

BLAKES WOOD

Transcription of PCHB 12

From book donated by W.R. Hood of Hill Cottage Little Baddow.

(Newspaper cutting)

“Gave Blakes Wood to National Trust

Death of Mr. W.R. Hood, of Little Baddow

Mr. Walter Richard Hood died on Tuesday at Hill Cottage, Little Baddow where he had resided since 1929. He was aged 87 and leaves a widow.

During the period he lived in Essex, Mr Hood took a great interest in Little Baddow and county affairs. He was a member of the County Council from 1935 to 1946 and a member of the Chelmsford Rural Council from 1933 to 1946, acting as chairman of the Buildings and Planning Committee.

He used all his influence in the direction of a better council house and was most anxious that all houses erected in the rural district should suit the locality from the point of elevation, amenities etc. He was a strong supporter of the National Trust and to show his interest in Little Baddow he gave Blakes Wood to the Trust. He was a deacon of the Little Baddow Congregational Church.

Funeral service will take place at the Congregational Church, Little Baddow, today, Friday, followed by cremation in London.”

Some notes on Blakes wood in past times.

It is natural to consider the name of “Blake” as affording some evidence as to the history of the wood, but it seems highly probable that the original name was “Black Wood”, one corner of it is still known as “Black Grove” in the Tithe apportionment, and the earliest documentary references I know of is in the Patent Rolls of the Record Office when “Blackwoode in Graces” is mentioned in 1547. As that time the wood was part of the manor of Graces which was then held by Sir Clement – Smith under the Crown in conjunction with the4 adjacent Manor of Little Baddow Hall.

There was a family of Blakes in the Parish, but they were resident at old Bassetts, as Norden records in 1594, though he spells the name as “Blague”. Giles Blake of Bassetts married Dorothy Tweedy, and she was presented before the Archdeacon for refusing to go the church on various occasions, as a “recusant”. Mathew Burles and Elizabeth, “servants at Blakes” were also presented, “suspected of being popish recusants in 1603; but the works “as Blakes” obviously refers to the connection with the family rather than to a house or estate. Giles Blake was also presented for neglecting the care of a grave in the Parish Church.

Is the name “Black Wood” description of its colour or character, or does there lie an older and far more remote signification? The word “Black” may be derived from a word meaning “bleak”, or even “shining”. There are old ponds in the wood commonly thought of as survivals of medieval “stews or stanks”, associated with the adjoining old site of Riffhams, but it is possible that they may be far older than the middle ages. Artificial ponds were made in pre-historic times so that the water might be visible from a height to indicate a way through difficult and dangerous country from one ‘mark’ to another. Beacons and large stones were also ‘marks’ and the shining ponds in the wood may have been the ‘mark’ between the old hilltop on Heather Hills to a site which was subsequently a British stronghold as Great Baddow. There is a Great stone outside the “Beehive” Inn which is possibly one of these marks. This is of course speculative, but it is well worthy of consideration as the whole study of the problem of these primitive tracks is in its infancy. It is outlined in Donald Maxwell’s “A Detective in Essex”.

Forest covered the whole county in Roman times, the thick trees being

interspersed with Grassy commons and often heathery spaces characteristic of the higher ground in our Parish, and known to the Saxons as 'waste'. From London to the sea Essex came under the 'Forest Laws' of William the Conqueror with their cruel restrictions and harsh penalties for any person who should interfere with the royal sport of hunting. Clearances in the forest indicated by the name 'field' (felled trees) were carried out in places by the various Lords of the manors, and it seems as though "Blakes Wood" shows indications of later afforestation rather than those of ancient forests like Epping, or even the remains in Danbury Park, where there are immemorial trees yet standing. There can be no doubt I think, that at least part of Blakes wood was inhabited and cultivated in the middle ages. 'Strips' for cultivation have been clearly discovered near the stream in the N.E. corner. Medieval pottery, brickwork, a horseshoe have been found in the heart of the wood, the artificial raising of the earth in places indicates old sites. The banks and ditches, old paths and property boundaries suggest habitation, and are more numerous than could occur in an ancient and undisturbed forest. From Parsonage Farm the track into the wood suggests a medieval road.

During the mid nineteenth century much planting of trees was done and the wood was carefully preserved for game. The gates into it were always locked. Archdeacon Ady, the rector, was favoured with a key and he used to take his family and friends into it for a particular treat. Near Water Hall is a piece of ground named on the Tithe apportionment as 'The Nursery,' and I have been told that young trees destined to be planted in Blakes Wood were grown there. Mr. Fitzwalter Plumtre, (later Lord Fitzwalter) owned the wood, by inheritance, when I came to Little Baddow in 1915, and continued the privilege of entrance to the wood. He owned a considerable part of property in the Parish including "Graces", so the association of "Blackwoode" with old manor continued for 400 years, nearly, after our earliest record of it. Indeed, the recorded story of it is bound up with that of "Graces" with its mysteriously suggestive names of "Bloodshots", and "Bloodlegs" and its medieval "ffree Chappell" standing near the old house whereof the Lord of the Manor of Graces had the presentation to the chaplaincy, the whole place would form a background for Hewletts 'Forest Lovers'. The industry, the social villge life, the dark woodland lives of serfs have dramatised the old place. The banners of le Gras and Darcy have flashed through it with their steel-clad followers. Sir Henry Mildmay has known it and his sad little wife has wandered along its paths. It is a place of memories with its steep tracks and remote pools, its strange echoes and profound silences t6hat invade the receptive soul.

The felling of great quantities of timber for sale following upon the disposal of the wood by Lord Fitzwalter despoiled the wood temporarily of much of its solemnity and beauty, but to those who look forward as well as backward natures promise of future splendour compensates for the passing of the great trees we used to know.

Future investigations will probably reveal much more of the historical background of the wood by discovering the rites of households in the past, their old relics, boundaries and ways leading to them and the making of this lovely romantic piece of woodland open to all who would wander there, and the prospect that one day it may become an addition to public property opens up perhaps the noblest chapter in the story of "Blakes Wood".

Jesse Berridge.....June 1937

Oaks

*I love these gnarled trunks,
Thus scarred with age, embossed and riven,
That speak of nature's harder way;
Strange that these who have so striven
As beautiful are as slender boles
That gracefully stand in trained designs
And careless ease; each like to each;
No torment waits upon their lines,
A noble mien, as on these trees,
Their moulded shapes of outspread poise
Tried warriors in a mighty land.*

*Beatrice Soloman
(Published in Trees and hard Earth.
Winter 1949)*

FAUNA

*Although quite an old member of the Essex Field Club, I can only speak as a 'mere botanist', so must 'tread delicately' in interjecting a note on the fauna. However, one item of this, as it happens, is of considerable botanical interest. I refer to the great colonies of the wood ant, (*Formica rufa*). Ignoring all the wonderful ways of these industrious little creatures, (- but **do** read that fairy-tale, Donisthorpe's 'British Ants'.) I **must** mention that they destroy enormous quantities of caterpillars, such as the larvae of various Tortrix moths. We often see our oak trees quite defoliated by the caterpillar pests, so please spare a thought of praise for *Formica rufa*. On the continent, where Forestry is taken very seriously, one of the things 'verboden' is interference with the 'nests' of the Wood Ant.*

There are, of course, many other entrancing scenes of bird, mammal and insect life in the wood, whereby those who study each section of such fauna may find ample interest.

Fras. W. Thorrington

Red Squirrels

August 1938

I saw a red squirrel in the wood; the same day that a temporary cage had been placed for three. These were put in the following day and the doors padlocked but as the trapdoor was only secured by a wooden stick the squirrels were released or stolen after a weeks confinement. Food is being placed in the open cage in case they return which seems likely as the food is being taken away.

N.E. Hood.

The Flora of Blakes Wood

By Francis W. Thorrington, F.R.H.S.

*(Member of Council of the Essex Field Club.,
Member of Committee of the British Pteridological Society.,
Member of the British Bryological Society.)*

I have been asked to write a few lines concerning the Flora of the 84 acres of lovely countryside known as Blakes Wood. This area has been 'dedicated' to the nation by Mr. And Mrs Hood, and will eventually be administered by the National Trust for the benefit of posterity, as well as for ourselves.

*I am putting due emphasis on the word 'posterity'. Far too often, in the matter of our wild flowers, for instance, we are prone to act most viciously down to the atmosphere of that atrocious quotation :- "Hang posterity! What's posterity done for me?" Yet no one of us **really** desires that, say, his or her grandchildren shall miss the glory of wild flowers of the English spring and summer.*

*Very well then: what are we prepared to do concerning this extremely urgent problem of the preservation of our floral resources? Unfortunately, the very people who say the "love" the flowers most are the main cause of the trouble. They gather great bunches of Primroses; or even 'armfuls' of bluebells and foxgloves, and never pause to consider the vanished seeding time of the plants they have thus devastated. Please **do** try to act in the spirit of that admirable motto of the School Nature, Study Union, "To see and admire; not harm or destroy".*

*Now, for a sentence or so about particular plant associations. Of these, as regards Blakes Wood, I would dwell on the sight of the massed effects of Primroses, Anemones, Bluebells and Foxgloves. Of these, perhaps the Anemonies (*A. nemorosa*) are safest, for two reasons:-*

- 1) They have a rambling rhizome;*
- 2) They are more 'tiresome' to pick.*

Yet, even the Anemones are gradually dwindling. If this is the case with the Anemones, how are we to safeguard the Primroses, Bluebells and Foxgloves? These are all very readily reproduced from seeds, and, normally, should increase much more freely than Anemones. So terrible, however, are the

results of continual gathering of their flowers, that all over the country these three species are diminishing. Need I say more?

*I will not linger on the colour and charm of several other denizens of the woods, such as the Rose Bay Willow Herb (*Epilobium angustifolium*) and the Great Hairy willow Herb (*E. hirsutum*) the first of these, known as 'Firewood' in N. America, from its seemingly miraculous appearance in quantities over the ashes of forest fires, often colours acres of summer woodland. The other usually needs damper conditions, and then flourishes. Both, I imagine, are safe from extermination, being rampant 'spreaders' by air-born seeds. The Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) usually gives delight to artist-souls from its subdued tinting. Some of these admirers'; my wife for instance, find this aesthetic pleasure modified by inability to classify its 'perfume' as that of almonds (amygdaloid), saying, in fact, that it is "not so, but far otherwise". There is a real danger, though, that the plant may become scarce.*

*One treasure of Blakes Wood is quite a large expanse of Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*). Everything I have written above applies to the continual picking of our delightful 'Wood Lilies'. They are seldom exterminated, because of their freely wandering rhizomes; but who wishes to have leaves only on a lily-bed? Please let them seed themselves, that the future may continue to enchant our senses with their perfume and grace.*

My own speciality, our British Ferns, and also the mosses, induces a wood or two about the cryptogamic vegetation of the wood. The ferns you are likely to find are few in species, yet these were once plentiful in number of individual plants. They are the Male Fern, The Broad Buckler Fern, the Shield Fern, the Common Polypody, the Hard Fern, and, if you search diligently, perhaps a solitary Lady Fern, or Harts'-tongue.

*Now as a 'raiser' and grower for many years of the wonderful varietal forms of almost all our native species, I can state definitely that Blakes Wood should have ferns in profusion, even in dry Essex. The 'History' of the wood is dealt with ably elsewhere, but I will venture a note concerning the 'history' of Fern life in this very region. The late Mr. Miller –Christy, many years ago in the pages of the 'Essex Naturalist', described the 'recorded' Fern flora of this part. There was great plenitude of the species I have mentioned; so plentiful, in fact, that Devon itself could scarcely improve on it. In addition, there were stations here for the Royal Fern, (*Osmunda regalis*), very profuse too, in*

places.

*Why is it that we, as the 'posterity' of that quite recent past, are deprived of the joy of viewing such a fern paradise? It is almost entirely a case of continual vandalism – **useless** vandalism also, for hardly any of the robbers manage to grow the 'booty' in their gardens.*

What hope is there, then, for the Flora of our countryside, unless the people alter their ways? At first consideration, very little, for preaching to the mass of 'plant-lovers' has had little result up to the present. For the future, I suggest a certain concentration on the schools. Teach the children to raise from seed, Primroses, Bluebells, and Foxgloves etc., instead of denuding the wild growths. Also, I would much like to find Teachers 'raising' Ferns from spores, quite an easy, but a fascinating demonstration for the youngsters. So shall rise a generation reverent for our heritage of woodland beauty.

Diary of activities

Jan 11 1930

The wood was sold to Mr. H. Davies and all the timber removed. Mr. Stankovich and his family a gipsy from Yugoslavia bought the top wood for £2. 0.0. and settled in a field between the N. boundary and Colam Lane. The top wood had to be removed by Dec 31 1934.

July 14 1933

Mr Walter Richard Hood, Little Baddow bought eighty four and a half acres of the wood – the remainder 19. 76 acres being purchased by Mr. Bremner, New Lodge to protect his property.

Jan 1934

Wood below Mr. Bradley's field as far as the stream coppiced W. Scrivener. Trees Conifers – Beeches, Birches, Willows

Winter 1935/36

Wood from the stream up to Parmenters Walk cleared also undergrowth cleared by Mr Miles – Ancient strip cultivation by the stream was exposed. Trees planted. Conifers by Parmenters Walk. Norwegian Maple and Poplar – Chestnuts E. of Gipsies – Sumachs

Winter 1936/37

Wood cleared and undergrowth cleared on W. boundary as far as Walkers weat below the Terrace by Ted Enefer. Trees White beam. Red oaks – Golden Poplar – Black poplar – Copper Beech- Willows – Hollies.

Dec 15 1936

The Wood accepted as a gift by the National Trust subject to the joint lives of Mr. And Mrs. Hood. - The sponsors being Rev. J. Berridge and G. E.

Dawkins Esq., Hoppett.

Winter 1937/38

A certain amount of drainage carried out – Small plantations of Oak trees thinned by Graces and the Dairy Riffhams Chase, by Sid Enefer.

Trees Pink Chestnuts – Acacia by gipsies – conifers on Fir knoll, also Canadian Maple – Oak – hybrids by Holly Knoll.

Summer 1937

Electric poles taken from Old Riffhams to Mr Bremners thro the valley a clearing 30ft. wide made.

Winter 1938/39

Acorns planted. Three red oaks by Terrace. Ten Scots Fir on Fir knoll and three larches. Larches planted on right of Holly Knoll. Coppice oaks thinned in places. Two new copper beeches planted 1937 did not survive – severe drought in summer.

A great many fox earths and many jays.

S. Enefer drained near Waters meet – made seats and bridges.

Planted oak and fir spruce Norway. E. Lawrence cleaned part of birch wood S. of terrace – Gypsies did much damage to palm willowes breaking the branches to sell.

August 8 1939

*Letter from M. Hudson of
S. Audrey's College,
The Broadway,
Thorpe Bay
Essex*

Dear Mrs Hood

Further to our conversation of this evening. I am pleased to confirm our agreement that the oak tree standing at the bottom of Parsonage Farm's

right-of-way, shall not be cut down and I will do all that is possible to ensure its preservation in the future.

I note that you will kindly hand a cheque for £5 to Mr. Enefer, who will apply its use as arranged between us.

Reply to your assertions of this evening, which I feel were scarcely justified in the circumstances.

Yours faithfully

M. Hudson.

Winter 1939/40

A few conifers planted to make good where some had died. Mr John Dawkins planted a red maple near Holly Knoll. Syd Enefer made more seats. Miss Hudson planted a 10" strip of land between her property and Mr. Bradleys to make a fresh entrance in the N. E. corner. Oak seeding planted. War in progress. Evacuees and thus teachers 140 enjoy nature rambles continually. Cleared to S. of Parmenters Walk –

Syd Enefer made new path from Hudsons land into Ilex walk – We have named it Martins Walk in memory of Rev. A.D. Martin who loved the wood.

Winter 1940-1941

In spite of bombing and incendiaries nothing seems to have fallen in the wood.

Syd Enefer made more seats and cleared half an acre of poor trees on the left of the main entrance.

Scrivener has cleared one acre of chestnut poles (for government contract) on the left of main path to Graces. (£4. 10.0 per acre). Cleared two acres to the N. of main entrance on the left of the path.

Winter 1941/42

Twenty larch and scots pine planted to replace some that died, 2 by holly patch and 4 on fox knoll. Black poplar planted by gipsy's water hole.

At the request of Agricultural committee gs was employed to rid wood of rabbits which were destroying newly sown crops cultivated in war effort. Cleared dense undergrowth of thorn and rose at the extreme W. end, next Graces. Seats placed in wood continually moved or destroyed. Wild cherries planted at western end of wood.

Winter 1942/43

A very mild winter and early spring – with abundance new growth in spring. Planted 20 young trees in Thorn wood and other places.

Apr. 15 1943

A high explosive 100lb. Bomb fell about 30 yards inside the wood opposite Hall Cottages. It did not explode but went down 21 feet – three weeks in excavating by bomb disposal squad.

Winter 1943/44

Planted a few hollies cleared slope of peat wood – and the path by stream near electric poles – Miss Hudson ploughed up right of way from Parsonage Farm to the gate into the wood. Matter put in Mr. Bakers hands – damage done to rustic seats in wood. During winter finished clearing Thornwood to the boundary and began clearing western boundary from Colam Lane. Scrivener cut chestnut poles from 4 acres £5. 0. 0. per acre.

1944/45

Many acres cleared by W. Scrivener for War Agricultural committee 19 for chestnut palings near Parsonage Farm and toward Old Riffhams property – and the stream. The right of way was again levelled therefore by W. Scrivener who brought his tractor for carting. Italian prisoners of war worked. No trees were planted – great lack of labour.

1945/46

W. Scrivener still clearing, but unsatisfactory work – badly shaped trees left and brush wood not cleared. Gave him notice.

1946/47

Mr. Willett thinned 7 acres – E. from Graces very satisfactorily. Chestnuts and other wood for very necessary firewood. Woodman reported many squirrels – Tops of spruces cut out by thieves for Xmas. £6. 0.0. per acre. The snowfall of 1946/47 winter increased growth of all trees unusually.

1947/48

Thinning continued N. to Terrace 6 new acres cleared laboriously on rough fields – costing us £20. 0.0. It should be continued but an expensive affair. Damage done to all paths by riding school. Ferns in sheltered parts growing and increasing. Three red oaks planted on slope. One stolen almost at once – Larches – Maple – red oaks near Graces path growing well – also a few bushes.

December

A request was made to the Nat. Trust that a representative be sent to advise about the wood. J.W Hood., Mrs. Hood, Mr. Dawkins and Mr. T. Baker. Solicitor met here and it was arranged that the wood should be passed over without delay to the Trust.

1949

Letter from Mr. T. Baker.

*Copland, Duffield, Ward and Baker
96 High Street
Chelmsford*

1st January 1949

Dear Mr. Hood

I am glad to say that we have had a letter from Mr. A.A. Martineau the Solicitor who acts for the National Trust. I gather that the wood will be declared by the National Trust to be inalienable in accordance with the provisions of the National Trust Act 1907. The effect of this, of course, will be

to enable the wood to be enjoyed by the public forever.

I am proceeding with the transaction and hope to report progress to you very shortly. The National Trust, however, do not have very frequent meetings and I think we must assume that the transaction will take two or three months but I will do my best to hurry the matter along.

Yours sincerely

T.H.M Baker.

*W.R. Hood Esq.,
Hill Cottage,
Little Baddow
Chelmsford
Essex*

March 1951

After long delay due to the loss of the original deeds – a copy was almost miraculously discovered at a lawyers in Chelmsford. The transfer then proceeded quickly. Mr. De Bazillo Corbin. The N.T. East Area Agent arranged with Mr. T. Baker solicitor, the wood boundaries. Mr. Bremner on the N. Boundary – and Mr H. Paterson the boundary between the Old Riffhams estate and Blakes Wood. The other boundaries well cleared mapped – The young birch trees and the oaks doing particularly well

Newspaper cutting (no date, but poss. 1951)

8 PROPERTIES FOR NATIONAL TRUST HENRY JAMES HOME

The National Trust now owns more than 1,000 properties throughout the country. It is negotiating for the transfer of eight more, which it has accepted. This is disclosed in the Trust's new list published yesterday.

Lamb House, Rye, Sussex, home of Henry James, the American novelist who became a British subject, is one of the proposed new acquisitions. James lived in this brick Georgian house, just off the main street of Rye, for the

greater part of 20 years until his death in 1916. His study is to be made into a memorial room.

Other properties accepted by the Trust but now as yet transferred are: Newark Park Glos., a 640 acre estate with mansion of 15th-century origin; Alderley Water Mill, Cheshire, a typical back-and-white Cheshire mill; Bridges Farm Dedham, Essex; Blake's Wood (84 acres), Little Baddow, Essex; Wynyard's Gap (small woodland), Dorset; and Mynydd Cilan, a cliff headland in Caenarvon.

The Trust owns two properties which are to become memorials to their present occupants after their lifetime. They are Mr. Churchill's home, Chartwell, Westerham, Kent and Mr. G.B. Shaw's home at Ayot St. Lawrence, Herts.

February 24 1954

(label enclosed of Cupressus 'Silver Queen')

Mr Hood died. His ashes were sprinkled on the knoll in Blakes Wood and a silver cupressus was planted on February 22 1954.

Sept. 1954

Walked thro the wood with Christopher Stamford to label certain trees, which we planted. No labels are attached to larches or firs, which were growing well.

Labels on 4 Turkey oaks. Near path to Graces – white beam near Laverick 4 beeches- Parmenters walk, near Graces,- White poplar near Lavericton slope

Canadian maple W, of fir slope – 2 maples – near Turkey oak – silver cupressus – on the fir slope.

Transfer being made of triangular piece of land near Old Riffhams by Mr. H. Paterson. A parcel of land on the Riffhams Road W. Of Old Riffhams which had been excluded from W. Hoods gift was to be incorporated in the Trusts property.

June 22 1955

*Letter from the National Trust at Bickling
To Mrs M. Hood
Quillets
Colam Lane,
Little Baddow.*

Re: Blakes Wood – Footpaths and bridle paths.

Dear Mrs Hood

Thank you for your letter of the 16th of June.

Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949. County Councils had to arrange for the preparation of draft maps showing all footpaths and bridle paths. This was done in most cases through the Parish Council where the local knowledge of Councillors was available. The Essex draft map was ready in 1953 and objections had to be registered within a limited time. The County Council have already made a final decision on most of the footpaths, but I believe some cases have been referred back to Parish Councils.

I cannot remember details of any footpaths shown across or around Blakes Wood. I certainly never made objection to any as I was not in a position to do so because the property did not belong to the Trust.

I am afraid that it is probably too late to register objections to any footpaths although the position could be made clear by the Clerk of the Essex County Council. There may be nothing to object about, of course. There was always the risk, though, that new footpaths, which the public had really no long standing right to use, would be included in the draft plan. I have successfully objected to a number of such footpaths on another property in Essex, but my objections were made in the autumn of 1953.

Yours sincerely,

October 10 1965

Mrs. M. E. Hood died, and her ashes were scattered, as she wished, on the knoll in Blakes Wood some weeks later by her nephew Kenneth Paterson and Christopher Stamford, great nephew.

CHEERY CHUMS CORNER

Newspaper cutting from the Essex Weekly May 30 1941

Dear Girls and Boys

Recently I had the privilege of spending a few hours in a very beautiful part of rural Essex, and on a gateway leading into a wood carpeted with bluebells was a notice which read something like this:-

You are at liberty to enjoy this private woodland, but please do not light fires, leave litter, nor dig up any roots.

I walked a long way through that wood, and I couldn't find any trace of anyone having done any of the things they had asked not to do, which was all to the good, I don't know who was the wonder of that wood, but I should have liked to have thanked him for sharing the beauties of it with other people, and I hope no one will take advantage of his generosity. Bluebells, primroses, violets, anemones, and many other wild flowers grew in profusion, doubly refreshing in these days. – Best wishes

Yours sincerely

THE CHEERY CHUM

Lines written about Blakes Wood dated 1936.

Secrets

*When I walk the green wood ways,
In the bramble maze,
Something is telling me secrets all the while,
And I listen, and understand and smile
In an intimate content.*

*I pass out by the farm in the sun,
And the secrets are done.
I have forgotten what they meant.*

Alice M. Sadler

The Felled Trees

*Here once were trees,
Murmurs of mysteries,
Stirring of wings,
And the note of a bird and knowledge of ancient things,
And marvel and delight
In the green day and mirk of the night*

*Now, when the dawn comes pale,
Never it kisses the trunk of a tree;
Vacant the Vale –
And the note of a bird and knowledge of them that be
At the heart of trees, at the heart of winter and spring,
Is a dead thing.*

Alice M. Sadler.