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Introduction

William Augustus Raper's Notebook 1 has been extracted from The Ashdown Forest Dispute 1876-1882 by Professor Brian Short which presents a revealing case study in the environmental politics of Victorian England.

On 13 October 1877 John Miles was cutting litter (bracken, heather, gorse etc.) on Ashdown Forest on behalf of his landlord Bernard Hale, barrister, J.P., Deputy Lieutenant of Sussex, and Ashdown commoner. William Pilbeam, one of Earl de la Warr's keepers, approached him and told him to stop cutting. Miles later recounted 'I went on cutting', thus initiating the Ashdown Forest case, brought by Reginald Windsor, seventh Earl de la Warr as Lord of the Manor of Duddlewell against Hale and Miles, to test the extent of Hale's common rights. Expensive legal opinion was hired by both sides since many commoners were titled and wealthy landowners; and William Augustus Raper, a Battle solicitor, was engaged to assemble evidence on behalf of the defendants. Some of this evidence is transcribed as the main body of text in this volume - over 100 depositions collected by Raper in 1878 and 1879 from elderly Forest residents.

Raper's visits to his informants' cottages were recorded in five small notebooks whose contents are not easily deciphered. This volume presents their full transcription, together with a contextualising introduction to the Forest and its customs and to the complex legal actions of 1876-1882.

These narratives are invaluable sources for the history of Sussex, for genealogy, and for environmental, legal, economic, social and cultural history. Herein are recounted the main environmental and local political themes of this surviving area of Victorian open Forest, seen quite unusually from the perspective of rural working people.

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Baker, Martha. Capital witness. Bring Family Bible.

Wife of James Baker, living at New Lodge, Hartfield. Maiden name Langridge, born 1st July 1810 at Fletching. Parents removed to Coleman's Hatch in 1817. Have an entry of the date in Father's Family Bible in his writing. Father followed trade of Blacksmith. In April 1823 went away to service to East Grinstead and London till 1845 when I came home to Coleman's Hatch and was married in June 1845 and came to live at New Lodge which my husband farmed where we have remained till the present time.

When we came to Coleman's Hatch, the Holly Hill and Hartfield Grove properties and the house we lived in all belonged to Colonel Young. The first year we were at Colemans Hatch my mother and I and the other children cut 9 load of brakes on the Forest: 3 for Colonel Young, 3 for Mr. George Adkins of New Bridge Mill and 3 for ourselves. Colonel Young and Adkins paid us 10s. a load for cutting. I had a new frock out of the money. I remember the occasion because we took the baby in its cradle out on the Forest and my sister Martha and I upset it between us. My Father was one who bit before he barked and he gave me and my sister a good hiding when we got home.

We cut for Colonel Young and Mr. Adkins the following year, but I do not recollect how much. (Colonel Young farmed Holly Hill and Hartfield Grove which was then called Snow's Hole.) I believe every year I was home we cut brakes for Colonel Young and helped offset the rent that way till he sold our house. We always cut brakes for our own hogs.

Before I went to service Colonel Young sold the Hartfield Grove portion and our house and smith's shop to Captain Hall who built Hartfield Grove House.

We used to cut brakes for others. I remember cutting some for Lower Parrock Farm. While I was living at Colemans Hatch, Captain Kidd occupied New Lodge and I frequently worked there.

I used to work in the garden at Holly Hill and frequently played with Colonel Young's children and I well remember that they then used litter in the yards both at Holly Hill and at Snows

Hole. I have seen old Jack Buckman (one of Colonel Young's workmen, now dead) bringing the team in off the Forest with litter to Holly Hill. I was at Mrs Buckman's house at the time helping her, as she had a thorn in her right forefinger which nearly cost her her arm. I remember Buckman stopping the team and coming in to see his wife and telling me to send for Dr Wallis at Hartfield at once.

In those days Colonel Young had peat off the Forest for the greenhouse fire at Holly Hill. I used to fetch it from the lodge and make up the fire. The peat used to come from the Bog near Newbridge. My Father used to cut a great deal of peat there. I used to help him lay out the pieces and I remember on one occasion when so engaged falling into the water there and getting into a dreadful mess. I was frightened by the "efts" swimming over my arm and when I got out my Father boxed my ears.

We always burnt at our house peat and turf which we got off the Forest. Buckman used peat and turf. We always cut birch, willow and alder on the Forest for fuel at our house at Colemans Hatch, but we were not allowed to cut oak or beech.

In those days Robert Edwards (now dead) was Reeve. He often saw us at work. We were never interfered with, nor have I ever heard of any payment.

I well remember Mr. Augustus Elliott Fuller of Ashdown House. He kept a private pack of harriers and hunted over the Forest frequently. He would often stop with his dogs outside our door and call out 'Langridge, be you ready for a hunt?' and if my Father was not busy he would go hunting.

I recollect when living at home that the occupiers of Upper Parrock and Lower Parrock farms used to send their teams on the Forest for litter. I cannot remember their names, but I recollect one of the teams when I was down for a holiday pulling up at my Father's when loaded with litter in order to get a shoe put on one on one of the horses. I think that was Langridge's team from Upper Parrock. I believe the carter was 'Champion' Young. I have seen loads and loads of litter carried by the farmers past my Father's shop. Most of them pulled up at the Inn adjoining. Among them I remember Mr. Edgar's team from Pixton's. The wagon broke down when loaded from a linchpin coming out or something of the kind and my Father had to do it up temporarily. Just afterwards I went for a month to Mrs Edgar to help in the nursery for a month Mr. Edgar was a sort of gentlemen farmer. Colonel Moor now lives at Pixtons.

Before I went to service I helped occasionally in the nursery at Mr. Nash's at Forest House which now belongs to Mr. Hale. They always had litter on the farm from the Forest. I used to see it.

Before I went to service, Chart used to keep a grocer and draper's shop at Marsh Green which Cox now keeps. I used to go down there shopping and I well remember that, in passing through the yard at Harts Farm which then belonged to Mr. Augustus Fuller, I have seen them many times unloading litter. That was the only shop nearer than Hartfield village or Forest Row and I used to go there every week, sometimes for 'tin and things for Father'.

I know Fincham Farm close by. It originally belonged to Tom Young who left it to his nephew William Young. William's cousin Harry Young disputed it and went to law and gained it and I remember Harry Young and his party coming home after the trial. I used to go to Fincham quite frequently with Father when he went round to settle his bills because I kept his books. I used to see litter and turf and peat there and I have often seen them there since my marriage as I was a great friend of Mrs Harry Young.

Before I went to service Jack Tasker was tenant of Shawhurst Farm now belonging to Mr. Hale. We did his work at our shop. I have seen his team many a time with litter from the Forest. *"Old Johnny and I was very good friends."*