

10. ALICE HOLT FOREST

Although Alice Holt Forest is not geographically within the Parish of Wrecclesham it is 'on our doorstep' and has since early times had a significant influence upon the village. It has been a source of employment, of refuge, wild life, timber and especially today of recreation.

That the Forest is ancient is undoubted there is plenty of evidence of its existence in prehistoric times and it was certainly busy in Roman Times. It is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, but nor is Wrecclesham for that matter. Only a few forests are mentioned by name but there is reference in the Hampshire section of Domesday to 'the King's Forest' which is thought may refer to Alice Holt, or alternatively to Wolmer Forest¹. I attach a very interesting article that appeared in 2010 in the freely distributed Listings Magazine R & A which can give you more background information than I could hope to give in this briefing paper.

Several writers on Wrecclesham have spoken of the links that the Village had with Alice Holt. Pat Heather in a study she undertook, but which remains unpublished puts it thus:

'One of the advantages of having a common boundary with the Holt was the right of the people in the tithing to intercommon in the Forest and to lop and top trees. These rights were disputed from time to time.One can be sure that the villagers protested their rights vigorously as there was no limit to the number or kind of cattle that they could pasture in the forest.Proximity to the wood encouraged particular occupations such as charcoal burning hurdle making and carpentry, which were staple village trades over the centuries, such trades being combined with farming. ... A woodland trade coupled with rights in the forest, plus some illegal poaching on the side, were necessary to make a small farm viable.'

The late Jeffrey Burr, a solicitor, and former Wrecclesham resident, in another unpublished report, talks of the people of Wrecclesham being:

'a very independent group and indeed one could almost describe them as difficult, vexatious, lawless, as well as godless, as even its very name implies: The place of outlaws and outcasts..... The Alice Holt and the River Wey formed an almost impenetrable area, spreading to the east and the west and south, offering a sparse living to many but welcome help to those people who had the cause to find sanctuary from the law, and particularly from the fearsome punishments meted out against the transgressors.... Sufficient time would have elapsed for the news of any unwelcome law enforcement officer coming from Farnham to have been passed to any fugitive who had reason to fear discovery and for those concerned to disappear and fade into the forest until the danger had passed. Indeed they could well have remained in the forest for any length of time for there was a splendid source of meat from deer and coney. Water was there in abundance. The people on the edge would be willing to sustain their fellows in trouble. One could imagine the sympathy that men of the tithing have had for their neighbours and friends in trouble, bearing the fearful penalties so often inflicted by their rulers.'

The local population was notorious both for its poaching and for stealing the timber. In Norman times strict Forest laws were introduced. Poaching was a capital offence. However

¹ The Royal Forest South of Bordon.

despite this it still carried on. The attachment gives more detail of these incursions by locals and upon the value of the Forest to the wider economy. From Pottery in Roman Times, through providing royal hunting opportunities, and in the 19th Century, to growing large quantities of timber for sailing ships to counter the threats from the French. Improved management since the 19th Century firstly, following the arrival in the of the Commissioners for Woods and Forests in the 19th Century, and the Forestry Commission in 1924, While still providing timber there are two important changes in emphasis. The first was the establishment of the Forest Research Centre in the 1950's and more recently the development of recreational opportunities to cater for a growing population enjoying more leisure time.

Today Wrecclesham residents no doubt enjoy their walks or cycle ride in the woods. Their children enjoy the pleasures of the adventurous activities that are provided, and if they can afford it,²as the Forestry Commission web site says:

Something for Everyone. NEW Tree Top Junior at Alice Holt.

One of the **best days out in Surrey**, there's something for the **whole family at Alice Holt Forest, near Farnham**. Whether you're wanting to **'monkey around'** in cool adventure playgrounds, ride through the forest on the great bike trails or enjoy our 'classic' **Tree Top Adventure, you'll have a wonderful day out.**

Alice Holt (close to Farnham and Guildford) is home to our **original Go Ape Tree Top Adventure**. We'll brief you for safety before you **fly down our zip-wires**, leap off our Tarzan Swing and tackle our obstacles whilst enjoying some **brehtaking scenery**.

If you're looking for outdoor activities for children, then Go Ape's got the answer with Tree Top Junior. Fun filled days out of canopy exploring, trail blazing and obstacles for all to enjoy. You'll **negotiate crossings and finish on a high (literally) with an awesome zip wire.**

Finally I would like to thank Brian Greig, a well-known Wrecclesham resident, for providing me with the information I am attaching. Apart from his interest in sport in Wrecclesham, Brian worked for many years at the Alice Holt Research Centre and he will be coming to our meeting on Saturday perhaps to add to the content of this briefing paper.

² Currently £25 and £18 for juniors and £33 for adult. An expensive day out for a family four!!