

NEW FOREST NOTES JUNE 2023

Pony feeding restrictions repeated – after sixty years

Sixty years ago, the Verderers and Hampshire County Council had a bright idea for reducing the number of animals killed and injured on New Forest roads. They decided that the public should be banned from feeding ponies adjacent to several important roads through the Forest because the expectation of such gifts induced the animals to hang about the verges, causing a danger to themselves and to motorists. Only the busy main roads were to be affected by the rules and of course none of these was fenced at the time. Both authorities talked about the scheme for a couple of years before deciding on a byelaw or byelaws to prevent such thoughtless and dangerous behaviour by visitors, but no decision was made until February 1958. There was some discussion as to whether the byelaw should be made by the Verderers or the council – or perhaps by both. It was eventually decided that the council version would be preferable because that allowed for the massive fine of £5 as opposed to the Verderers' meagre £2. With a council byelaw too, the police would be responsible for prosecutions rather than the Verderers with their restricted resources.

The byelaw was duly prepared and confirmed, while eight years later it was extended to nearly all roads in the Forest. A very large number of notices announcing the restrictions appeared throughout the Forest, but so far as I know, nobody was ever fined and perhaps very few were even challenged. Pony feeding continued unabated.

In September 1968 the Verderers had another bright idea. The anti-feeding byelaw should be extended to cover "petting" – a rather ill-defined concept. This scheme did not progress, probably because someone had by this time invented human rights and perhaps even animal rights. By this date also the fine for feeding had been increased to £20 and the police had been urged to take all possible steps against offenders. There is no evidence that the police took any notice.

Over the next three and a half decades the crumbling notice boards decayed still further and nobody had ever been prosecuted, so that in 2004 most of them were completely illegible and there was even a good deal of uncertainty as to whether the byelaw was the responsibility of the county council or New Forest District. Anyhow, most of the notices were quietly removed and I believe the byelaw was repealed at the same time.

Another twenty years passed and the local authorities and the Verderers had a bright idea. The feeding of ponies, donkeys etc by the public should be banned. Everyone (ignoring historical precedent), agreed that this was an excellent idea as it would discourage the animals from hanging about the roads and car parks, constituting a danger to themselves and to motorists. Moreover, there had been a few rather nasty incidents in which visitors had been hurt by over-enthusiastic demands for feed by addicted ponies. History has come full circle, but this time the vehicle for enforcement is the public space protection order, newly made by the New Forest District Council. I think it is rather improbable that any more people will be fined under this regulation than under the one of 1958, but the protection order does include the option of on-the-spot fines, so that opens up a new avenue of

enforcement. Unfortunately, the path to such enforcement is not smooth. There are rumours of disquiet amongst Forestry England staff at the prospect of having to challenge offenders who are ready to unleash a torrent of abuse (or worse) at “interfering busy-bodies out to spoil our fun”. I have myself warned the occasional visitor of the dangers of allowing a small child to play around the ponies, while clutching food. The results of such warnings can be unpleasant. A few visitors are grateful, most are sullen but understanding and some are extremely unpleasant. Forestry officers, who will not enforce their own byelaws are, not unexpectedly, reluctant to take up the task for someone else’s.

Forestry England officers will not be alone in the enforcement business. Local authority staff and even agisters will be expected to take a share of the burden. A training programme is about to start.

At the Verderers’ Court last month there was a succinct and well worded presentment on the subject from Mr. Adam Coutts, a Bramshaw farmer. He claimed that it is irresponsible of the Verderers to expect their agisters to become involved in the (inevitable) confrontations which will occur. The agisters, he said, are livestock managers and not there to police the activities of visitors. Those who encourage visitors and promote the Forest as a tourist attraction (the National Park Authority and Forestry England) should be responsible for ensuring the proper behaviour of their customers.

I think there is a good deal of sympathy in the Forest for Mr. Coutts’s views, but it will be for the Verderers, after due consultation with their staff, to instruct the agisters as to what they are to do. I am told that the future of the protection order depends upon all the promoting agencies giving it continued support and therein lies an important dilemma for at least some branches of management as they negotiate with reluctant employees.

A forgotten concrete experiment

Those living in Sway and the surrounding areas of the Forest’s margins live, almost literally, in the shadow of Peterson’s great experiment in the use of unreinforced concrete. His huge tower or folly, built in the 1880s, dominates the landscape for miles around, while lesser buildings and works of the same material are only visible from the roads immediately around. The tower is rightly regarded as an important local history landmark, but it is something of an exception in the protection of the Forest’s interesting buildings of the past. Not since Roman times has the area been particularly noted for industrial activity and even such significant operations as the Redlynch iron manufactories have left little physical evidence, but industrial remains can still be important.

This lack of protection of industrial buildings, or at least interest in what remains of them, is demonstrated in the north east corner of the Forest near Nomansland. Here, at about the same time as Peterson was experimenting at Sway, one of our great estates – Hamptworth - was, inexplicably, using the same material on a large, if less visible, scale. The works, in support of agriculture and forestry, were centred on Lyburn, about a mile west of Nomansland.

Prior to the inclosure of Downton Common, the Forest's heaths stretched unbroken from the Avon Valley far into southern Wiltshire towards Whiteparish. Then, in 1822, several thousand acres of common land were lost under an inclosure award of that date. Hamptworth Estate in due course acquired most of this land, turning it into a vast private forestry project. Most of it comprised quick-growing conifers.



By the latter part of the 19th century, this immense area of timber was nearing maturity and it seems that the estate's owner decided to instal facilities for processing it in-house, rather than simply selling the rough produce. Small streams rising near the Bramshaw Telegraph escarpment were channelled into a newly-formed mill pond at Lyburn. The pond was surrounded by mass concrete walls, while the same material was used to build a water-powered sawmill fed from the pond. Presumably at about the same time, concrete was used to form the boundaries of a number of fields in the area. The whole operation can only be regarded as a remarkably expensive experiment in the use of this material. It was the more extraordinary as Hamptworth lies immediately adjoining the then largest brick-making manufactory of the Forest at Woodfalls. Bricks were even made within the estate boundaries.

Exactly when the sawmill was built (and when it closed) is not entirely clear, but it was constructed after 1870 and was probably closed by the time of the Second World War. Little record of its use has so far come to light. It is now badly neglected, with its roof missing, the waterwheel rusting away and the mill pond walls collapsing. The interior is, as usual with such buildings, defiled by hideous graffiti. The photograph was taken last winter and shows what remains and could still be saved given sufficient will on the part of the authorities. I am told that the planners can do little

because this is not a listed building. That is particularly sad because other national parks pride themselves on the preservation of the remains of their industrial past. Of course, great country houses should receive protection, but there is also a place for the relics of our lesser but still important industrial past.

Jude James

Students of the New Forest's history will have been saddened by the recent death of Jude James. During his time in charge of the Christopher Tower Library in Lyndhurst he became known to hundreds of people, helping them with minor details of family history or major projects such as the establishment of the New Forest Archaeological Record. All received equal courtesy and valued attention. Aside from his work in the library, Jude was an expert on the villages surrounding his home in Hordle, but he also added greatly to our knowledge of the Forest through his books on the settlements surrounding Beaulieu Heath.



When I first knew him in the early 1960s, Jude was a bus driver for the Hants & Dorset company, but his love of history was already a dominant theme of his life. He, like Thomas Hardy's hero of the same first name, decided to throw up such rather mundane work in favour of a life of study and research. Such transitions may be common enough today, but half a century ago they must have needed a good deal of courage and determination.

In his early years, Jude was also much involved in archaeological fieldwork in the Forest. He instigated one of the first excavations of an abandoned field system in the Forest, working with Colin Tubbs on some enigmatic earthworks on Setley Plain. The photograph, taken in 1968, shows Jude (kneeling) working on the excavation of Roman quern stones revealed when a conifer plantation near Fordingbridge was destroyed by a storm.

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