



BEAULIEU HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No. 36 July 2019

Editor's Column

Past Meetings

At the **Annual General Meeting** on 25 January 2019 the committee was joined by Dene McCulloch and Anne Coles retired. After the AGM, Rupert Scott gave a talk on **Beaulieu's Private Utility Companies**; the story of Beaulieu's own water, gas and electricity companies, stretching back from the 1950s to at least the 18th century.

On 15 March 2019, a talk on the **The Mitford Family's Creation of the Exbury Estate in C18th** was given by history society chair Emma Page who researched this subject for a doctorate at Oxford University. The evening was also the launch of her book on the subject, which can be purchased at the New Forest Heritage Centre, Lyndhurst.

On 3rd May 2019, a visit was arranged to Exbury Gardens for a talk by Lionel de Rothschild on **The History of Exbury Gardens** followed by an escorted walk around the gardens with rhododendrons and azaleas in glorious bloom.

Forthcoming Meetings

The next event in the autumn will be a **Visit to Titchfield** on 26 September 2019 by coach at 10:30am from the car park of Beaulieu Village Hall, returning 4:30pm.

Titchfield became associated with Beaulieu when, after the dissolution of the abbeys in the 16th century, both abbeys came into the ownership of Thomas Wriothesley, 1st Earl of Southampton, courtier to King Henry VIII. The association has continued into recent times.

The day visit will comprise:

- Guided tour of the ruins of Titchfield Abbey (founded 1232) and Place



House with its imposing Gatehouse

- Talk at the Great Barn (early 15th century) with buffet lunch

- Guided tour of St Peter's Church (first constructed in

680) including its grand monument to Thomas Wriothesley and his descendants (above).

On 14 November 2019 a talk will be given on the **History of Montagu Arms Hotel**. The Montagu Arms has had many owners and many names over the centuries yet, till now, its history has not been recorded in depth. Anthony Norris will relate the story in the Village Hall, after which the managers of the hotel have kindly invited members to the hotel to see some of the features mentioned and be served refreshments.

On 31 January 2020 the society will conduct its AGM followed by a talk on the **Maritime Archaeology in the Solent** by Garry Momber, Director of Southampton's Maritime Archaeology Trust. Garry has been engaged over several decades in



investigating the archaeology of the Solent in prehistoric times when the sea levels were much lower and humans and wildlife lived on what is now the sea floor.

John Pemberton

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Dates for your Diary

Thurs 26 September 2019 10:30am
Visit to Titchfield
courtesy of Titchfield History Society by coach from Beaulieu Village Hall

Thurs 14 November 2019 6:30pm
History of Montagu Arms Hotel
presented by Anthony Norris at Beaulieu Village Hall

Friday 31 January 2020 6:30pm
AGM and talk on Maritime Archaeology in the Solent
presented by Garry Momber at Beaulieu Village Hall

Subscriptions

Membership fees of £5 per member were due at the start of the calendar year. If you have not yet paid, you are encouraged to make an electronic bank transfer to Beaulieu History Society, sort code 20-53-53, account number 90157031. In the Reference box, please put your surname and what is being paid (membership, book, name of event), otherwise we may not know what the payment is for.

If available to you, this is a preferable alternative in cost and convenience to sending a cheque by post to the secretary Gillian Strathcarron at her address on the back page.

Americans in the New Forest

Dan Oxberry gave a talk to the society in November 2018 on the Airfields around Beaulieu. Here he extends his study to the Americans who came to the New Forest to aid in World War II.

Of the three Beaulieu airfields, the subject of my talk, Lymington was entirely run by the Americans, while Beaulieu was taken over by them in March 1944, in the run up to D-Day. Both bases flew the Republic P47 Thunderbolt, an immensely strong, single-engined fighter bomber, with three squadrons, about 80 aircraft



and over 1000 men at each location. In passing I raised the question of how these American temporary guests were viewed by those who lived and worked here and to what extent their presence was indeed welcome; I did not provide much of an answer, not least because the social history, such as it is, is only fragmentary.

However, looking again at the brief accounts of the US Army Air Force bases in the wider New Forest (other American Thunderbolt units could be found at Bisterne, Winkton, Christchurch, and Ibsley) a few clues emerge and one obvious truth – the US Army Air Force were indeed not here for very long, essentially March to June 1944, and during that brief time they

were extremely busy. At Ibsley, for example, 48th Fighter Group was ready for action 20 days after arriving from the USA, while at Winkton, 404th Fighter Group were attacking V1 sites in France just over three weeks from arrival.

Not impressed by his tent, at least one American found lodgings in a local cottage near Bisterne and the base found time to give parties for local children. Bicycles were in great demand to get round the dispersed

base and into the village pubs. A few ‘acquired’ cars to get them further afield, for example to the American Officers’ Club at the St Leonards Hotel in Bourne-mouth.

Dances were held in Lymington and Brockenhurst, the Morant Hall on Saturday night being particularly popular, while the more adventurous would park a bike for thepence in a garden opposite Brockenhurst Station and take the train to London, risking a three mile walk if their bike had been acquired when the mail train brought them back at 0200.

It is widely accepted that the Americans were welcomed in Britain from 1942 when the first units arrived to start building airfields, notably in East Anglia, preparing for the so-called Second Front. They were encouraged to spend Christmas with a British family and families were urged to invite them to the extent that an estimated 50 invitations were made per head. American servicemen were issued with extra food to take to their chosen family to supplement the rations, typically fruit juice, evaporated milk, bacon, coffee, sugar, lard, rice, peas, ‘candy’ and doughnuts.



I am, of course, aware of the cynical view that the Americans “came in late to take the glory” and that they were regarded by many as “oversexed, overpaid and over here”, a line attributed to comedian Tommy Trinder. I prefer to think that very young men released from the constraints of family, living in a group of kindred spirits far from home, some facing daily the prospect of death or mutilation, are bound to pursue life’s more tender pleasures while they can. I am sure that has been true of armed forces throughout history.

As to money, American servicemen were paid on average five times as much as their British counterparts but not over paid by their standards. It must be said also that their British comrades in arms were paid hardly more than pocket money for their involvement. It also must be said that so many British young men were absent on duty overseas and the combination of testosterone-fueled and well paid Americans was bound to attract at least some of the girls who met them. They introduced pinball machines, jukeboxes, the jitterbug, swing bands and were indeed a ready source of coveted nylon stockings and their ubiquitous candy.



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An interesting local topic

If you have an article on a local topic you think would interest the members, or would like to write one, please get in touch.

Researching an article can often be easily done on the internet or using the excellent reference library of the New Forest Heritage Centre in Lyndhurst. See www.newforestheritage.org.uk/library for opening hours.

Help in researching and writing is available from the society’s committee members. Please email newsletter editor John Pemberton at johnlpemberton@compuserve.com in the first instance. We would be glad to help.

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Although estimates vary, nationally there were about 70,000 marriages, 'the war brides', most of whom went to join their husbands in the USA soon after the war. However, an estimated 9000 girls were 'left in the lurch' with illegitimate babies. An estimated 2000 babies were of mixed race parentage at a time when attitudes to such relationships were disapproving at best.



Quite what portion, if any, of these figures occurred in the New Forest is beyond the scope of this article and,

frankly, of no concern to anyone except those surviving who might have been involved.

Piecing the jigsaw together, I have no doubt that Beaulieu and the New Forest at large welcomed the visitors from the USA with a mixture of curiosity and compassion, with some minor friction, that reflected the country as a whole. After two and a half years of very mixed fortunes Britain was surely ready to welcome anyone who came to help with men and material and we had no more powerful ally than the USA. Even in

the pre-invasion pressure cooker that was Southampton, where troops of allied forces were going about their business, the level of violent incidents was surprisingly low. The Port Provost Marshal (the top military police officer) reported that most incidents occurring during 1944 were the result of "British troops assaulting a smaller group of Americans". Among the causes he put down were that great difference in pay scales, boasting by one or other party, preference shown by British women for American troops and, of course, alcohol. As a former soldier, I find none of that surprising.

"Over here" is a given, and thank goodness they were. A visit to the Cambridge American Cemetery near Madingly would remind doubters that several thousand American servicemen are still "over here" - 3,811 burials to be precise, and these were only those whose family had opted for them to be buried with their comrades, rather than repatriated. The names of a further 5,127 who were missing in action are engraved on the memorial.

It is a beautiful place and, in the 75th anniversary year of D-Day, I recommend a visit to sit and contemplate quite where we would be without their sacrifice.

Dan Oxberry

History Society Publications

Beaulieu in Tudor and Stuart Times 1500-1673 by Alan Bartlett

Alan Bartlett, a retired civil servant, spent many years in the 1960s and '70s studying the history of Beaulieu and the 8,000-acre Beaulieu Estate. The Estate was acquired by the Wriothesley family, later the Earls of Southampton, in 1538. Their descendant, the late Edward, Lord Montagu commissioned Alan Bartlett to write a history of Beaulieu in the Wriothesley period, which he completed in 1973.

The book begins with an account of the last days of Beaulieu Abbey on its dissolution in 1548, through the lives of the four Earls of Southampton, and finishes in 1673 when the 4th Earl's daughter Elizabeth married the first Duke of Montagu.

The second part of the book is concerned with the topography of the Estate and the lives of all who lived there. The social history of the times is brought vividly to life using original letters, court and parish documents, wills and inventories.

The book is a valuable resource for anyone studying local history. It remained in typescript form until the Beaulieu History Society was given permission by the current Lord Montagu to publish it.

The price of this book is £20 plus £3.50 P&P.

Older Houses of Beaulieu edited by John Coles

This is a record of ten interesting houses of Beaulieu, many of which society members have visited over the years. Research done on the houses, resulting in talks given by the owners, are summarised and photographs of each are included.

It covers the following properties:

Otterwood	Curtle
Ipley Manor	Hill Top House
Keeping	Kelham
St Leonard's Grange	Drokes
Beufre	Beaulieu High Street

The price of the book is £10 plus £2 P&P.

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To order either book, please send a cheque for the price plus P&P to Gillian Strathcarron, Secretary, Beaulieu History Society, Otterwood House, Beaulieu S042 7YS.

Alternatively, please make a bank transfer of the price plus P&P to Beaulieu History Society, sort code 20-53-53, account number 90157031, putting the initials of the book BTST or OHB and your surname in the reference box. You will also need to notify Gillian by email gillian.s@mac.com of the address to which you want the book(s) to be sent.

## New Forest C18th Productivity

**Gale Gould** questions whether the rational scientific methods that the government of George III applied to improve the productivity of the New Forest brought the benefits that were intended.

During the reign of George III (1760-1820), the British Government began to look for ways to make the New Forest more productive. One of the means identified was to create plantations of oak trees, which would be destined to supply the royal navy, by using 'scientific' enlightenment methods and 'rational' techniques. The success of the timber plantations in the New Forest required certain elements (arable crops and trees) to be included within the timber plantations, while others (deer, mice, rabbits, and commoners' livestock) needed to be excluded. The divide that separated these elements was provided by inclosures, which were physical barriers that were designed to keep the approved species in and the unauthorised species out.

However, the use of enlightenment methods to create the inclosures within the New Forest was rather more suggestive of a political ideology. This is evident when examining the encounters in and around the inclosures between the included rational elements and the excluded instinctive elements of the Forest. Indeed, the repeated failure to establish timber trees in the inclosures reveals that George III's Government was itself prepared to act irrationally in order to establish tree plantations in the New Forest; and by its own actions would encourage the very features that would resist its plans.

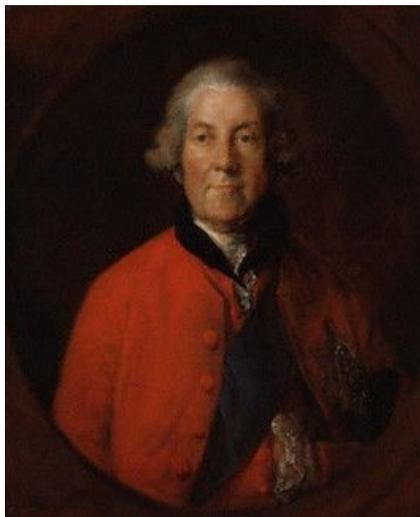
In 1664 John Evelyn's book *Sylva* was published. This was a text approved by the Royal Society of London and written in response to a request from the Commissioners of the Navy asking how best to plant oaks and other ship-timber in the royal forests, chases and parks. The later eighteenth century editions of *Sylva* would urge that Chapter VII,



John Evelyn by Sir Godfrey Kneller 1687

which contained 'some Encouragement and Proposals for the Planting and Improvements of His Majesty's Forests'. . . should constitute part of the Political Catechism of all Statesmen'. Thus crucially, rather than being a mere textbook on arboriculture or forest husbandry, Evelyn's recommendations became the creed for a higher political and national purpose by linking the planting of oak trees to patriotic glory.

This sentiment would resonate with George III's Government when it took control of the New Forest. Evelyn had recommended that having chosen the spot and well-fenced it for the growing of



John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford by Thomas Gainborough 1770  
National Portrait Gallery

timber, the ground ought to be prepared the winter before by breaking it up to 'mellow it'. While Moses Cook had suggested, in 1676, that, 'If you have ground that is wet and barren, and that you are minded to plant .... sow it for the first year with Oats, to mellow the Ground.'

John Russell, the fourth Duke of Bedford, who was Lord Warden of the New Forest for the first eleven years of George III's reign, therefore proposed that three New Forest inclosures – Etherise, Pignell, and Black Bush - should be sown with acorns to raise oak trees for naval timber, but that the ground would first be made ready by 'taking off One Crop of Oats'. Bedford's accounts for 1769-1771 show that labourers were paid for various activities including cutting heath, grubbing and cleaning the ground in the inclosures, in order that they could be ploughed and cultivated with oats and afterwards with acorns.

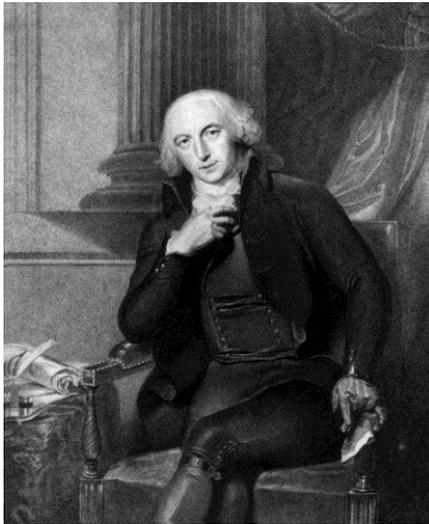
Bedford's accounts also detail incursions from the excluded elements of the Forest including deer, fern, and possibly even commoners' livestock. Mice also invaded the inclosures and in March 1771, 5s 8d was put aside for the cost of '400 bricks taken to Pignall Inclosure to kill the mice that eat up the acorns'. There is no indication of exactly what purpose the bricks served other than for pest control but the so-called 'English brick deadfall' trap is one strong possibility.

The Fifth Report of the Middleton Commission, published in 1789, which was appointed to enquire into the state and condition of the New Forest, was critical of the lack of progress in the inclosures and remarked upon their neglect and bad condition which would 'keep out neither Deer, Horses, Cattle, or Swine'.

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Lord Glenbervie, the Surveyor General of Woods reported in 1808 that



1st Lord Glenbervie by Edward Harding 1794, National Portrait Gallery

‘acting under the opinions of many skilful and practical men..... [he had] made accordingly inclosures of various sizes’. These inclosures were ‘well fenced from deer and cattle, the rabbits and vermin destroyed, and the wet parts of the land were skilfully open drained’.

There were repeated attempts, in various ways, to establish timber, including by means of ‘raising oaks and seedlings intermixed’, ‘planting tall oak plants from nurseries’, and ‘a more general trial of nursery plants’ which included introducing other species such as Spanish chestnut. Following these attempts, it was acknowledged that ‘still the oak appeared stunted and unhealthy’.

A further invasion of mice occurred in 1814, which was in the manner of a swarm. It was reported that between 7<sup>th</sup> January to 8<sup>th</sup> March, 11,500 mice were taken in the New Forest by methods that included, trapping; poisoning; opening up the runs to encourage the predation of owls, foxes, and weasels; employing vermin-hunters; releasing domestic cats into the Forest; and the digging of pits. Even Sir Joseph Banks, who had accompanied Captain James Cook on his great voyage to Australia, was consulted and expressed surprise on hearing about the mice but said that the facts about their behaviour would make, ‘A valuable addition, not

only to natural history, but useful to all planters who, when they are made aware of the nature of the obstacles presented to them, will have a better chance than otherwise would be the case of discovering a remedy’.

In conclusion, the persistence of George III’s government in the use of so-called enlightened, scientific methods to overcome the instinctive, irrational elements of the New Forest was actually more consistent with fiscally-focused political ideology than it was about developing a convincing ecological approach to forest management.

At the beginning of George III’s reign, the government aimed to strengthen Britain’s navy by planting stands of oak trees, while towards the end it aimed to establish any tree species, including softwoods, as long as it was in large quantities. Indeed, the belief that forests are spaces only synonymous with trees was established in this period and is a view that persists today.

Gale Gould

## Waterside Heritage

One of a series of occasional articles on history and archaeology groups in the area surrounding Beaulieu. There are several groups all doing interesting work.

Waterside Heritage seeks to embrace the local and community history of the Waterside parishes of Fawley, Hythe & Dibden and Marchwood, broadly an area stretching from Exbury & Calshot in the south to Marchwood in the north, with the boundaries of Southampton Water to the east and the National Park to the west. Its Facebook page is [www.facebook.com/WatersideHeritage](http://www.facebook.com/WatersideHeritage).

The group runs the Waterside Heritage Centre in the old railway station at Hythe. The Centre acts as a local record office, permanent exhibition and study centre for the area. A quarterly newsletter is published.



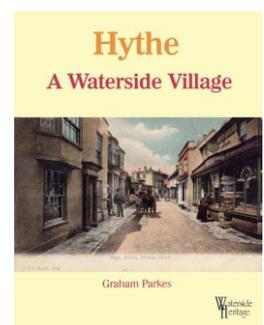
The Centre is led by the group’s chairman Graham Parkes.

A series of books is being published about the three parishes. Already published are *Fawley and the Southern Waterside* and *Hythe - A Waterside Village*. *Dibden and Dibden Purlieu* is in preparation and *Marchwood* is planned. Copies, when in print, are available from the Centre.

Being adjacent to each other, the Waterside and Beaulieu societies have much in common. One example is that the current Lord Montagu of Beaulieu is an active President of Waterside Heritage as well as having served on the committee of Beaulieu History Society.

There is much of interest when you visit the Centre.

The Waterside Heritage Centre can be found at Hythe Railway Station, Dominy Close, Hythe SO45 6HA [centre@watersideheritage.org.uk](mailto:centre@watersideheritage.org.uk) 023 8084 4074. It is open for visitors Tuesday and Thursday 10am to 1pm, and Saturday 10am to 4pm.



John Pemberton

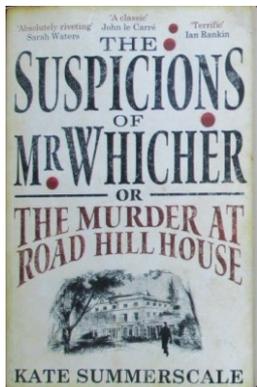
## Victorian Novels

Local historian Anthony Norris, a regular contributor to this newsletter, wishes to share with you three historic novels he has appreciated.

Recently I have been reading three books which deal with the history and development of crime and the criminal justice service in Victorian England.

The first two, both written by Kate Summerscale, are *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher* and *The Wicked Boy*.

The *Suspicions of Mr. Whicher*, recently made into a film, relates the story of a gruesome murder in Road, Wiltshire on 30th June 1860.



The summary on the back cover says: 'It is midnight on 30th June 1860 and all is quiet in the Kent

household in the Kent family's elegant house in Road, Wiltshire. The next morning, however they wake to find that their youngest son has been the victim of an unimaginably gruesome murder. Even worse, the guilty party is surely one of their number – the house was bolted from the inside. As Jack Whicher, the most celebrated detective of his day, arrives at Road to track down the killer, the murder provokes national hysteria at the thought of what might be festering behind the closed doors of respectable middle-class homes – scheming servants, rebellious children, insanity, jealousy, loneliness and loathing.

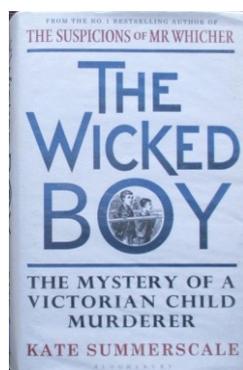
This true story has all the hallmarks of a classic gripping murder mystery. A body, a detective, a country-house steeped in secrets and whole family of suspects – it is the original Victorian whodunnit.

Kate Summerscale has used reports

of the time recorded in the national press to put together a masterpiece of research and is, as the Sunday Telegraph describes, "Gripping, unputdownable."

The second book, *The Wicked Boy* follows the exploits of thirteen-year-old Robert Coombes and his twelve-year-old brother Nattie beginning on the morning of Monday July 8th 1895 when they set out from their terraced house in East London to watch a cricket match at Lord's. Their father had gone to sea the previous Friday, the boys told the neighbours, and their mother was visiting her family in Liverpool. Over the next ten days the boys spent extravagantly, pawning their parents' valuables to fund visits to the theatre and the seaside. But as the sun beat down on the Coombes house, a strange smell began to emanate from the building. When the police were finally called to investigate, the discovery they made threw the press into a frenzy of horror and alarm, and Robert and Nattie were swept up in a criminal trial that echoed the outrageous plots of the 'penny dreadful' novels that Richard loved to read.

In *The Wicked Boy*, Kate Summerscale uncovered a fascinating true story of murder and morality – it is not just a meticulous examination of a shocking Victorian case, but also a compelling account of its aftermath, and of man's capacity to overcome the past.



*The Wicked Boy* was described by *The Times* as a "haunting, hugely entertaining investigation into one of the nineteenth century's greatest murder mysteries."

The third book, *Shooting Victoria*

written by Paul Thomas Murphy is a narrative history of the seven boys and men who, driven by a variety of inner demons, attacked

Queen Victoria on eight separate occasions between 1840 and 1882. The queen's would-be assassins

succeeded in changing the course of British history – and their actions had far-ranging repercussions throughout nineteenth-century Victorian Britain. This impressive book pulls together many strands of legal, social and political history and reflects on the influence of the differing relationships between Queen Victoria and her prime ministers.

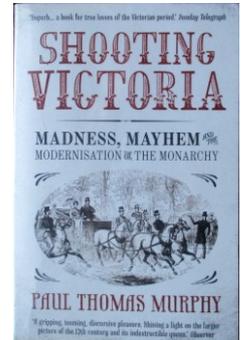
I found all three books very difficult to put down after I had started and I am sure any reader of any of those three books would want to read the others. Their details are below.

Anthony Norris

Kate Summerscale, *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher or The Murder at Road Hill House*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008, ISBN No.: 9780747596486

Kate Summerscale, *The Wicked Boy – The Mystery of a Victorian Child Murderer*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, ISBN No.: 9781408851142

Paul Thomas Murphy, *Shooting Victoria – Madness, Mayhem and the Modernisation of the Monarchy*, Head of Zeus Books, 2013, ISBN No.: 9781781851975



## Beaulieu Electric Light Station

In January, Rupert Scott gave a talk about the utility companies of Beaulieu. Here he looks at how electricity came to be generated in the village.

One of the first decisions made by John Montagu after he inherited Beaulieu Estate in 1905 was to commission an electricity generating station that would supply not only Palace House and stables, but also the entire village. This was an expensive project and must have been quite difficult to justify in terms of need since the village already had its own gasworks. But for John Montagu a change from gas to electricity seems to have been an absolute priority. As a man deeply interested by technological change, in particular by the motor car, it is perhaps not surprising that he should have recognised that electricity was the energy of the future.

From 1874 light and some heat had been provided to Beaulieu village and Palace House by coal-gas from a private gasworks sited just off Dock Lane (near Home Farm) and since demolished. This was a small operation that produced about 500,000 cubic feet per year, a sub-commercial amount. There were about 30 customers, and the village had gas street lighting. The gas system, seems to have worked reasonably well although there were problems with gas quality. These problems were typical in small gasworks, as the gas was often not 'fresh' or the coal quality might be poor. John Montagu complained that the gas lights in Palace House spluttered and emitted an unpleasant smell.

John Montagu's decision to dispense with gas and install electricity can perhaps be seen as part of a larger project to modernise an Estate that in 1905 was still very much a 'backwater' with declining population and low wages. He wished to create an environment that would attract investment and enterprise and saw providing electricity as an essential part of doing that. To some extent he achieved these ambitions. From 1905 the population of the parish begins to rise, having been in constant decline since 1850.

The first private electric station in the UK was constructed in 1872, only 33 years earlier, at Cragside in Northumberland. From the 1890's electricity had begun to replace gas for domestic lighting and by 1905 the technology for both small and large-scale electricity generating stations was becoming well established. For a village system like Beaulieu a 110v DC system was considered ideal. DC power could be distributed over a distance of roughly a mile without a serious drop in the voltage. DC electricity could also be used to charge accumulator batteries which could supply the grid in non-peak hours. This meant that generators could be run for only part of the day, which was a useful saving of fuel.

In 1906 The Beaulieu Electric Supply Co. Ltd was incorporated, and a site chosen for the new electricity generating station at the edge of the village in Fire Station Lane. It is an elegant brick building with large windows, approximately 15m x 7m.. The site was convenient for coal deliv-

eries. Barges could come up the river and deposit coal at Palace Quay. The land haulage from there to the new generating station was minimal.

At the heart of the new Station were 2 large 'gas-suction' engines, one of 21hp and other of 41hp, ordered from Fielding and Platt of Gloucester. The combined cost of the



engines was £538, and they were delivered by train, presumably to Beaulieu Road station. Weighing several tons, both engines had cast-iron flywheels almost 8 feet tall which by belt turned two English Electric dynamos. The



total capital cost of building and equipping the Electric Light Station was £4,548. There were additional costs for running wires to properties connected to the grid, and the electric wiring bill for Palace House came to over £900.

The Fieldings engines burned coal gas, produced by heating high-grade coal in a retort. The station used about 10-12 tons of coal per month and employed 2 men and a 'boy'. The first manager was Frank Wadley, also head of the Fire Brigade, who was paid £6-2s per week. This small staff had a great deal to do. Coal had to be supplied to the retorts, the gas suction engines had to be maintained and serviced, the spark plugs had to be cleaned daily and the brass had to be polished. Electricity was produced 7 days a week and 365 days a year, so there can have been few holidays.

The work conditions probably wouldn't have passed modern and health and safety regulations – the air was dusty and the engines were noisy. There was a large exhaust chimney to about 12 feet to the south side of the plant. The noise from this could be heard several miles away if the wind was in the right direction.

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Typically the engines ran from 8am to 1pm and then from an hour before sunset to 10pm. Outside these hours the grid was supplied by battery. Occasionally, if there was heavy demand, both engines worked at the same time – for instance on New Year’s Eve if there was a big party at the Montagu Arms Hotel.

The local grid expanded from an initial 3 users in 1906 (Palace House, the Estate Office and the Workshops) to about 80 users by the 1930. To the north it went as far as Pennerley Farm and Hartford House. To the south it went down Dock Lane as far as Oxleys. The electricity produced was extremely expensive by modern standards – 1 shilling per kilowatt- hour, with a separate meter and lower tariff for electric heaters. This tariff remained fixed through the station’s life. It is worth bearing in mind that one shilling in 1910 is equivalent to £5 in today’s money. A large house might use around 250 kwh per quarter, which would cost £12.10s. The smallest users consumed around 50 kwh per quarter.

By the early 1930’s the Beaulieu Electric Supply Co. was probably at its peak, turning over about £1,000 pa and making a small profit. In 1936 the West Hants Electric Co. which supplied electricity to Lymington and New Milton and was keen to expand eastwards made an offer of £1,000 for the Goodwill of the BESEC. Captain Widnell, Agent to Beaulieu Estate, advised the trustees that this offer was too low and it was rejected.

This decision was possibly unwise. The final 18 years of the company became increasingly difficult. By the late 1930’s the equipment was becoming difficult to maintain and spare parts were difficult to obtain. These problems got worse during WW2 when industrial production was prioritised towards the requirements of the armed forces. In the late 1940’s and early 1950’s it became difficult to obtain coal and there were regular power cuts. Its customers complained of high prices and low voltage. Increasingly they demanded the lower-cost high-voltage AC supplies available in nearby

towns. In 1947 the Attlee government’s Electricity Act rationalized the UK’s many 100’s of electricity companies into 14 regional boards. The BESEC might have become part of the Southern Board, however as a ‘Non-Statutory DC Supplier’ it was exempted from nationalisation. It continued to supply electricity until June 1954, when there was an agreed handover to the Southern Electricity Board without compensation.

There was a closing ceremony at the Electric Light Station in June 1954. Among the guests was Clive Cooper, the consultant who had co-ordinated the building and specification of the Station back in 1906. Also present was Alan Humble who worked at the light station from 1948-54 and now lives in Exbury. There was a moving speech by Captain Widnell who had retired in the same year, which it is interesting to quote:

“This for the older of us is a sad as well as a solemn occasion. We have just witnessed the last turn of the wheel of what I think I may justly call a famous Beaulieu institution, which has given light (except on one or two memorable occasions) to the people of Beaulieu for 48 years with in the main only two generations of staff.”

It was indeed the end of an era, but the Station itself continued to serve a useful purpose – first as a factory for Palace Quay scows and now as the very elegant offices of Redman Whitely Dixon, Naval Architects.



Rupert Scott

**Thanks to Dr Anne Coles**

Anne Coles has stepped down from the committee after many years. She has been enormously helpful to the development of the Beaulieu History Society. How we miss her wise counsel, her energy, and her unstinting enthusiasm for Beaulieu history.

We have been very lucky to have had such a respected academic on our committee. As well as contributing ideas for meetings and scholarly but entertaining articles for the

Newsletter, Anne instilled in us all the importance of critical scholarly research and we will continue to be guided by her example. Her introduction to carrying out local research has led many of us to the Palace House archive, the New Forest Reference Library in Lyndhurst, the Winchester Record Office and the National Archives at Kew. She will be missed on the committee, but we look forward to seeing her at future meetings.

Emma Page and Gillian Strathcarron

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