

New Forest Notes – June 1991

Forest Memorials.

This spring will see the opening of two memorials on the open forest. They are to be opened rather than unveiled because both will be of practical value to those who live and work in the Forest. The first comprises a new passage running north from Aldridge Hill Inclosure at Brockenhurst in memory of the late Derry Seaton of the New Forest Association. The second, about a mile away in the Hursthill Driftway, comprises a pound for managing the commoners' animals and has been built in memory of agister Terry Jones.

The utility of both makes them the best sort of memorial and I am sure that they would have received the approval of those whose names they will bear. However, memorials in general are not without their problems, both in the New Forest and elsewhere. I was once told by a National Trust land agent responsible for a fine stretch of coastline, that one of the headaches of his job was to resist the requests of the bereaved to erect seats and stones or plant trees as memorials. Although individually inoffensive, such proposals could collectively have converted his piece of coast into the replica of an urban park. In the Forest too, the fashion for commemorative and memorial structures and planting has grown over the last few years. Every significant event must have its tree or piece of street furniture. Until the latter part of this century there was little problem. Rufus Stone, two hunting accident memorials (Carter's Stone at Culverley and Admiral Murray's Passage at Withybed) were the most notable monuments, but then a rash of coronation trees started the rot. Natural agencies have thinned these here and there with the Forest ponies taking care of the 1953 Fritham tree and the 1987 storm felling the 1911 oak at Bolderwood. It is not the trees themselves which present a problem, but the string of attendant plaques, stones and seats. I feel it is particularly sad that the Mogshade memorial should have been so spoiled by ornamental planting and tidying when the unadorned cross was so much more moving a reminder.

Perhaps there is a solution to this growing problem in the Forestry Commission setting aside a small portion of an Inclosure in which oak trees could be planted to commemorate royal occasions, deaths, victories and important visits, but without commemorative plaques. The bereaved could be given an attractively mounted plan showing the tree or trees planted on their behalf and they would have the satisfaction of knowing that, under the Minister's Mandate, their memorial would stand for at least two hundred years and would be entirely in keeping with the character of the Forest. In fact, I understand the Commission already has in mind one small area of memorial planting to replace gale damage.

Those dignitaries who harbour a secret ambition of having a bit of the Forest named after them as a memorial (or worse still while they are still alive), would do well to remember that the men who served

the Forest best over the last two centuries needed no such recognition. We have no place names recalling Briscoe Eyre, Esdaile, Lord Henry Scott, or Sir Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre. The Forest itself is their memorial.

A31 Road

The A31 road from Cadnam to Ringwood must certainly rank as one of the nastiest features of the New Forest, its noise penetrates several miles into quiet woodland and heath and in its exposed upper stretches it is a considerable eyesore. Now there is growing evidence that its pollution is having a damaging effect on the Forest's sensitive vegetation. The recent public meeting of the National Trust's local committee was given a most interesting talk by the Trust's ecologist, Katherine Hearne, in which she described research into the effects of pollution from the road. In summary, the heather is in retreat under a rain of fumes, while the purple moor grass is encouraged. With traffic predicted to grow massively and the Department of Transport's plans to increase the capacity of the road and to force on an unwilling Forest a major junction scheme at Stoney Cross, the prospects for the future seem bleak.

The past few weeks have provided one or two more immediate problems on the A31. Firstly, tower lighting of a very permanent appearance has sprouted between Cadnam and the foot of Malwood Hill. When challenged on this, the County Council as agents for the Department of Transport have said that it is temporary and for the duration of the roadworks only. The Forest authorities must keep them to their word. Secondly, at Picket Post the Verderers agreed to grant land for the new junction scheme on condition that no high level lighting would be provided because this is one of the highest and most visible parts of the Forest. Such lighting would be seen from miles around. On a recent visit to the works, members of the Court were not at all pleased to find that, despite the condition, provision for tower lighting appeared in the specification for the junction. Strong protests have been made.

Two small crumbs of comfort can be salvaged from recent developments on the road. One is that, on the Verderers' insistence, the underpasses are to be lined with brick rather than the white slab concrete which disfigures these structures elsewhere on the A31, the A35 and the A337 within the Forest. The two new underpasses at Picket Post will be treated in this way. The second piece of good news relates to the blocked animal underpass at Picket Post which was closed with dubious legality and to the fury of local riders so that the contractors should not have the inconvenience of having to keep the works and the road itself secure against Forest ponies and cattle. Estimates at the beginning of May suggested that the underpass should be reopened about now. Perhaps it is time for the equestrian organizations to seek the registration of the underpasses as brideways so that they cannot in future be shut without formal legal processes. The bridges over the railway already enjoy such protection.

The Cut Walk and the Old Roman Bridge

A road, if it can be called such, of an altogether gentler character is that which runs from Lyndhurst Hill at Emery Down to Warwickslade and which is shown on some early Ordnance Survey maps as "The Cut Walk". Until recently it was much overgrown, but it is one of those trackways which has now been cleared in part by the Forestry Commission, its construction and flanking earthworks make it unique among Forest paths and perhaps gave rise to the story of a Roman origin. In fact it seems probable that this is an elaborate piece of landscape gardening carried out by the Duke of Bolton in the mid-eighteenth century,

I am indebted to David Stagg's historical research for the information that in 1724 the Duke sent a memorial to the Treasury that it would be for the advantage and beauty of the Forest "to make a riding between Burleigh and Lyndhurst. He is of the opinion that it will be of so great use that their Lordships will be importuned to cause other ridings to be made through the great thickets of the New Forest." If the cut walk is in fact the result of this memorial, it seems that the present day Ornamental Drive had an early rival. The line of the Duke's riding west of Warwickslade is uncertain. Perhaps it was never completed or it may have followed the line of the existing road to Burlev Lodge.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this abandoned road is the fine brick arch over Highland Water near Holidays Hill. It is known, without any historical justification, as the Roman Bridge. To the best of my knowledge, no documentary evidence as to its origin has come to light, but for what it is worth, the story told the late Commander E. C. Wrey may be of interest. He said that the bridge was built in the early years of this century by Deputy Surveyor Lascelles using materials salvaged from the old lodge site at Bolderwood. Since it is known that the famous Deputy Surveyor collected bricks at about the same time and probably from the same source for the construction of the Verderers' Court and the rooms above, the story has the ring of truth about it. I would welcome any more precise information.

Those visiting the bridge will see large areas of abandoned gravel hardstanding which is all that remains of the closed-down Holidays Hill camp. It is pleasant to record that the Forestry Commission is about to start work on its removal and the restoration of the area.

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