

# NEW FOREST NOTES MARCH 2017

## Maldwin Drummond

The death two weeks ago of Maldwin Drummond marks the end of an era in New Forest history. He was the last surviving member of Sir Oliver Crosthwaite Eyre's team that guided through Parliament the New Forest Act of 1964. The Act was crucial to the survival of the New Forest and provided for, amongst other things, the fencing of the A 35 road from Ashurst to Hinton. I can remember Maldwin addressing a very hostile meeting in Lyndhurst on the subject of the Bill and his mixture of good humour and common sense completely turned round the attitude of his audience. He was then quite a young man and, I believe, had been the youngest person ever to have been elected to the modern Verderers' Court.

Maldwin Drummond came from one of the great landowning families of the Forest which, before the Second World War, had provided the entire membership of the Court. After 1949 the exclusive property qualification for election was done away with and it might have been expected that the landowners would no longer be represented among the elected Verderers. Maldwin broke that expectation because he was an extremely popular figure in the Forest. He regularly topped the poll in subsequent elections for nearly thirty years.

I always found it surprising that he chose to relinquish his influential position as Senior Elected Verderer (effectively the vice-chairman of the Court), to take on the chairmanship of the New Forest Committee in 1990. That body was a toothless non-entity where, perhaps, his abilities were wasted. In 1999, however, he was back with the Court, this time as Official Verderer, an office in which he served for three years. By that time many of the great challenges which had faced the Court were behind the Verderers and Maldwin was also involved with much other public service work. Indeed, if he had a fault it was to spread his talents too thinly through his willingness to take on almost unlimited work for the community.

Of those Verderers now serving, only Dionis Macnair and I are survivors from Maldwin's time. I shall remember him as the most good natured of my colleagues, if not always the firmest when unpalatable decisions had to be taken for the good of the Forest. In meetings he had the endearing habit of making little drawings on the back of minutes, agenda papers etc, so that it seemed his pen was never inactive. He was also full of little stories. One of his trademarks was to carry a bag with his initials "MD" in large letters on the side. He recounted how, on a visit to Australia, he had been carrying this bag along a beach when he encountered someone he had never seen before. The stranger, observing the inscribed bag, walked up to him and said "Maldwin Drummond I presume." – fame almost equal to that of Dr. Livingstone.

### **No hope for Mark Ash Wood**

Last winter the ponies began to kill large numbers of ancient beech trees from Highland Water, through Mark Ash and into Oakley and Beech Bed Inclosures, by tearing off and consuming their bark. Efforts were made to identify the offenders and to seek their removal from the Forest, with suitable compensation being paid to the owners. It was hoped that this would have seen the end of such attacks, but this year they have re-emerged and look like being as bad a problem as ever. It is pitiful to see the great pollarded beeches (generally assumed to date from before 1698) being wrecked in this way, along with numerous others dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The wood was already in severe decline due to an almost total absence of natural regeneration over many decades and it seemed that only by enclosure to protect the remaining trees and to foster new growth could it be saved. The Forestry Commission agreed to look into this idea, but in February the Deputy Surveyor told the Verderers' Court that the work could not be afforded because a minor road grid would be required. That, to my mind, represents a complete dereliction of duty by the Forestry Commission. The New Forest Act of 1877 requires that "the ancient ornamental woods and trees in the Forest shall be preserved" – a clear instruction to management - while the 1949 Act gives to the Commission the necessary power of enclosure to achieve this. It is a power that needs to be used sparingly, but Mark Ash is in desperate need of its exercise. The wood is to be sacrificed because the government will not spend a few thousand pounds on a grid while many hundreds of thousands of pounds annually are being poured into stream filling projects. All that is being done is to send a volunteer out weekly to record the rate at which the great beeches are being killed. The Verderers are continuing to provide financial support for the removal of those ponies doing the damage, but it is clear that this will prove too long a process to give the wood a chance of survival. While many trees are almost totally ring-barked, there are innumerable other examples where small patches of bark are being pulled off near the roots, giving warning that they are the next on the list for destruction.

The deficiencies of management are not only apparent in the failure to tackle this problem, but the appalling treatment of fallen trees throughout Mark Ash is unpardonable. Of course some dead wood is required for beetles and other wildlife. Nobody denies that, but the whole of this wood is now littered with fallen trees so that it looks dreadful. On the main path to Oakley heavy machinery has roughly pushed up tangled heaps of broken branches and trunks so that this once beautiful area has degenerated into a decaying rubbish heap through the Commission's failure to manage it properly. Anyone who wants to see this need only go to the little car park in the middle of Mark Ash and walk westwards for 300 metres to know exactly what is happening.

### **Animal accidents**

I suppose that every few years I write something about animal accidents and the failure to secure any significant reduction in numbers. I am always told that actually things are really rather good in that because the number of animals grazing the Forest has more than doubled and the volume of traffic has greatly increased, the static figures in fact represent a reduction in the killing rate. In bare statistical terms that is undoubtedly true, but it is cold comfort. The dreadful fact remains

that year after year about one hundred ponies, cattle and other animals are killed or injured on Forest roads. Many are left to die in agony by callous motorists who do not report collisions. The Verderers offer a substantial reward to anyone who gives information leading to the successful prosecution of such people.

To newcomers to the Forest the answer to this problem seems simple. Just fence the worst killing roads (Dibden to Portmore and Cadnam to Godshill) removing the speed limits to which they are at present subjected. At the same time reduce the speed limit over the remainder of the Forest to 30mph or below, thus making them even less attractive to speeding commuters, while the newly fenced roads become more attractive. After all, why impose 30 mph limits in villages and leave the Forest livestock at the mercy of drivers going at 40mph or more ? What this sensible assessment of the problem ignores is that to allow more fencing a new Act of Parliament would be required and there is absolutely no prospect of such an Act being secured. Not until there is the most terrible accident resulting in multiple human loss of life will such a solution even appear on the agenda.

One of my colleagues on the Verderers' Court did recently come up with a novel, if highly controversial, suggestion for reducing the terrible toll of accidents. Since fast commuter routes are at the heart of the problem, why not deal with the threat at source and close (i.e., block at a suitable point) some of the dangerous roads ? Traffic would at the same time be diverted out of the Forest and onto existing fenced routes. A suggested example is the B 3078 and B 3079 roads linking Cadnam with Godshill and Downton. Clearly the implications of such closures would need careful planning and the proposal would undoubtedly be unpopular with motorists, but no solution to the present intolerable carnage should be dismissed out of hand. The sky does not fall in when, every few years, the B 3078 is closed by flooding at Fordingbridge.

### **Holly pollarding**

This is the time of year when the Forestry Commission pollards (cuts the top off) holly trees in order to provide extra feed for the ponies. In theory this does not damage the trees and can in fact help to rejuvenate them in some cases. As I have written before, the Forest's hollies are in a rather desperate condition because of the damage to their bark by ponies and it is quite rare to come across trees that are completely unaffected. Some areas are much worse than others. For example, above Soarley Bottom near Old House, the once thriving holly groves are now bare skeletons as more than three quarters have been killed. Although barking is the root of the problem here, a fire some years ago here may also have contributed to the deaths.

Pollarding usually takes place in small groups involving only a couple of dozen trees, but at Bolderwood Hollies there has recently been an experiment involving a much larger area (I estimate about two acres), with quite remarkable results. A certain amount of bark has always been eaten from felled holly trees, but this is different from anything I have seen before. Not only has all the green stuff been taken, but the stems and branches of the cut material have been stripped bare of bark leaving the whole area like an enormous bone yard of brilliant white sticks and logs. The ponies

are rooted to the area, but so also are the deer, with the latter not even bothering to move off when I stopped to take photographs. It occurred to me that this might be an attempt to attract damage away from the nearby beech woods, but I am told that this is not the case. The Commission's efforts are clearly greatly appreciated by all, but whether this will in fact prove a successful distraction, preventing other damage, I am uncertain. It could equally well be an education in the practice of bark eating recruiting new vandals to join the existing team.

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