

NEW FOREST NOTES MARCH 2018

Mr Bartlett's Toad

The New Forest of today seems to breed less exotic and outspoken characters than it once did. We are so constrained by political correctness in word and deed that it is hardly possible to express one's true feelings on many subjects to anybody but the closest of friends. The late Maldwin Drummond had a favourite story about the interaction between the rather irascible commoner and trade union activist George Blomfield and his Conservative MP the (then) Colonel Crosthwaite Eyre. That story, I am afraid, could not now be repeated, so newcomers to the Forest must remain in ignorance while members of the older generation, who remember it well, chuckle quietly to themselves.

Things were very different in the 19th century, with all sorts of remarkable people doing and saying strange things. One of these characters was the Revd. John Pemberton-Bartlett who, like many of his profession pursued a variety of pseudo-scientific interests, some of which were focussed on the Forest. My interest in Mr. Bartlett arises from the fact that he seems to have been the first person to appreciate the immense opportunities for archaeological discovery presented by the making of the great timber plantations in the years after 1851. I have not been able to find out much about him, but he appears to have come from a living in the parish of Kingston in Kent in about 1850 to take up the duties of curate at Fordingbridge. Several years later he moved to the opposite corner of the Forest, to the church at Exbury, where he remained for a great many years.

In an article in the *Archaeological Journal* for 1873, Bartlett tells how, when rambling in the New Forest on a beautiful spring day he "happened to light on a piece of coarse-looking pottery that had been unearthed by a rabbit in making its subterranean home." He took it with him and a little further on encountered labourers engaged in digging ditches to prepare the ground for the new trees. He describes them in language which, while complimentary, would hardly be acceptable today. They were "tall, long-backed, long-limbed West-Saxon-looking peasants, but withal civil and intelligent". Anyhow, they were able to direct the reverend gentleman to other sources of such pottery. This set Mr. Bartlett off on a programme of investigation (today we would call it wrecking) of a variety of ancient sites across the north of the Forest, including Bronze Age burial mounds and Roman remains. Perhaps fortunately, his move to Exbury took him away from the chief area of temptation, although he did still manage an attack on some prehistoric burials at nearby Langley.

Before turning his attention to antiquities in the Forest, Bartlett had followed similar interests in his Kent parish, but he was also extremely interested in natural history. There his work included recording invasions of butterflies from the continent, and sightings of rare birds. He noted a great northern diver in the New Forest near Fordingbridge in January 1851. But it was for his toad experiments that he particularly came to the public's notice. In 1861 he wrote to *The Zoologist* from Exbury Parsonage with details of a bizarre discovery (presumably in Kent) in which he found a live toad completely sealed within a cavity in a twenty-five year old fir tree which he had felled. I believe

such stories are not uncommon and I have myself found a live toad in a little hollow beneath a paving slab, from which there was no sign of an escape route. Mr. Bartlett was not prepared to leave matters there. He set up an experiment with a toad, imprisoning it in closely-sealed flower pots, cemented together and with the holes also sealed with cement, buried at a depth of three feet. After three months he dug up his victim and found it alive and very little reduced in weight. The toad was then returned to its cell for a further three months and again resurrected and noted to have suffered little more weight loss. Then (for the toad) disaster struck, in that the cement was not properly set at a third burial and the tomb collapsed, so that on excavation after a final three months the "poor toad was dead as well as buried!" Today I imagine his parsonage would have been picketed by animal rights activists and he might even have received a visit from an RSPCA inspector. Rather surprisingly, Mr. Bartlett appears to have been the author of a book or pamphlet, published in Southampton, and called "Simple Questions with Easy Answers on Kindness to Animals". I have not seen a copy.

I have for some time been trying to find a photograph of Mr. Bartlett. His time in Fordingbridge was probably too early in the life of photography, but there must surely be photos dating from his Exbury years. I should be very grateful for assistance in locating one.

Ridge and furrow

After the second world war the Forestry Commission obtained statutory powers to fence in up to five thousand acres of the Forest's common land and to plant timber trees on it. The power was subject to the approval of the Verderers, so that the new plantations became known as "Verderers' Inclosures". The Court reluctantly agreed to the planting of two thousand acres only. The land was to be held on lease for 125 years during which time rent would be payable to the Verderers, preventing them from slipping into bankruptcy. The Verderers' Inclosures were dotted about across the Forest and some provided landscape benefits as in the case of Dibden and Fawley Inclosures which screened (and still do) ugly development along the Forest boundary. Moreover, some of these new woods have become favourite sheltered walking places for neighbouring residents. In other places the plantations helped to reduce road accidents with the commoners' animals, in the days before fencing of the main roads was permitted. Examples are Markway (of which little now remains) and Dunces Arch. Finally such plantations as Dur Hill and Turf Hill were said to help in preventing animals straying outside the Forest prior to the installation of cattle grids and gates. There is not much evidence that they achieved anything in this direction.

An initial step in preparing the land for planting was to turn over the surface profile into a giant replica of corrugated iron, by the use of a very large plough. This assisted with the establishment of the newly planted trees. The fencing of the woods then went ahead, together with the planting of some grass strips around the outside as a sop to the commoners. Within a few years the trees were well established. Then, in the years between 1970 and 2000, as the first rotation of trees was approaching maturity, fashions in forestry changed and the Commission decided to abandon these plantations, steadily clearing the timber when it could be sold. The process was speeded-up by the great storm of January 1990 which levelled large areas of conifer throughout the Forest.

The abandonment of the Verderers' Inclosures should have been largely beneficial to the Forest so long as key amenity areas and screening were preserved, but everyone had forgotten the deep ploughing which, even after the clearance of the trees, left huge areas inaccessible to walkers and more particularly to riders. It might be said that riders could quite easily avoid such areas, but that is not the case for agisters and commoners rounding up stock. They must follow wherever their quarry goes and the ridge and furrow made such work extremely dangerous. The Forestry Commission was at first very resistant to carrying out much restoration. It claimed all sorts of "conservation" objections to such work, but it was in fact motivated by financial considerations. Even so, a few small experimental areas were dealt with satisfactorily. Only when the Forest became flooded with Higher Level Stewardship money (of which the Commission receives a large share) did they join enthusiastically in the campaign for levelling.

A site meeting held last month produced a rare show of unanimity over plans for dealing with these derelict areas. Disfiguring stumps are to be broken up and the furrows filled using earth moving machinery. Areas at Turf Hill and Dur Hill will be among the first to be tackled. Initially the appearance will probably be unpleasant, but earlier experiments have shown that heather quickly re-establishes itself and the levelling should be invisible within a couple of years.

"The Journal of Louisa Lushington 1821-1822"

In February the Chawton House Library (in Jane Austen's home village) published the journal of one of Lyndhurst's prominent 19th century residents – Lady Louisa Burrard. The journal covers two years prior to her marriage when she was Louisa Lushington. Her father, Sir Henry Lushington, had secured the British government position of Consul General at Naples following the failure of a bank in which the family was deeply involved. He took his large family with him, including Louisa his second daughter. In 1821 the population of Naples rose in revolt against the king and an Austrian army invaded in support of the monarchy. The Lushington family and other British subjects were evacuated by the warship *HMS Active* and Louisa records their perilous journey back to England, including erroneous reports that *Active* had been wrecked with the loss of all on board. In Gibraltar they were stuck for three weeks waiting for an east wind.

Once back in England the family was quickly immersed in the social life of London and the journal records the extraordinary events surrounding the coronation of George IV and the scandals relating to Queen Caroline. They found time for a holiday in the Isle of Wight. Thereafter there is a hair-raising account of the return to Naples over land. It was a journey that involved constant competition for post horses, horse fights, broken-down carriages on precipitous mountain passes, the threat of bandits and innumerable disagreeable French inns, occasionally with filthy blankets and fleas. Finally, once back in Naples, there is an eye-witness account of the 1822 eruption of Vesuvius, an event painted by Louisa's elder sister Maria.

I have always thought of Lady Burrard as a rather dour Victorian lady (there are photographs of her in the Christopher Tower Library in Lyndhurst), but as a young woman she was clearly a

remarkable person prepared for any adventure and at the same time an accomplished artist. The book ends with a rather sad extract from a surviving fragment of Louisa's 1879 diary, written when she had been a widow for nine years and was living at Holmfield in Lyndhurst High Street.

The editor of the journal, Linda Slothouber, has done an excellent job in setting Louisa's writing in the context of its time and in describing the family's later connections with Lyndhurst.

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