

NEW FOREST NOTES NOVEMBER 2003

American travels of a Forest picture

On a summer's day in about 1860, a gentleman sat in the corner of a field below Landford Church sketching the bridge over the river Blackwater together with the adjoining farmhouse. The gentleman was Admiral Sir Charles Burrard. After serving on HMS Victory and later in command of his own ships, Sir Charles retired to Lyndhurst where he raised a large family of daughters, effectively ensuring the extinction of his title. He also changed his hobby from amateur marine artist to painter of landscapes. He toured southern Britain in pursuit of this interest, but most of his work was done in and around the New Forest. There are at least four collections of his paintings – three in this country and one in New Zealand, but only a few other pictures are known in private hands (although there must be many more in existence). My interest in the artist is that he was my great great grandfather.

Last month I received an email from a man in Scarborough who had come up with a painting by Sir Charles. It turned out to be the Landford watercolour. It seems that some search engine had turned up the name of Burrard and my address on a Sussex website where I had sought information on the location of some Uckfield paintings. Anyhow, my Scarborough correspondent has a brother in Toronto who had acquired the goods of someone "in financial difficulties". Among them was a framed and glazed watercolour. It appears that "the guy had picked it up in Chicago". The Canadian brother brought the painting to England and it was valued by the Antiques Roadshow, fortunately at a price which enabled me, with the co-operation of the brothers, to ensure its return to the Forest and that its ultimate destination should be the New Forest Museum, only yards from the artist's home. It arrived very promptly by post with, remarkably, the glass still intact.

The picture is of a thatched and part timbered house with an arched red brick bridge in the foreground. On the back are three notes in ink, written on a brown paper seal of the frame. One states that the painting is by Sir Charles Burrard and that it is of Landford Bridge. The second says "painted approx 1860" and the third: "Given to me (A.R.M.) by Miss Alice Nelson, a grand daughter of Sir Charles Burrard". Another label inside the frame refers to "Philip's Bridge, Landford." I can just remember, as a very small child, being taken to visit Alice Nelson in her home in Avenue Road, Brockenhurst. I believe that she died in her hundredth year, probably in the 1950s. Her mother Emily was indeed a daughter of Sir Charles's and was married to Rear Admiral the Hon. Maurice Horatio Nelson in 1863. At the time the painting was done, the Nelson family owned much of Landford and the connection perhaps accounts for the location of the picture which is somewhat outside Sir Charles's usual Forest territory.

The scene today is very different from that in the 1860s. The A 36 screams across a concrete bridge which replaced the original picturesque structure in 1953, but the house (Bridge Farm) remains, its thatched roof replaced with slate and its western chimney gone.

After travelling half way across the world and back again, the picture is now within five miles of its starting point on that day over one hundred and forty years ago. There remains one mystery: who was A.R.M. ? The probability is that he/she was a Brockenhurst person, but whether they moved to the USA or if the picture was simply sold after a death and then exported, remains unknown. Alice's gift (evidently a significant one of a family heirloom) was probably made at about the time of the Second World War and there may still be a Brockenhurst resident who recognises the initials. If so, I should be very interested to hear.

The "Progress Project"

In mid-October (and in place of the Official Verderer), I attended a very pleasant dinner at Rhinefield House, arranged by the Forestry Commission. The occasion was the launch of something called the Progress Project – a collaboration with the managers of Fontainebleau Forest south east of Paris over techniques for managing recreation in nature reserves. The dinner was numerously attended by French officials responsible for that Forest and by representatives of a Dutch organization specializing in studying such matters. There were also a great many familiar faces from local management, not always immediately recognisable freed from their uniforms and wellington boots. Altogether the dinner seemed to be a triumph of organization by the Commission – not least in the provision of interpreters provided by raiding stores of hidden talent within the Queen's House staff. This allowed me (a linguistic failure) to conduct a fairly successful argument with a Dutchman about the merits of waymarked trails, a halting conversation with a Frenchman amount the role of amenity societies and a more fluent discussion with the (British) chief executive of the Association of National Parks on the consequences of what may be done to the New Forest. I think it likely that the Commission's local staff may become the victims of their own success in that our continental friends were evidently enjoying themselves so much that I am sure they will want to come back. Meanwhile, just beyond the floodlights of the hotel car park a buck was groaning mournfully and, I hope, not prophetically.

As to the project itself, I have rather more reservations. From the single sheet of explanatory details which accompanied the invitation, it appears that Progress is an attempt to square a circle or, in other words, to provide more tourism and recreation in vulnerable areas. In the words of the leaflet, it aims to: "protect and enhance their internationally important wildlife while meeting the needs of the public for access and recreation". That sounds to me like promising to protect the sheep while meeting the wolf's demand for mutton. However, the Commission's recreation manager assures me that all will become clear once the paper stream starts to flow, so I will reserve judgement.

Brian Ingrem

It is likely that everything which can be said about Brian Ingrem's retirement as head agister has already been said. The achievements of his 44 years service were recorded with gratitude by the Official Verderer at the October Court. It is certainly going to be a different Court without him and it is remarkable to reflect that when I joined the Verderers thirty years ago, Brian was already well into his second decade of service. On the other hand, I am

inclined to think that agisters, like old soldiers, never die. Whenever I attend a pony drift, there is Raymond Bennett on his horse (he says riding is no problem – it is just getting about on legs which presents difficulties !), while former head agister Raymond Stickland is often to be found supervising on foot. No doubt Brian will prove just as durable and persistent in the years to come. Someone, after all, is going to have to keep an eye on the youngsters.

The drought

At the time of writing this (22nd October), the first rain has just fallen on a Forest which looks as burnt as in the middle of an August heatwave. For the first time I can remember, there has been no autumn grass growth at all and that is serious. This annual flush of late grass is relied upon to set up the Forest animals and farm livestock generally for the winter. It usually comes in September and, if the season is mild, continues well into November. This year there may well be nothing. Fortunately the Forest livestock is entering the winter in better condition than for many years past, but we shall have to wait to discover the long term effects of the grass shortage. For the time being the ponies are consuming vast quantities of acorns (it is a good mast year) and this will inevitably take its toll. By the October Court no deaths from acorn poisoning had so far been reported to the agisters.

Perhaps statistics will show that the drought is not a record and certainly there have been brief intervals of rain (seldom more than half a day) during the late summer, but in its overall effect it may prove exceptional. Heywood Sumner recorded the consequences of drought on three New Forest ponds in 1911, 1921 and 1929 and in each case the drought had effectively broken by the end of September. In those years Janesmoor Pond never failed, but the other two (Ocknell and Longcross) more or less dried out at times. Even the great summer drought of 1976 which so many people remember, was actually broken by torrential rain as early as 29th August, but in the weeks immediately prior to that Janesmoor had been completely dry. In the 2003 drought water remained in both Longcross and Janesmoor (17th October), but this is presumably more to do with the lower temperatures and reduced evaporation at this time of year than to amounts of rainfall. Ocknell was so much damaged by wartime works that comparisons are meaningless.

Planning double standards

Neither the Forestry Commission, nor the Verderers will allow mobile phone masts on Forest land, so the phone companies have been forced to look for alternatives. Landowners welcome their money and the companies appear to have found a soft touch in the New Forest planners. Masts have been springing up all over the place on private land adjoining the Forest and apparently irrespective of their damage to the Crown lands. Perhaps the most obvious case is the huge mast adjoining the A 337 north of Lyndhurst, just inches from the Forest. I know that planners in general have difficulties with mast control because of government pressure, but it sometimes seems that New Forest District meekly rolls over and gives in to the companies.

There appears to be a strange set of double standards where aerials are concerned. Last year I had the idea of installing an 18" satellite television aerial on my house in a

conservation area. I asked the planning office about it and a helpful officer explained the rules. Without planning permission I could not put it on a chimney where it might possibly be seen by someone with good eyesight on an adjoining field path: I could not put it on a farm building where no-one at all could see it; I could not put it on a pole in the garden where it would be equally invisible. He could not say what my chances were of getting permission at all. I would have to invest my £112 planning fee to find out. In the end my installer found an obscure recess which was both legal without permission and actually allowed the aerial to work. There was much muttering from the top of the ladder about foolish people who talk to the planners rather than getting on with the job ! All this is in marked contrast to the huge gleaming metal phone mast which has just appeared in the centre of the next conservation area to the south (Fritham), dominating the central crossroads of the village and visible to hundreds of people every day. Whether it is permitted development or has planning permission I do not know, but it certainly demonstrates a remarkable inconsistency in planning standards.

Anthony Pasmore