her father’s experience of her when a young man.



Photo: courtesy of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

He was courting a girl from Fawley at the time, and they were enjoying the festivities of the Beaulieu Fair. They forgot how late the hour had got and the girl, having promised her parents that she would be back at a certain hour, was very upset. At that moment old Mrs White was passing and asked what the problem was. On hearing the story, she ‘promised that if a start were made without an instant’s delay, and the now benighted traveller just kept ‘jogging along,’ that she would arrive home in time.’ (p173) She followed the old lady’s guidance and ‘never to her dying day could she account for the fact that somehow she did cover that four and a half miles from Beaulieu to Fawley within the allotted time.’

The Burley witches

The village of Burley is today linked to a tradition of witches and witchcraft, but this dates from much more recent history than the Beaulieu witches and relates to the arrival in the village of Sybil Leek, known as a white witch

Sybil Leek, came from a family with a tradition of involvement in the occult, and became known as a white witch. In the late 1950’s she moved to Burley where she had an antique shop.



Her open attitude about being a witch caused problems. Growing media interest led to the press and tourists visiting Burley to see her and follow her to the secret coven meeting places.

Although the interest in her activities led to increased tourism in Burley, some people were not happy about the scale of interference in village life, while others were also uncomfortable having a white witch in their midst. The lease on the property she rented in the village was not renewed and she moved out, finally moving to the USA, where she was widely welcomed, and remained until she died in 1982.

⁷⁶ H.E. R Widnell in ‘*The New Forest*’ with forward by Lord Radnor, Pheonix House, London, 1960.

Fairies in the New Forest

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the New Forest also had a tradition of the involvement of fairies in everyday life. Writing in 1862, Wise writes:

'Here in the Forest still dwell fairies. The mischievous sprite, Laurence, still holds men by his spell and makes them idle. If a peasant is lazy, it is proverbially said, "Lawrence has got upon him," or, "He has got a touch of Lawrence." He is still regarded with awe, and barrows are called after him. Here, too, in the Forest lives Shakespeare's Puck, a veritable being, who causes the Forest colts to stray.... This tricky fairy, so the Forest peasant to this hour firmly believes, inhabits the bogs, and draws people into them, making merry and laughing at their misfortunes.... Only those who are eldest born are exempt from his spell. The proverb of "As ragged as a colt Pixey" is everywhere to be heard.....There is scarcely a village or hamlet in the Forest district which has not its "Pixey Field," and "Puck Piece." At Prior's Acre we find Puck's Hill, and not far from it lies the great wood of Puckpits; whilst a large barrow on Beaulieu Common is known as Pixey's Cave.' (p174-5)

However, by the time De Crespigny and Hutchinson published their account of the New Forest's traditions in 1895⁷⁷, they were able to note that 'no forester of to-day numbers Puck among his acquaintance' (p101) and regarding another local fairytale, they state that 'if the forester of to-day were questioned he would be likely to profess himself as ignorant of this matter as of the existence of Puck or Lawrence.'

⁷⁷ *The New Forest: Its Traditions, Inhabitants and Customs*. Rose C de Crespigny and Horace Hutchinson, John Murray, London 1895.

Afterword

As noted in the Introduction, this report has attempted to make a start at acknowledging and listing some of the well known traditions of the New Forest. It is only a start and some ideas which have been suggested but time has not allowed to be investigated further include:

Section 1: Economy

Pony breeding

Section 2: Culture and religion

The many religious sects that have set up in the New Forest over the years

Quakers in Godshill

Lymington Advertiser and Times

Societies such as	Pony Breeders
	NFCDA
	NFA
	NF Pony Enthusiasts

Section 3: Recreation and tourism

The history of camping

The Ramblers' Association in the New Forest

Sailing

Fishing/Shooting

Riding

Section 4: History and myth

Famous people of the Forest, or with a New Forest connection:

William Gilpin

Arthur Conan Doyle

W H Hudson

William Cobbett

Alice Lisle

Brusher Mills

Alice Liddel

Section 5: Military activities in the New Forest

Tudor Gun Fort at Calshot

Hurst Castle

East Boldre Airfield

Calshot Base

Ibsley Airfield

Beaulieu airfield

Holmsely Airfield

Stoney Cross Airfield

Bisterne Airfield

Lymington Airfield

Needs Oar Point Airfield

The Schultze Gunpowder Factory at Eyeworth

Armaments Research Department at Millersford

Ashley Bombing Range

The Portuguese Fireplace

The Canadian Memorial