



# BEAULIEU HISTORY SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

No. 45 October 2024  
Minor revisions

### Editor's Column

#### Recent Meetings

On 5 July 2024 Paul Manning, who enjoys the title Lord Montagu's Falconer, presented **Falconry—One Thousand Years in the New Forest**; the long history of hunting with birds of prey from the the founding of the New Forest as the first royal hunting ground by William the Conqueror in 1079, through the rich history of the centuries which followed, up to modern times.



Marc Heighway presented **Beaulieu River at War** on 26 September 2024, a talk prepared in conjunction with Mary Montagu-Scott. In the year of the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, the talk illustrated the contribution the historic shipbuilding yard Buckler's Hard, and Beaulieu River in general, made to the construction of a wide range of vessels used in naval operations on D-Day and throughout World War II.

On 24 October 2024, Jim Beckett presented **The Brickworks at Bailey's Hard**. This brickworks on the Beaulieu River operated for more than 130 years from the end of the eighteenth century; a time when brick products were a vital commodity. Jim, an Industrial Heritage historian and volunteer at the Bursledon Brickworks Museum, explained how bricks, tiles and drain pipes were made. He showed how the local geology enabled bricks of different colours to be created, and how the white bricks, in particular, acquired national importance.



#### Forthcoming Meetings

The last of the year's meetings **Wings over the Forest – The New Forest's Pioneers of Flight** will be on 28 November 2024. Given by Marc Heighway, the talk presents the rich aviation history of the New Forest; from the early dreamers and inventors to the pioneers of Great War (1914-18) aircraft. The presentation explores the innovative spirit of those magnificent men and their flying machines. Marc presents tales of adventure and bravery, plus many strange inventions that didn't quite take flight.



John Pemberton

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#### Dates for your Diary

28 November 2024 6:30pm  
**Wings over the Forest -  
New Forest's Pioneers of Flight**  
presented by Marc Heighway  
at Beaulieu Village Hall

Friday 24 January 2024 6:30pm  
**Brief Annual General Meeting  
and Talk—to be announced**  
at Beaulieu Village Hall

#### Membership

**Membership fees** of £5 per year last until the end of the calendar year. To renew membership at the start of the next calendar year, login to the website (as given below), select menu item Membership and Renew membership. Payments can be made by debit/credit card and PayPal .

**To become a member**, select Membership and Join the Society. Enter your name and email details and pay the £5 membership fee.

If you have a problem, or any other query, click Contact Us at the top of the screen. This does not require you to be logged in.

## Producing the Spitfire

The iconic Spitfire World War 2 aircraft has its roots in Southampton, where it was not only designed but also produced by the Supermarine company at its factory at Woolston, Southampton. It was tested at Eastleigh Aerodrome, now Southampton Airport. A prototype was shown at the RAF Hendon air display in June 1936. The first production aircraft known as the Supermarine Spitfire was built in 1938. At the start of the war Spitfires were only mass-produced at Woolston, although later many thousands more would be built at other factories.

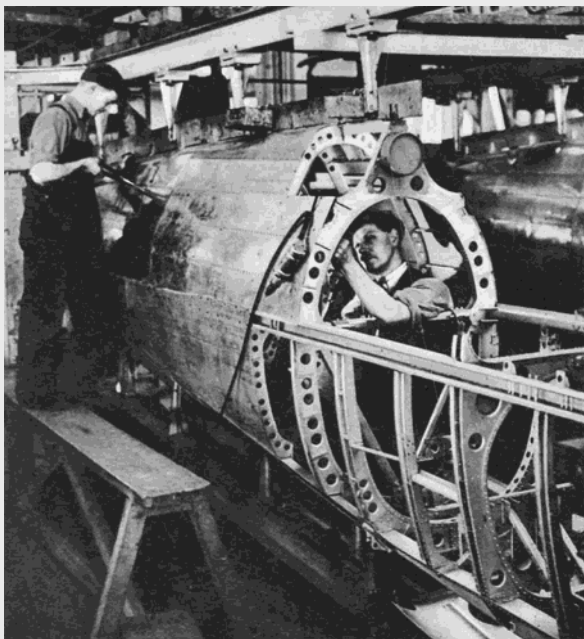
The article which follows is abridged from *The Illustrated London News*. It was published in February 1939, and gives an insight into the manufacture of the aircraft before it was realised the contribution its unique features would make to World War 2.



The Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire, an eight-gun, single-seater, day-and-night monoplane is probably the fastest standard fighting machine in any air force. The first deliveries of this aircraft to RAF squadrons were made last year. The Spitfire has a maximum speed of over 350 mph and was designed by the late R. J. Mitchell, who had the benefit of the experience gained by the Supermarine Company in the design and construction of high-speed seaplanes for the Schneider Trophy contests.

Features of the machine are: a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine; a laterally retracting undercarriage; and split trailing-edge flaps. The front cover of the magazine on the previous page shows Flying Officer J.K. Quill, a Vickers' test pilot, who recently flew in a Supermarine Spitfire from Le Bourget to Croydon in 41 minutes, is seen trying out a new machine.

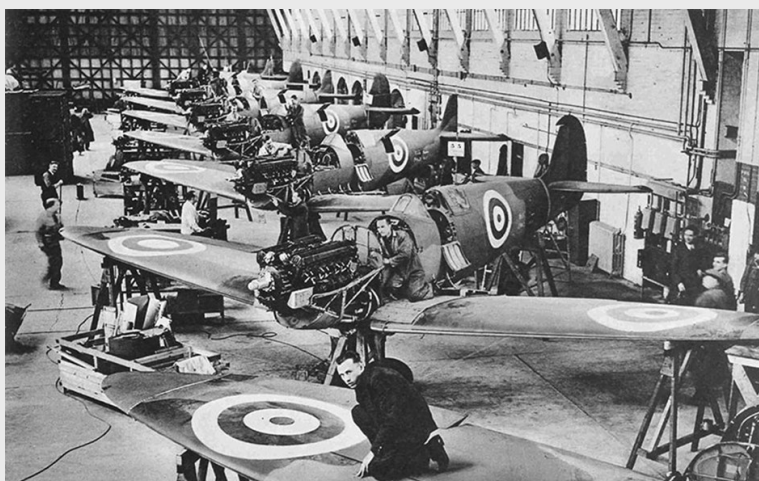
The fighter aircraft of the RAF play an important part in the arrangements made to protect this country from aerial attack. In the event of an air raid, they would do patrol duty and intercept the hostile bombers before they reached their objective, the searchlight units of the Territorial Army assisting them by picking up the raiders and maintaining contact with them. Sir Kingsley Wood recently stated that between 5,000 and 6,000 of these machines were on order or would be ordered. A large number of Vickers-Supermarine Spitfires, believed to be the fastest military aircraft in the world, are now being constructed.



Riveting-on the all-metal stressed-skin to the main structure: the fuselage of a Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire single-seater fighter on its cradle at the Supermarine Works, Southampton..



Producing component parts for the Spitfire at the Supermarine works at Southampton : Girls drilling and punching holes in metal accessories.

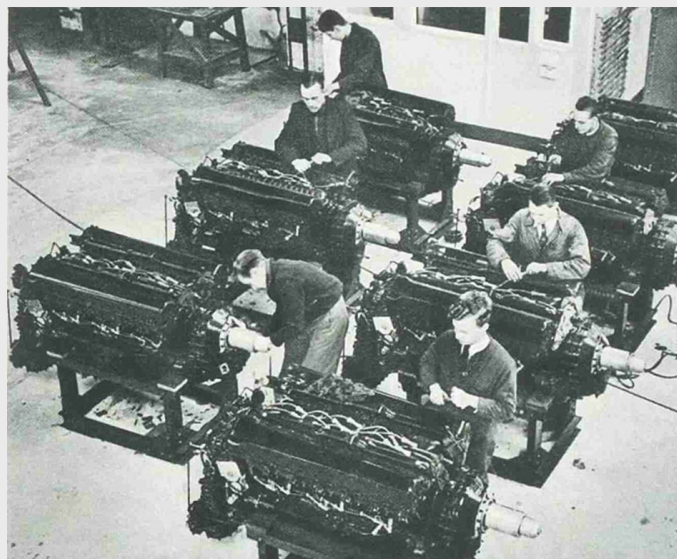


A row of nearly completed Vickers-Supermarine Spitfires at The Works: Machines whose prototype appeared at the RAF display at Hendon in 1936, now in mass-production for the fighter squadrons of the air force.

The method of construction facilitating the interchangeability of components, not only at the Supermarine Works at Southampton, where the photographs reproduced on these pages were taken, but also by twenty-three firms in co-operation. The supply of these aircraft will be further increased when Lord Nuffield's new factory at Birmingham is in full production on the order it has received for 1,000 Spitfires.

On the previous page we reproduce photographs showing the early stages in the construction of a Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire: here we show the finishing touches being given to the machine and its engine, a fully supercharged Rolls-Royce Merlin II with a maximum output of 1,030 hp at 16,250 ft. The exhaust manifolds are of a new ejector type which increase the speed by some 15 mph when the machine is flying at over 300 mph giving a maximum speed of over 350 mph. When the Spitfire has been assembled it is placed on wooden turntable and swung round in a circle, so that the compass can be corrected for variations set up by the metal in the fuselage, and it is then ready for testing.

A test pilot takes the machine up and for thirty minutes performs aerobatics at speeds in excess of 300 mph while he makes notes and calculations on a writing-pad strapped to his knee. If the test is satisfactory the Spitfire is handed over to a waiting RAF pilot, who flies the machine to its squadron.



Receiving final touches before being mounted on Vickers-Supermarine Spitfires: fully supercharged Rolls-Royce Merlin II engines, which develop over 1,000 hp at 16,250 ft.

Putting on the airscrew: almost the last phase of construction in the workshop before the Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire goes on an engine test.



Swinging the compass: a Spitfire on a turn-table which moved round to all points of the compass to correct it for variations set up by the metal in the fuselage – one of the ground tests made before the machine is taken on its trial flight.

## Memories of Beaulieu in the 1920s

by Anne Chichester

This article is reproduced from  
Newsletter No. 10 February 2010  
edited by Anthony Norris

Anne Chichester (1921-2015) was a daughter of John, Lord Montagu (1866-1929), grandfather of the current Ralph, Lord Montagu. Written from a different viewpoint about a different age, the article gives a captivating insight into the lives of the inhabitants of Beaulieu village in the 1920s.

Beaulieu was a wonderful place in which to live as a child. Our home, Palace House, was in the village, not at the end of a long drive as some large houses are. The word "Stately Home" was unknown. Ours was the largest house in the area, but we were not in the least conscious of the fact. It was just our home and we took it all for granted. Every day our Nanny, and often the Nursery maid too, took us for a walk and nearly always we went up the village street.

We left through the gatehouse, with the clock on top, over the bridge, and then the first buildings on the left were the Mill House and the old mill, still working, run by the Norris family. I remember Mr. Fred Norris and Jack Hendy plucking masses of huge turkeys with feathers flying everywhere and the sound of the huge old millstones turning round to grind the corn.

Mr. Norris always wore a bowler hat which was covered in dust from the flour and it had a dent in the top where he constantly knocked his head on the beams. On the floor of the mill was a lavatory seal and if you looked down you could see the water of the river running below. As far as I know it is still there.

The building opposite was the old mangle house and next door the cottage which was originally the cart house of the mill. In 1926 it was altered and improved for my father's secretary from London, Miss Jane Clowes. I remember climbing a builder's ladder into the roof and being told not to fall as if I did I would go through the ceiling. The cottage was later lived in by my half sister, Elizabeth Varley.

Opposite the cottage was the house where Mr. Wadley lived. He was the chief electrician and around the corner was the electric light station, a very favourite place to visit. Also next door was the Fire Station. My father, John, Lord Montagu, installed the huge turbine engine to provide electricity for Beaulieu, a very unusual and far-seeing thing to do at the time. We loved the smell and sound of the enormous turbine engine and watching Charlie Pattillo and Ted Biddlecombe working there. I have faint memories too of builders' scaffolding when the new part of the Montagu Arms was being built.

Continuing our walk, the grocer's shop on the left was run by Mr. Norman Winsey. We liked to go into his shop as he always gave us chocolate biscuits. Then came the small shop next door, which was a haberdashery, then Mr. and Mrs. Lewis's house. He was the village clock-maker and was very good at mending watches.



'Christmas Preparations at Beaulieu - Norris and Hendey'  
painted by Charles Cundall 1937



Winsey's shop on left, Manor Office on right

After that, the saddlers and corn merchants shop belonging to the Norris family. The schoolmaster's house was lived in by Mr. and Mrs. Shotter, on the corner of the schoolyard. He was a much respected man and always walked with a very straight back, like a soldier. On the right side of the school building was the village Hall. Next came the W.I. hut where regular meetings were held.

Our next stopping place was often the Estate Yard, presided over by a wonderful man called David Kitcher. He lived with his large family in the big house on the corner of the yard, where Fairweather's garden centre is now. Beaulieu was more or less self-sufficient in those days and we had our own plumbers, carpenters, woodmen and electricians and the lovely pale bricks which came from the brickyards by the river, at Bailey's Hard. One of the foresters was Mr. Elsworth who lived in the cottage under the clockhouse. For many years the clock chimes were turned off, as Mrs. Elsworth said the noise kept her sons, Bill and Walter, awake at night.

The next house was Curtle House, lived in by the much-loved Vicar, the Rev. R.F. Powles. He was originally the family chaplain and became Vicar in 1886. He used to come once a week to our schoolroom to give us bible lessons and every Wednesday my mother had him to lunch.

She used to ask our cook, Mrs. Triggs, to make a special fruit-cake for him to eat with his cheese, a North-country habit he said.

He was a most distinguished old man with a white beard, and he wore a frock-coat of grey or oatmeal coloured tweed, spats, gloves and a large wide-brimmed hat. He prided himself on seldom preaching for longer than five minutes.

His dining-room table had a thick tablecloth and was covered in a lot of items he had bought over the years from various sales. One day he saw me looking at a Staffordshire jug in the shape of a cow and he immediately gave it to me. I have it to this day. After the old Vicar died, Abbey Lane Cottage was given over to the new Vicar, Rev. Cyril Pearson, to use as a vicarage.

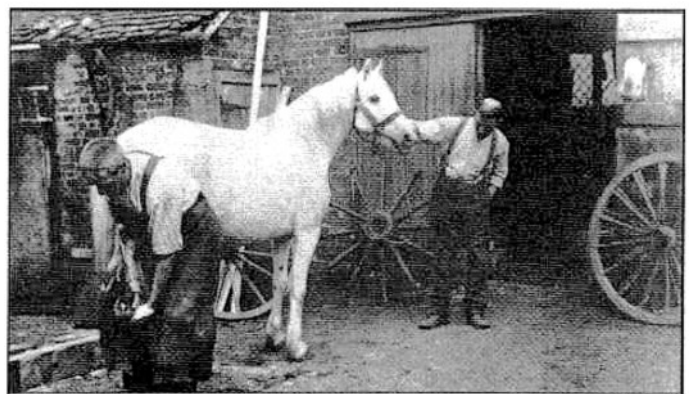
At the top of the village on the right was Mr. Hayward, the butcher, who lived next door. Then a few doors down lived Mrs. Payne, the postmistress, sister of Mr. Fred Norris. In the Post Office was the village switchboard, used for all the Beaulieu telephones, and it was manned by Miss Ena Crouch.

Then the next building was the Blacksmith's. Mr. Bailey worked away at his anvil every day and it was one of our favourite ports of call. He wore a stiff leather apron and always seemed to be bent in half over the fire, which he controlled with hand bellows.

All the horses came to be shod from miles around. He also specialised in beautiful wrought iron work. He never minded us standing around watching him at work.



*Curtle House  
painted by C.M. Walker 1916*



*The Forge*

Then next door came Whitehall, the largest house in the village street, where Colonel Delamain, lived with his bull terriers. After that was the Queens Meade shop owned by Mr. and Mrs. Reg Stevens, whose brother Fred ran the dairy behind.

My Mother was very keen to be fair to both grocers' shops, so her account was kept at one shop for a month and then the other shop for the next month. She always tried to buy everything she needed from the village traders.

Next down the High Street was Harry Well's cycle shop, and then the Manor Office. Captain Harry Widnell (known by my family as Widdie) was the resident agent, assisted by Mr. Ashmead who was the accountant, and the secretary who at one time was Mr. Wadley's daughter and later Fred Norris's twin sister Dorothy. Captain Widnell was badly wounded in the 1st World War and, after an introduction, my father appointed him to run Beaulieu. He was a marvellous man who gave the rest of his working life to caring for and improving the Beaulieu Estate on behalf of all its inhabitants and the Montagu family. During the many years that my Mother, Pearl, was "life tenant", until my brother Edward succeeded aged 25, Captain Widnell was in charge of the Manor Office and the day to day organisation of all the Manor of Beaulieu. At the back of the Manor Office lived Mr. and Mrs. Ashmead and their son.

Next door lived Miss Preston, the very good village dressmaker. She had no electricity and did all her work under a paraffin lamp.

The last house on the left at the bottom of the street was the newspaper shop run by Mr. Aldridge. Then round the corner on the left was the large building facing the Mill Dam, which was the original "Poor House". I well remember the discussion that it was now always to be known as "Pond Side". We used to go there as children to visit Miss Carpenter, who had been Ladies Maid to my Father's old cousin, Lady Mary Kerr. The very nice modern flats in Pond Side are now very much appreciated by the Beaulieu people who live there. Next door was the garage owned by the Marvin brothers, Alec and Cecil, who ran the regular bus service. The bus was used as a parcel carrier as well as for taking passengers to Southampton. Petrol was then 1 shilling and sixpence a gallon.

My first education was in a tiny class run by Miss Peock firstly in the old Tea-rooms in the Montagu Arms, where we could crawl under the tables and chairs in the corner, covered in dust sheets, and later in Mrs. Payne's front room at the Post Office, where we were allowed to play in her small garden.

When I was seven a much-loved Governess arrived to teach me and some other children as a small class. I left Nanny Champ in the nursery and went downstairs to our schoolroom under the care of Miss Snushall, known by us all as "Nooie". From then, our walks were mostly in Harford Wood or down by the river towards the brickyard and Buckler's Hard.

The Abbey was first opened to the public by my Grandfather early in the 1900's and the tickets were sold by the gatekeeper Mr. Willis at sixpence each. Masses of charabancs (the old word for motor coaches) brought visitors on a regular basis. Quite a few of the families who lived in the village when I was a child are still around and there is a flourishing community in Beaulieu, partly of course as a result of the large number of visitors who come to see the Motor Museum, Palace House and the Abbey.



*To the left, Whitehall and to the right, the School Master's house*



*The Montagu Arms in the 1920s*

## The Unmarked Grave of John Bitten, where the grass never grows

On the 5th of March 1781, a gruesome scene awaited those entering a house in Hythe. Catherine Bitten was discovered lying in her bed, dead, her throat cut. Further exploration of the home revealed her husband John on the kitchen floor, also dead, with a bloodied knife clenched tightly in his hand.

Those who had been summoned to investigate this tragic scene immediately suspected John Bitten of killing Catherine. It appeared that he slit her throat and then killed himself with the same knife. The local coroner concurred with this suspicion, as the inquest found a verdict against Bitten of murder and 'felo de se'. This is Latin for 'felon of himself', an archaic legal term meaning suicide.

With Bitten dead and unable to clarify what had happened, or indeed defend himself against the accusation, the 'murder suicide' case would have been the talk of Hythe. I have no doubt that the names of John and Catherine Bitten would have been whispered in the dark corners of the local inns, including the Lord Rodney, which had opened just a year previously in 1780.

As tragic as this story is, sadly, it is not uncommon. John Bitten was not the first man to kill his wife, and the centuries since have witnessed similar incidents. However, there is something that sets this case apart from others you may have heard of.

According to English common law of the time, a person who died by suicide was declared a felon. Any property the person had would be forfeited to the King, who in this case was George III. As a tenant of Cadland Manor, Bitten the mariner had no property to forfeit. In addition to the legal ramifications to his death, there were also religious consequences. Suicide was deemed a sinful act, and those who died by their own hand were to be denied a Christian burial. People who died from suicide would sometimes be buried at a crossroads between the hours of nine and midnight, occasionally with a stake through the heart.

The reason crossroads were chosen for burials such as this was likely due to a connection to the cross itself. There was also the belief that regular foot and horse traffic over the grave might keep the ghost of the wandering soul down, leaving them trapped in the indeci-

sion that a crossroads offers. I am sure there was also an element that such a public burial site could act as a deterrent to others considering suicide.

Whilst there is no record of Bitten being buried with a stake through his heart, he was to be buried on a crossroads in Hythe.

You might ask yourself, which crossroads in Hythe? After all, not many readily come to mind. However, the roads and tracks were very different in the 18th century. There was a busy crossroads that intersected what we now call Fawley Road, located about two hundred meters south of the Netley View One Stop and post office. The crossroads remain to this day, albeit rarely used. It's a dirt and gravel track named Hardley Lane on the left-hand side when facing the direction of the Hardley roundabout, marked with a metal gate across it. Pedestrians can walk down it, but it's closed to cars. On the opposite side, Hardley Lane continues as a narrow tarmac road, eventually turning into dirt. Over two hundred years ago, this crossroads was a thoroughfare between Hythe and Fawley, running north to south, and from Southampton Water to Hilltop down to Beaulieu, running east to west.

These crossroads serve as Bitten's final resting place. If you walk past this spot, keep an eye out for a patch of earth, devoid of grass. One hundred years after the incident, a local rector named Hoare discussed Bitten's death and the Hardley Lane crossroads, writing how 'no grass would grow on the murderer and suicide's grave.'

I have never ascertained the exact spot where Bitten rests. It's very possible that his grave has been covered by tarmac and concrete as the road has been widened and modernised over time.

But perhaps somewhere on the old crossroads of Hardley Lane and Fawley Road lies the silent testament to a tragedy that is centuries old: John Bitten, murderer, resting in an unmarked grave upon which grass refuses to grow.

And if you do find the barren patch, it will offer a timely reminder that some wounds, like a scar on the earth, can never truly heal.

Marc Heighway

### Committee Members

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