

## New Forest Notes – August 1996

### Forest pony brands and the Atlas of Rights

For some years after the last war, it was possible to buy a volume which listed all New Forest pony and cattle brands, together with their owners' names and addresses. In the early 1960s, the brands were published annually in an appendix to the New Forest Pony Breeding and Cattle Society's stud book, so that unless one wanted to spend the considerable sum charged for that book (£10 lost year), the brand list was virtually unobtainable. Moreover, as the years went by, the stud book list became more and more out of date and inaccurate. New brands were added, but obsolete ones were seldom struck out. No-one was prepared to undertake the considerable work involved in a thorough revision. By 1995 it was clear that the studbook list was made up of a vast mish-mash of obsolete brands and a relatively small number that remained in use. Names and addresses were very much out of date. The Verderers accordingly decided that the whole thing must be overhauled.

Over many months the Staff Committee Verderers, the Agisters and the Clerk worked to produce a new list and the fruits of their labours have just been published by the New Forest Research and Publications Trust in a volume which it is hoped will be useful to everyone interested in the Forest. It records all the brands in use in 1994, together with new brands registered up to the end of 1995. This means that of the 1,400 recorded in the 1994 stud book, only 600 were considered by the agisters to remain extant. A brief appendix lists the few brands which, while no longer in use, belong to surviving local families and which the agisters consider might possibly be used again in the future. Brands belonging to dead commoners or those who long ago moved away or gave up farming have been struck out. Those "mantelpiece brands" registered with no intention of use have been similarly deleted.

An introduction explains the byelaw requirement for registering brands, the procedure and cost of registering and the basis upon which the book has been prepared. This first edition of the brand book for over thirty years also includes details of the location of the brand on a pony, i.e. saddle, shoulder, etc. During the preparation of the book, fears were expressed that the obsolete and inevitably erratic old numbering system used for pony registrations might be dropped. However, the address list includes all the old numbers so that registrations can continue as before. In a major revision such as this, it is inevitable that some errors will appear, despite the best efforts of the Agisters and Clerk in checking the names and addresses. Space has accordingly been allowed for **future** gummed in corrections and additions, and these will be issued from time to time. The opportunity afforded by the publication of the brand book has been taken to include a comprehensive guide to the atlases of common rights held by the Verderers at their Lyndhurst office. In recent years there has been a growing interest in common rights, mostly for their curiosity value, amongst purchasers of land and houses in the Forest area. Solicitors and estate agents now routinely carry out searches of the atlases on behalf of their clients and innumerable queries arise as a result. The

Verderers' Clerk has for some years issued guidance notes, but now for the first time the method of recording the rights is explained in detail.

The first statutory register of rights in the New Forest appeared in 1858 and was a stout paper covered book listing every parcel of land in the 65,000 acres carrying rights, the claim numbers, the owners or occupiers and the nature of the rights. The "Register of Claims" was published by Eyre & Spottiswoode at the huge price of 2/6d. and is now one of the most valuable and sought-after books on the Forest. By 1949. the Register was so difficult to interpret that it was transcribed onto 25" Ordnance Survey maps which now comprise the Atlas of Forest Rights. A second atlas dealing with pasture rights on various commons on the Forest margin was prepared after 1964. Altogether it is a complicated subject and the new guide should assist interested property owners and their advisers in discovering exactly what rights of common they possess and how those rights are recorded. Copies of the Brand Book and Atlas Guide can be obtained from the New Forest Research and Publications Trust at 4, Clarence Road, Lyndhurst, at £3 (£3.45 by post).

### **Maritime Ponies**

To those unacquainted with the Forest's Solent coast, the current dispute over ponies on the Beaulieu foreshore may seem just about as complicated as the geography of the area. It is certainly not my home territory, but after many site meetings over the years dealing with this vexed subject, both the topography and the politics have become familiar.

Between the Forest and the coast lies a belt of agricultural land between one and two miles wide and largely divided between several great estates. This belt is fragmented by a series of high ways and private roads leading down to the coast, some of which are open to commonable animals from the Forest proper. Most of the area is within the perambulation of the New Forest. In other words it is within the gridded perimeter of the Forest. In such places it is a long established custom that landowners must fence against Forest stock if they wish to keep the animals out.

On the coast itself are extensive mud flats and marshes and behind them are pieces of land which **are** either unfenced or on which the fences fell down many years ago. The place has an air of interesting dereliction. On all this open land the commoners claim (and can probably prove) prescriptive rights of grazing. The exposed, waterlogged and salty nature of the land probably led originally to its abandonment for regular farming, but compared to the short pastures of the Forest's heaths, it is an equine paradise — especially when taken together with the verges of the lanes leading to the coast and the opportunities for occasional raids into better farmland through badly maintained fences and gates. There are also few animal accidents here because of the minor and slow character of the roads. Altogether, it is an attractive area in which to depasture stock and the ponies evidently thrive. One seldom sees anything but grade 1 ponies on the coast.

Towards the Lympington end of this stretch of coast there are occasional points of friction, especially where dilapidated fences allow stock to escape onto the roads outside the Forest, but no-

one has seriously challenged the ponies' right to be there, This state of affairs persists eastwards as far as Park Shore, but after that the trouble starts. South west of Warren Farm Lord Montagu has a beach house and just to the west of this building there is a barrier, part fence and part groyne, which stops public access further along the coast and impedes the progress of ponies in that direction. The fence runs into the sea and at low spring tides a few yards remain in the water to a depth, estimated by English Nature's reserve manager, of about six feet. The ponies, however, irritated at this obstruction to their foraging, simply swim round the end and then carry on as before. Once round the obstruction, they are said to cause annoyance by congregating around the two or three beach and other houses, staring in the windows and doing occasional unspecified damage. Much of the marshland here is occupied by English Nature for conservation purposes and they are ambivalent about the presence of the ponies They welcome grazing, but are unhappy at possible disturbance in the nesting season and when birds are migrating.

Leading the campaign against the maritime herd is the Beaulieu Estate. They deny the existence of common rights east of the Park Shore groyne and maintain that In swimming around the obstacle the animals are acting mischievously within the terms of the Verderers' byelaws. They have accordingly asked the Court to order the removal of all the "trespassing" stock. In effect this means that the animals would have to be permanently banned from the Forest since, if moved to another part, they would simply return to Beaulieu. The commoners for their part deny that the swimming constitutes mischievous behaviour and say that it is in fact perfectly natural in horses. They claim that, even leaving aside the question of grazing rights, the Beaulieu Estate has an obligation to fence against stock within the perambulation, just like any other property owner. The estate replies that the maintenance of any fence within the sea is extremely difficult and that however much it is extended or redesigned, there are no guarantees that it will be effective. They are reluctant to adopt the alternatives of fencing along the shore coast) or enclosing the dwellings which are alleged to be under siege by the ponies. The Verderers will now be asked **to** enforce their byelaw and evidence from both sides will undoubtedly be for.

### **Mole crickets**

Many years ago, when I first moved to my present village, I occupied a small and rather wet farm on the edge of the Forest. Ancient locals immediately told me that it was (or had been) a great place for mole crickets During my ten years there, I saw no sign of this enigmatic insect— a creature which is now the subject of a nationwide hunt to discover whether or not it has become extinct in England. In the Forest, the Forestry Commission is involved in the search, but the co-ordinator is David Bird. 1, New Buildings, Spetisbury, Dorset, who is seeking records of past or present sightings. So far a blank seems to have been drawn in this area. although reports from Hamptworth are being investigated

According to the "wanted" poster, the mole cricket is two inches long and dark brown in colour. It has an armour plated head and spade-like front legs. It spends most of its life underground, but evidently possesses a romantic streak. On hot thundery nights in May and June it sits outside its

burrow singing. If the cricket does survive, a captive breeding programme will be established to re-introduce the species.

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