The Royal Forest of Bere,
Bedhampton Deer Park,
Havant Thicket (Havant Chase)
Rowland's Castle Deer Park

Rowland’s Castle Village Green, an unsigned pencil and wash sketch by Brian Peskett, *c.*1990. It captures perfectly its form as an ancient exit-funnel from Idsworth Common and the Forest of Bere.

John Pile

October 2020

£2.50

Havant Local History Booklet No. 124
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The term ‘forest’ is used for any large area of woodland, but 'Royal Forest' is a legal term describing a tract of land, not necessarily completely covered with trees, which was under Forest Law. I shall use the word ‘forest’, with a lower case letter, in its former sense and 'Forest', with a capital letter, for Royal Forest. A Forest was a portion of territory within clearly defined bounds within which the right of hunting was reserved exclusively to the king, and Forest Law was probably formulated soon after the Norman Conquest to preserve the 'vert and venison' of the Forest – the herbage upon which the Beasts of the Chase subsisted – and the animals themselves. To ensure that Forest Law was upheld it was supported by a system of Forest Courts and a hierarchy of officers. It is not proposed to go into the details of these administrative arrangements or the definition of 'Beasts of the Forest' and the reader wanting more information should refer to J C Cox's *The Royal Forests of England,* (1905), or the more recent book by Charles R Young, *The Royal Forests of Medieval England,* (1979).

Kings and aristocrats enjoyed hunting deer and wild boar long before the Norman Conquest but it was William the Conqueror who imposed the Norman Forest system on his English kingdom. There is ample documentary evidence that the pre-Conquest kings hunted over extensive tracts of countryside, but there is nothing to suggest that they claimed exclusive hunting rights as did William I and his successors.

Forest Law did not preclude the use of the Forest for pasture or agistment by those entitled to it and intercommoning in the Forest was probably practised long before the *adventus Saxonicum*. The Laws of the Forest were administered and enforced by the Officers of the Forest and the Forest Courts and in this respect the Forest of Bere differed little, if at all, for example, from the New Forest.

However, there is some evidence that enclosures and lodges were set up for the use of huntsmen in suitable areas of countryside in Saxon times. There are 35 references in Domesday Book to 'parks' already in existence by 1086, and in our area two of the entries relating to estates in Soberton refer to Earl Roger's park, probably within the bounds of the Forest, of which half a hide extended over Herbert the Chamberlain's manor and one virgate over Henry the Treasurer's. The deer-park was probably a Norman innovation, but it may have been based on an earlier arrangement such as the 'hay' OE *haga*, an enclosure which appears to have been used for the management of deer and their maintenance during the winter months.

The area of the Forest of Bere varied considerably over time and it is now impossible to say with any certainty what it was at any period prior to the 1688 perambulation. My estimate is that the area within the 1688 Regard was somewhat less than 11,000 acres, or 17 square miles and much of it, particularly along its southern edge had long been enclosed. In theory, Forest Law allowed the reigning monarch to afforest any subject's land he chose, but in practice this right was tempered by the power of the barons who were concerned to maintain full control over their lands.

The area of the kingdom under Forest Law had reached its maximum by the reign of King John (1199-1216) and at this time the Forest of Bere may have extended to the south coast and to the Hampshire/Sussex

border, but following John's concessions at Runnymede in 1215, Henry III disafforested all the lands that had been afforested by Henry II, Richard I and John, and these disafforested lands became the Purlieus which were then subject to special laws. By 1301 the Forest of Bere was reduced to its minimum extent, possibly comprising only the two areas of Crown Demesne as perambulated and recorded in 1301 (Katharine A. Hanna (ed.), *The Cartularies of Southwick Priory*, Hampshire Record Series (HRS) 9 (1), II 54, 55) and perhaps a small area of about four acres at Bulls Lodge in Waterlooville.

It is likely that the Norman Forest of Bere extended from the River Meon in the west to the Sussex county boundary in the east, but three portions of it were exempted from Forest Law at an early date and it is possible that they were never under Forest Law. The three areas in question correspond with the northern parts of the later parishes of Bedhampton, Havant and Warblington. These would not have been distinguished as parishes in Norman times but as manors belonging, in 1086, respectively to Hugh de Port, the monks of St Swithun's in Winchester, and Roger, Earl of Montgomery. Bedhampton Deer Park was enclosed within a bank on which stood a timber fence and an internal ditch. Inside the park were fish ponds, a rabbit warren and a keeper's lodge. There may have been gates at the north and south entrances to the park with attendant gate-keepers. In addition to serving as a manorial larder, the tenants of the manor would have had access to the park, at certain times of the year, for a payment, to depasture their cattle and pigs.

The details of the administration of the Forest are perhaps best studied with reference to the introductory sections to David Stagg's *A Calendar of New Forest Documents 1244-1334*, HRS 3, (1979) and *A Calendar of New Forest Documents: the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries*, HRS

5, (1983). By the late 18th century the Forest of Bere had been divided for administrative purposes into two ‘walks’: the West Walk and the East Walk. The principal lodge or headquarters of the administration was on the site of West Lodge in West Walk and a subsidiary lodge, Creech Lodge, was on the western edge of East Walk. A third and smaller lodge for an under-keeper was Bulls Lodge. The Constable of Portchester Castle was, *ex officio*, Warden of the Forest of Bere.

West Lodge was set within a large banked and ditched enclosure with the rounded outline typical of early medieval assarts (enclosures from the 'waste') and its origin is suggested by a find, close to the Lodge, in 1833 of a large hoard (now in the British Museum) of 259 silver coins and two gold rings. The coins comprised 78 of Edward the Confessor, 159 of Harold and 22 of William the Conqueror. Although there is no definite link between the hoard and the Lodge, such a link seems likely and suggests that the lodge, and therefore the Forest, were established very soon after the Conquest. On the other hand it is possible that West Lodge was on the site of a pre-Conquest lodge within a Saxon *haga*.

The boundaries of the Forest of Bere were imposed over an existing patchwork of lay and church estates of largely pre-Conquest origin and were determined entirely by geographical and geological considerations rather than existing landholdings. The metes and bounds of the Forest as recorded in perambulations often proceeded directly from one heap of stones or a marked tree to another or followed existing tracks. This resulted in many of the manorial estates lying partly within and partly outside the Forest. Manorial wastes (commons) such as Soberton Heath, Anthill Common, and Purbrook Common were similarly divided, and it is an interesting feature of the Forest of Bere that so many of these commons – a few still unenclosed – extended beyond the Forest boundary. These peripheral commons usually possessed 'exit-funnels'

which facilitated the management of livestock as it was driven off the common and into a droveway (Fig. 3). The exits were gated and the names of many of them, such as Eastland Gate and Forest Gate, survived long after the commons disappeared. It is sometimes said that these gates mark the Forest boundary but this is not the case as the gates gave access to areas of common before the Forest was reached. Livestock driven through the gates would find its own way onto the Forest.

Rather confusingly, in the light of what I have said above about purlieus, this term, as used in the Forest of Bere, also had a special meaning which was applied to that part of a manorial estate that lay within the regard of the Forest, e.g. Garnier's Purlieu and the Bishop of Winchester's Purlieu. Although purlieu-holders and their tenants were restricted by Forest Law as to how they could use their own land, the usual rights of common appear to have been largely unaffected.

The Thirteenth Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the State and Conditions of the Woods, Forests, and Land Revenues of the Crown [etc.], (1792) lists 16 purlieus in the Forest of Bere equally disposed between the two walks. A similar list in the margin of the 1301 perambulation of La Rode – the Crown Demesne of Creech Lodge – lists nine lordships in the 'East Bailey' and eight in the 'West Bailey' of the Forest. Clearly there is a relationship between the two lists, but unfortunately they cannot be easily matched, although it might be achieved with a little research. In 1301, eight of the purlieus were in Church hands, but by 1792 the number had been reduced to two, both belonging to the Bishop of Winchester.

The Thirteenth Report recommended disafforestation as a means of improving the productivity of the unenclosed Forest. It was claimed, not without justification, that disafforestation would enable purlieu owners

and their tenants to enclose and use suitable land for farming and the growth of timber or coppice. The purlieu owners were obviously in favour of disafforestation, but the small commoners stood to lose far more in the form of common rights than they would gain in productive agricultural land. Nevertheless, matters moved quickly following the recommendations of *The Thirteenth Report*, and an Act of Parliament of 1810 enabling disafforestation and enclosure to proceed was followed in 1812 by the extinguishing of common rights and in 1814 by the allotment of the enclosed plots. Although changes have occurred over the last two hundred years, most of the straight field and property boundaries we see today are of this date. The more irregular boundaries generally have a much earlier origin and are often of early medieval date.

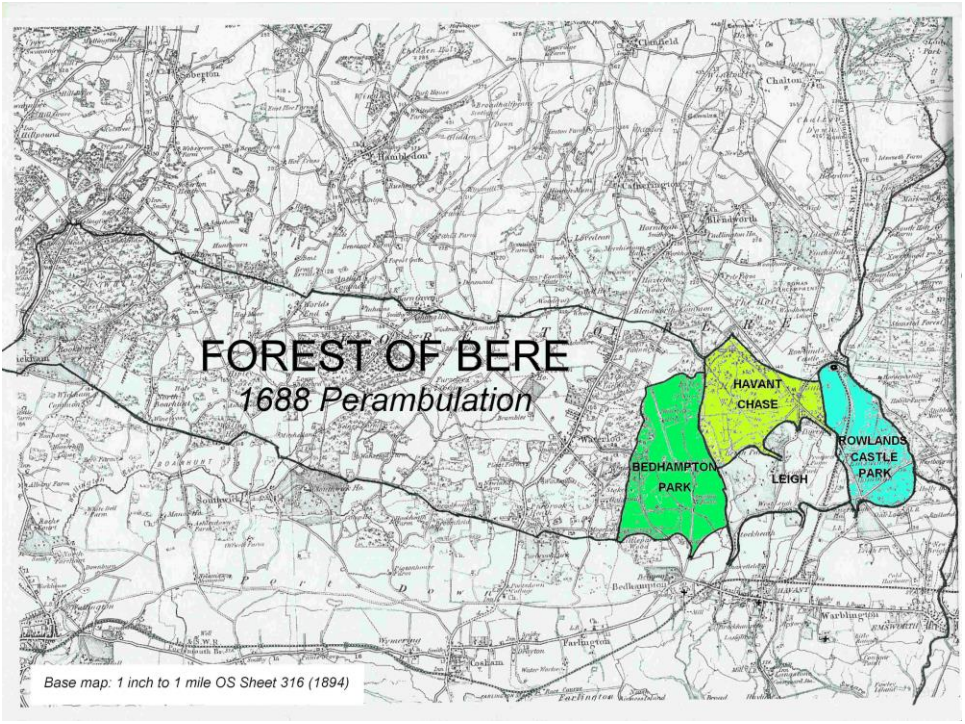

Fig. 1 The bounds of the Forest of Bere according to the 1688 perambulation. Also shown are Bedhampton and Rowland's Castle deer parks, Havant Thicket/Havant Chase, (Havant Thicket was the Bishop of Winchester's hunting chase during the Middle Ages), and the territory of Leigh, all of which may once have been within the 'Regard of the Forest'.

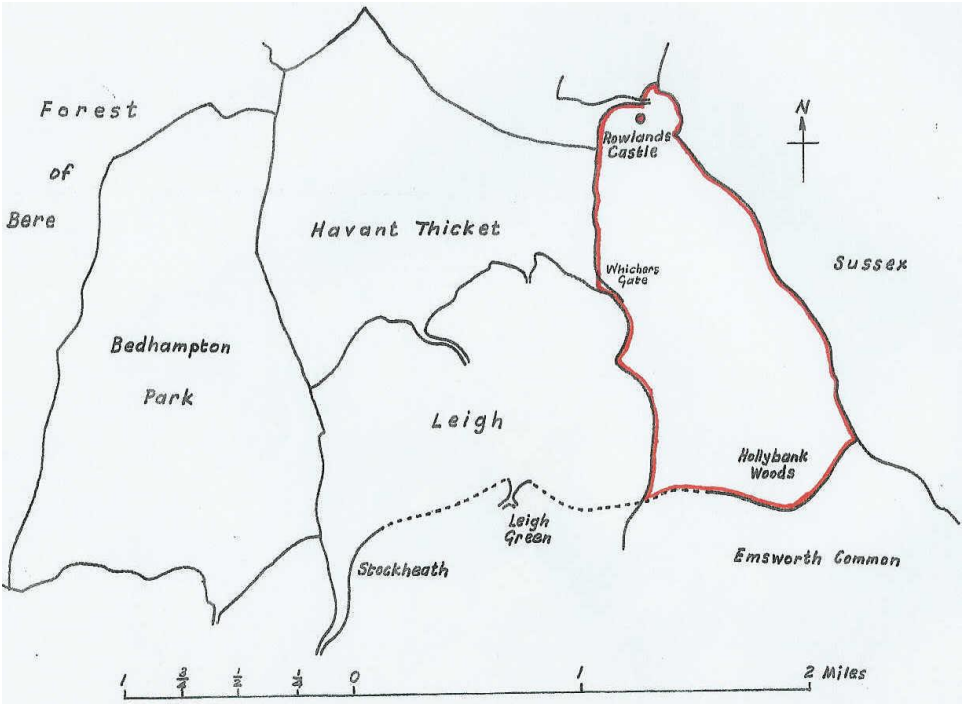

Fig. 2 Bedhampton deer park, Havant Thicket, the suggested boundary of Rowland's Castle deer park and Leigh. The wood-pasture exit-funnels at Stockheath and Leigh Green are evidence that the whole of Leigh may, at one time, have been common wood-pasture, however, the early history of this area is far from clear. (Pile 2005, 2017)

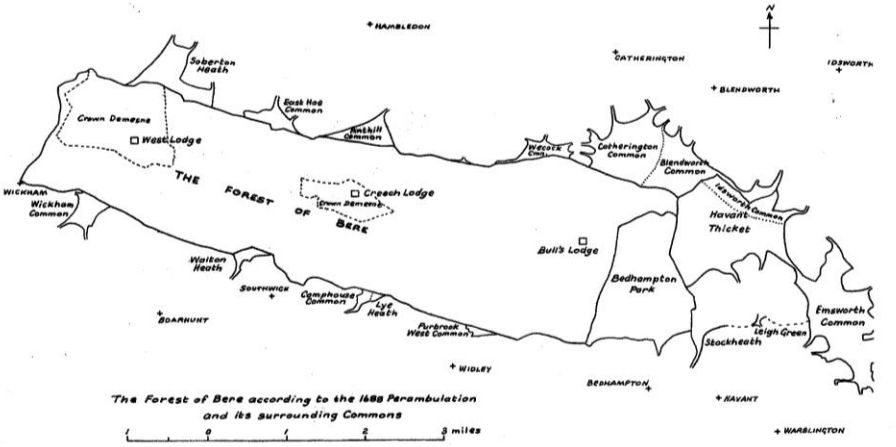

Fig. 3. The Forest of Bere in 1688 and its peripheral commons. The many exit-funnels indicate the existence of droveways serving the surrounding communities that had rights of common on the commons and within the Forest.

Rowland's Castle Deer Park

There can be little doubt that Rowland's Castle – the Norman motte and bailey in the extreme north of Warblington parish – lay within its own park (Fig 2). There are many examples of parks across the country and a typical park was roughly oval in shape with the castle at one of the narrow ends. Examples are Devizes in Wiltshire and Merdon in Hampshire (Crawford 1953, figs 31 & 34). James Bond, in his survey of parks in medieval Wessex, suggested that 'The total number of medieval parks in England will probably never be known' and his map of mainland Hampshire includes 67 parks of which 5 were royal, 17 episcopal, 9 monastic and 36 'private' (Bond 1994, 133, fig 6.7).

The enclosing park pale would have been a fence built on a bank with an internal ditch, making it difficult for deer to get out once they were inside. At Rowland's Castle it is suggested that the whole of the northernmost part of Warblington parish was emparked with the present Hollybank, stretching between Havant parish on the west and the Sussex county boundary on the east, forming the southern limit of the deer park.

The purpose of a park was to provide private hunting and a ready supply of venison. It might also provide pannage for pigs and pasture and browse for cattle. Many parks, like that at Bedhampton, included a rabbit warren and fish-ponds (Pile 1983, 1990). Parks also provided underwood for firewood and a variety of other purposes, as well as valuable timber trees.

The Rowland's Castle motte and bailey, which was partially destroyed during the construction of the Havant to Waterloo railway line, is of a type introduced by the Normans in 1066 to enforce their rule over the country, though the albeit sparse archaeological and documentary evidence suggests that at Rowland's Castle the castle or strong-point was built in the 12th century under the lordship of Robert of Bellême, Earl of Shrewsbury, lord of the manor of Warblington from 1098 to *c*.1112, or of the de Courci

family who were lords of the manor from *c.*1112 until 1203 when their English lands were forfeited to king John when Robert de Courci joined Philip Augustus of France.

Why a castle was built here is a matter for speculation. Rowland's Castle lies at the junction of the clays of the Hampshire Basin and the chalk lands of the South Downs, therefore commanding a variety of economic resources, including sheep and cereals to the north and extensive common grazing lands and woodlands to the south. The castle also commanded an important route from the sea and the coastal plain, through the forest to the Downs and perhaps ultimately to London. More local considerations may have been the protection of a droveway, immediately to the north of the castle, from Idsworth Common to Idsworth village and defence against the possibility of armed incursions from the Sussex side of the border during the unsettled reign of king Stephen (1135– 54).

The origin of the place-name 'Rowland's Castle' is explained by Richard Coates (Coates 1989):

t. Ed II Rolokescastel; 1369 Roulandes Castell; 1381 Roulakescastel. Whatever this name originally was, it became associated with the hero Roland of the twelfth-century French romance. The first part is indeed likely to be a man's name, and, to take it at face value, it may be a Frenchified (continental Germanic) *Hrōdlaik (or less likely Scandinavian *Hróðlaug, a woman's name), which would have been introduced after the Norman Conquest. Castel 'castle' is also a borrowing from Norman French; the whole thing is a medieval rather than a Dark Age name.

* denotes a hypothetical form of a name whose former existence can reasonably be inferred.

The early history of Rowland's Castle is complex and obscure and the best way to approach it is through the study of its landscape and the surviving

documentary evidence, the earliest and most reliable being Domesday Book compiled in 1086. Domesday Book looks both back to the period immediately prior to the Conquest and forward to 1086 when most of the large estates, formerly held by the Saxon nobility and its retainers, had passed to the Conqueror's family and his supporters. Present-day Rowland's Castle is divided between two ancient ecclesiastical parishes: Chalton and Warblington, the boundary, running along the wall of 'Deerleap', almost certainly representing that between the two Saxon estates and subsequently the Norman manors. Before the Conquest, both Chalton and Warblington belonged to Godwin, Earl of Wessex. After the Conquest they were granted to Roger, Earl of Montgomery, and later of Shrewsbury, and they remained in his family until 1102 when Robert de Belêsme forfeited his lands for his rebellion against Henry I. It was at this point that the lordship of the two manors was divided. In 1107 Chalton passed, as part of the Honour of Leicester, to Robert de Beaumont. A portion of this manor, subsequently becoming the manor of Idsworth, was granted to William de Ferrers and then to a succession of high-ranking officers in the king's household. After Robert de Belêsme's forfeiture Warblington passed initially to William de Courci, dapifer (royal steward) to Henry II and an influential baron.

Rowlands Castle's motte and bailey is of a well-known and widely distributed type of Norman stronghold and it must be supposed that it was constructed by a lord of the manor of Warblington who possessed the means and felt the need to do so. I have suggested, above, that this was during the time of the de Courci lordship, but it should be stressed that there is neither documentary nor artefactual evidence to support this date. A recent desk-based assessment of the site for a proposed development (CgMs Ref. No. MS/KB/11517, January 2010) concluded that it was of 12th century date and it was a seasonal residence or hunting lodge. The date is reasonable, but no evidence was given in support of either suggestion.

The evidence of the landscape, both as it is today and as it is shown on early maps, is of considerable interest and importance, but, unlike the documentary evidence which offers specific dates and events, it lacks a chronological framework. Nevertheless, a detailed study of the landscape is essential if we are to understand the early history of Rowland's Castle.

The present shape of Rowland's Castle's village green proclaims it to be a common pasture exit-funnel, typical of commons, particularly wood-pastures, across the country (Oliver Rackham, *The History of the Countryside,* 1986, pp. 141-2). This was the sole entry and exit point to Idsworth Common and the Forest of Bere for the use of tenants of the manor and tithing of Idsworth. That the tenants' animals had the range of the Forest as well as Idsworth Common is implied in a document of 1451 in which it is stated that the tenants of Soberton had rights of common throughout the Forest from the river Meon to 'Roulondes Castell' except in the close season (HRO Ref. No. 5M53/92, translated by Katharine A. Hanna, Portsmouth Record Series: *Deeds from Portsmouth and its area before 1547,* 2008, No. 1085). Although it is possible that the bounds of the Forest of Bere may have extended to Rowland's Castle immediately after the Conquest and during the period of its maximum extent in the 12th century, by 1451 they had been reduced to their 1688 extent; that is, the Forest extended no further than Bedhampton Deer Park and Havant Chase. Nevertheless, the manorial tenants of Idsworth and Rowland's Castle probably had access to the Forest via their common of Idsworth and Blendworth Common as these were contiguous and without any physical barriers to the movement of livestock. Julian Munby in *Cunliffe & Munby* (1985) appears to take a different view as his map of the Forest and the surrounding settlements that had access to it suggests that Idsworth tenants had rights of common pasture on Havant Chase but not in the Forest. Clearly, there is more research to be done on this point.

Charles J. Longcroft, (*A Topographical Account of the Hundred of*

Bosmere, 1857, p.149) says that in his day two fairs were held at Rowland's Castle, one on 12th May for horses, toys and pedlary and the other on 12th November for the sale of horses and pigs. Longcroft adds that there are no known grants or charters authorizing the fairs and he thought they may be of pre-Conquest origin. The fairs that Longcroft knew were clearly the remnants of earlier and more important events. The dates are significant; the 12th of May marked the date of the Spring turnout when the tenants' commonable livestock was turned out onto Idsworth Common from where it would find its way into the Forest. The fair provided an opportunity for commoners to buy and sell livestock before the turnout and no doubt it was a magnet for hucksters and dealers of all kinds from miles around. The 12th November was the time of the Winter heyning when the tenants' horses and cattle were rounded up and removed from the commons, providing another opportunity to buy and sell. It is not surprising that by Longcroft's time both fairs had lost their former purpose and were little more than pleasure fairs as both Idsworth Common and the Forest of Bere had been enclosed by Acts of Parliament in 1812. The enclosures would have had an immediate effect, not only on the farming community, some of whom would have welcomed the changes but the smaller tenants would certainly have lost far more than they gained. Eyewitness accounts are of the greatest interest and Joseph Holloway of East Leigh's description in verse of the May fair *c*.1829 is worth quoting in full:

Now let me tune a sprightlier lay
To Roland's annual gala day:—
To charms May Fair could boast of yore,
Tho' faded now to bloom no more;
Of all the crowds that once flock'd there,
Those profit, pleasure these to share—
Of all the herds once thither brought,
To be exchang'd, or sold and bought,
Now a few grunters form the whole,
To the "lords paramount" that pay toll.
Yet 'twere ungrateful if my muse
Should a few lines to these refuse,
Since many pleasant hours by thee,
May Fair, have been afforded me.
Some twenty years are past away,
Since all the gayest of the gay,
And all the fairest of the fair,
From far and near assembled there;
And youth and age from miles around,
At Roland's Castle Fair were found.

Joseph Holloway, *Sketches of Bel Air and Its Neighbourhood in Three Strolls*, printed by D. Wise, Havant, *c*.1829. Bel Air is East Leigh.

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Some Notes on the Forest of Bere

Enclosure timetable

1810 Enabling Act of Parliament for enclosure

1812 Common rights over the Forest extinguished

1814 Award of Forest land in lieu of common rights

The area under Forest Law was probably at it greatest extent in the 12th and 13th centuries. This appears to have been drastically reduced to the Crown Demesne under the perambulations of 1300-1, but was subsequently increased to its 1688 extent, although I do not know when this occurred.

The Forest bounds were apparently arbitrary and complete towns and villages might come within the scope of Forest Law. The 1688 perambulation of the Forest of Bere shows quite clearly that the line of the bounds often passed directly from one marker to the next with little regard to the local topography or to ownership.

The Thirteenth Report of 1792 estimates the total area under Forest Law at that time to be 'at least 25 square miles' or 16,000 statute acres, although my own estimate based on a detailed study of the 1688 perambulation, is that it was only 16 square miles (10,240 acres) in extent of which approximately 2 square miles (1,280 acres) was Royal Demesne, and 6½ square miles (4,160 acres) excluding the Royal Demesne, were already 'enclosed'. This is a considerable discrepancy which I am unable to account for as it is clear that the 1688 bounds were still in force at the time of parliamentary enclosure more than 120 years later. About 40% of the legal Forest was, therefore, already under some kind of cultivation although, without special dispensation, it probably remained within the 'range and browse' of the deer if not of

the commoners' ponies and cattle. I believe I have seen a reference to the fact that some of the Crown Demesne would also, at any one time, have been open to the commoners' livestock.

Perambulations of the Royal Forest seem to have been ordered only when changes to the bounds were made, although private perambulations of individual purlieus might be made at any time, particularly when there was any perceived threat or trespass. The term 'purlieu' as used in the Forest of Bere is defined in the *Thirteenth Report* as a landowner's or manorial lord's property within the Forest bounds which is thus subject to Forest Law. This is contrary to the definition to be found in most general books on royal forests and may be peculiar to the Forest of Bere.

The precise area under Forest Law (the Royal Forest of Bere) varied considerably over the years, but the bounds of the Forest recorded in 1688 are probably the same, or very similar, to those at the close of the 14th century after new afforestation by Edward III had increased the extent of the Forest following its drastic reduction under the Charter of the Forest of 1217. It is likely that the 1688 perambulation restored its extent to that which the Norman kings had brought under Forest Law after the Conquest, though no documentary evidence has survived to substantiate this.

The Norman Forest may have extended to the Sussex boundary, though three portions of it appear to have been exempted from Forest Law at an early date, or possibly they were never under it. The three areas in question correspond with the northern parts of the later parishes of Bedhampton, Havant and Warblington. At the time of Domesday Book (1086) these were portions of the three manors belonging respectively to Hugh de Port, the monks of St Swithun's, Winchester, and Roger, earl of Montgomery. Hugh's deer park was enclosed within a bank topped

with a fence and an internal ditch. Inside the park were fishponds, a rabbit warren and a keeper's lodge. There were probably gates at the northern and southern ends of the park with attendant gate-keepers, and in addition to serving as a manorial larder, the tenants of the manor were allowed access to the park (on payment of a fee) to depasture their cattle and pigs.

To the east of Bedhampton Park, Havant Chase was the monks' hunting forest (the Bishop of Winchester's after 1284), probably unenclosed but serving a similar purpose to the park. The area to the south of the chase was called Leigh and this had long been cleared and settled, perhaps continuously from Roman times. The hamlet of Leigh was eventually swept away with the enlargement of the Leigh Park estate in the 18th century.

Between Havant Chase and the county boundary was Rowland's Castle Park, probably enclosed like Bedhampton Park but having a motte and bailey castle at its northern end. The southern boundary of the park is probably represented today by the Hollybank, a broad and sweeping earthwork bank on the southern edge of Hollybank Woods. This deserves further documentary research and fieldwork.

What is remarkable is that the three early land units are clearly a continuation of the Forest of Bere and take it up to the Sussex county boundary, on the other side of which the pattern is continued. Immediately to the east of the county boundary are Stansted Forest and Stansted Park, both early land units like those on the Hampshire side, beyond which stretches the Forest of Arundel which, for historic reasons, was not a Royal Forest under Forest Law, but a private hunting chase belonging to the Earls of Arundel.

A chase was an unenclosed tract of land defined by metes and bounds

over which a subject, either a lay or ecclesiastical lord, had the exclusive right to hunt. The Bishop of Winchester possessed two chases within the area of the Forest of Bere and which were probably once part of the Forest. These were Hambledon Chase and Havant Chase (also known as Havant Thicket) occupying about 800 acres at the northern extremity of the manor of Havant. The bishop's tenants had rights of common pasture over Havant Chase and when it was enclosed in 1865 they were compensated for their loss.

Deer parks, unlike chases, were enclosed and the Bishop of Winchester possessed no fewer than 11 parks in Hampshire, including one at Hambledon. Bedhampton Park did not belong to the Bishop of Winchester but was part and parcel of the manor of Bedhampton and though the earliest surviving documentary evidence for its existence dates from the 13th century, it is likely to have had an earlier origin. It contained about 1,060 acres and like Havant Chase was situated near the northern extremity of the manor, although Padnell Common separated it from the boundary of Blendworth which was part of the Manor of Chalton.

Summary Chronology of the Forest of Bere

Before 1066 Common pasture intercommoned by tenants of surrounding estates.

After 1066 Imposition of Forest Law: area uncertain but probably similar to the 1688 perambulation.

12th Century Forest of Bere probably reached its maximum extent during this period.

1217 'Charter of the Forest' – All lands afforested by Henry II, Richard and John to be disafforested.

1300 Perambulations suggest that the 'Legal Forest' had been restricted to the Crown Demesne, the areas around West Lodge, Creech Lodge and Bull's Lodge.

1327-1377 New afforestations made by Edward III.

1630s Charles I attempts, unsuccessfully, to reafforest parts of the Forest included in perambulations made prior to 1217.

1688 Perambulation. Determination of new bounds or confirmation of existing bounds?

1792 *Thirteenth Report* recommends disafforestation.

1810 Act of Parliament for the disafforestation of The Forest of Bere.

1812 Common rights over the Forest of Bere extinguished.

1814 Forest of Bere enclosed and land divided between purlieu owners and their tenants.

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