

**A Review of "The Royal Forests of  
England," by J. Charles Cox, LL.D., F.S.A.**

By the HON. F. STRUTT.

**T**HIS book, which is one of the series of the Antiquary Books published by Messrs. Methuen, deserves some mention in this *Journal*, not only because it contains probably the best account yet written of the Royal Forests in the county of Derby and its immediate neighbourhood—namely, the Forests of the High Peak, Duffield Frith, Needwood, and Sherwood—but because it is the work of the Rev. J. Charles Cox, to whom the Derbyshire Archæological Society owes its origin, who was a former Editor of its *Journal*, and who has done so much to make the history of his native county interesting and attractive to the general reader.

In attempting in a few lines to give a short account of this work, we shall think it best to confine ourselves to the accounts of the two forests which will, we think, be of the greatest interest to Derbyshire readers; and we shall also pass over the eight preliminary chapters, which contain, more particularly, an account of the laws, the officers, the courts, the customs, and the general history of these Royal Forests.

These chapters alone would afford interesting reading to, and would be found most useful by, those who are taking up the study of the sport and of the forest life in England six or seven centuries ago.

The forest of the High Peak was probably one of the most extensive in England, and covered altogether an area of forty

and a half square miles. From the days of Henry I. it was divided into three districts—Campana on the south and south-west, Longdendale on the north and north-west, and Hopedale on the east.

The bounds of the Forest, as set forth in the forest pleas held 1286, were as follows, given in an English dress:—

The metes and bounds of the Forest of the Peak begin on the south at the New Place of Goyt, and thence by the river Goyt as far as the river Etherow; and so by the river Etherow to Langley Croft at Longdenhead; thence by a certain footpath to the head of Derwent; and from the head of Derwent to a place called Mythmstede (Mytham Bridge); and from Mytham Bridge to the river Bradwell; and from the river Bradwell as far as a certain place called Hucklow to the great dell (cavam cave?) of Hazelbache; and from that dell as far as Little Hucklow; and from Hucklow to the brook of Tideswell, and so to the river Wye; and from the Wye ascending up to Buxton, and so on to the New Place of Goyt.

This great forest—one of the most important of the Royal hunting-grounds, and visited for that purpose, we know, by members of the Royal family, and occasionally by the Sovereign himself—was, it must be remembered, used by no means exclusively for hunting purposes, or for growing timber, or for letting out to the various officers of the forest or to other tenants, but was in part farmed and used for the purposes of horse-breeding by the King himself and by members of the Royal family.

We are told that at the Forest Eyre (a court for hearing and determining pleas of the Forest)—

Full lists of assarts and purprestures that had occurred since 1261 under the respective bailiffs were also presented at the 1286 pleas.

As to horses, it was presented that the Queen Consort had a stud of 115 mares with their foals in Campana (one of the divisions of the Peak Forest), to the great injury of the Forest, but that many had horses and mares in Campana under cover of their belonging to the Queen. Peter de Shatton, forester-of-fee, had eleven horses and mares feeding in Campana, whose pasturage was rated at 2s. Nineteen other foresters had horses and mares in various proportion, all claiming to be part of the Queen's stud. They were all ordered to remove their animals, and had to pay pasturage value, and in addition, fines varying from 1s. to 4s., save in the cases of Adam Gomfrey John Daniel and Cecily Foljambe who were pardoned.

A good deal is also said in the details of farm stock for one year about the sheep, and there are various references to the milking of the ewes in the Peak Accounts; and we are by this

reminded that from the time of Domesday to the time of Queen Elizabeth the making of cheese from sheeps' milk was universal throughout England, as we find it is still in the warmer climates of the south of Europe, the Canary Islands, and many other places.

Of course, no history or account of Peak Forest would be complete without frequent references and allusions to the Castle, that home of the first Peverel, one of William the Conqueror's most favoured followers, and the place which, in the first two or three hundred years after its erection, was not unfrequently the abode of the Sovereign himself.

It is rather sad to find that the only use to which this romantically-situated stronghold was put for many years before it became a ruin, was that of a prison for felons and murderers and offenders against the Forest Laws.

In June, 1585, in the reign of Elizabeth, it appears to have become almost a ruin, and the Commissioners who reported as to its state were ordered to put it in repair. It appears, however, never from that time to have been made use of, either as prison, or stronghold, or residence of any kind.

It was as early as 1635, in the reign of Charles I., that the first steps were taken for the destruction of the deer and for the partial enclosure of this large domain. In that year the landowners and inhabitants within the Forest petitioned the King, complaining of the severity, trouble, and rigour of the Forest Laws, and praying that the deer, which were in sufficient numbers to do considerable damage to the crops in the Forest and its purlieus, might be destroyed, and asking to be allowed to compound by enclosing and improving the same. Thereupon the King issued a Commission of Inquiry under the Duchy seal; and directed that two juries should be impanelled, appointing a surveyor to assist them. The first jury viewed the whole Forest and its purlieus, and presented that the King might improve and enclose one moiety in consideration of his rights, and that the other moiety should be enclosed by the tenants, commoners, and freeholders. The other jury was

impanelled to consider the question of the towns within the purlieus, and they represented that the King, in view of the largeness of the commons belonging to the towns of Chelmorton, Flagg, Taddington, and Priestcliffe, might reasonably have for improvement and enclosure one-third, and the remaining two-thirds for the commoners and freeholders.

Both Crown and inhabitants were well pleased with the result. The commons were measured, and surveys made that divided the land into three sorts—best, middle, and worst—and the King's share was staked, and maps showing the results were drafted.

The surveys were not completed till 1640, and all the preliminaries having been adjusted, the King caused all the deer to be destroyed or removed; and since that date, the report expressly states, there were never any deer whatever within the High Peak Forest.

"The extirpation of the deer was almost immediately followed by the beginning of the 'troubulous times' that preceded the actual outbreak of the Civil War, and hence further proceedings came, for a time, to an end."

We may here remind our readers that by referring to vol. xxiv. of this *Journal* they will find some account of the enclosure of Peak Forest, taken from original MSS., showing how various Peak families obtained a considerable part of their estate.

Duffield Frith, the other Royal Forest in the county of Derby, was, as is well known, for a considerable time the property of the Ferrers family, until, in the reign of Henry III., in consequence of the rebellion, their estates were forfeited to the Crown. These estates were then granted to Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, in whose family they remained till, on the accession to the throne of Henry Duke of Lancaster, they again became Crown property.

Here again, as in the High Peak Forest, we find that great use must have been made of the Royal Forest both for horse and cattle-breeding and for dairy purposes. We may presume

that, as the land of Duffield Frith is richer than the land of the High Peak, that is the reason why we hear much more of cows and less of sheep. It is interesting, also, to be told with certainty that in Ravensdale Park stood the chief lodge of Duffield Frith, which was the hunting seat of the Earls and Dukes of Lancaster when in this part of their estates, and which was occasionally honoured by the presence of royalty.

In the receipts of John Hulleston, the Receiver of the Ward of Hulland, there is an account of very considerable repairs being done to the lodge and park of Ravensdale during one year. Even the price of the painted glass for the windows of the Manor Chapel and the iron for making the bars for the support of these windows is mentioned. It seems a pity that beyond a stone or two of the foundations of this lodge touched now and then by the plough, and the name, Ravensdale Park, which is still attached to that particular hamlet, all memory and all trace of this ducal residence should have long since so absolutely disappeared.

The word forest, we all know, does not necessarily apply to a wild space covered with timber, but all who have read these accounts of the two Derbyshire Royal forests will realise that in these forests, at any rate, even supposing they were not all covered with trees, there must have been a noble display of timber. This timber in Duffield Frith, as anyone can realise who has wandered through some of the remaining indigenous woods of Alderwasley, or along the now enclosed valley of the Ecclesburne, must have been principally oak, with birch on the more sandy and higher ground.

If any reader of the history of the Forest of the High Peak should doubt the probability of the oak growing in any profusion in the valleys of the higher part of Derbyshire, let him go and explore the Baslow and Beeley ends on the east side of the river in Chatsworth Park, where he can still get a faint idea of how beautiful the rocky valleys of Derbyshire must have been when full of oaks of noble size, and he will then also, perhaps, begin to wonder why greater efforts are not now being

made to plant and to re-afforest a good deal of the land in this county which at present is almost unproductive, and bringing little or no profit either to its owner or its tenant.

In this very short sketch that he has given of this interesting book, the writer does not pretend to have been able to do justice to it. He hopes, however, that this mention of the book may induce many of the readers of the Derbyshire Archæological Society's *Journal* to study it themselves, and by doing so gain a greater knowledge of and a more thorough insight into the life led by their ancestors in days of old.