BEAULIEU IN BOOKS

By books I mean books not by historians but by other writers—novelists, poets, travel writers, naturalists, who visited Beaulieu as some point in the past. Why did they come and what did they say? I suggest to you that observations by non-historians are an important, and perhaps a neglected, part of Beaulieu's history.

For reasons of time I have had to exclude Buckler's Hard which needs a talk all to itself.

I have divided the material into three parts: the Abbey, the Heaths and the River.

THE ABBEY

The earliest comments I have found are by John Leland, regarded as the father of English local history, who around 1540 visited the area and noted the importance of Beaulieu as a place of sanctuary, as did William Camden who refers to the "pretty monastery" and "pleasant situation" of Beaulieu in his description of Britain of 1610. But these were little more than passing remarks.

In 1793 Richard Warner, a clergyman who served as a curate in Boldre and later Fawley, and who wrote extensively about Hampshire, published a book called *Topographical Remarks relating to the South West Parts of Hampshire.* He had this to say about Beaulieu Abbey: "Perhaps few spots in the kingdom could have been ... better calculated for monastic seclusion than this. The deep woods with which it is almost environed throw an air of gloom and solemnity over the scene; while the stream that glides by its side afforded to the recluse a striking emblem of human life. It is a spot indeed which one cannot leave without reluctance; where one might covet to wear away existence, abstracted like the monk of old from the world."

This as we shall see was quite a common reaction from visitors to Beaulieu. They saw it as a place of peace, a welcome oasis, primarily because of the Abbey and its monastic past. But there were different reactions too.

One of the most interesting and distinguished travellers who commented on Beaulieu was the famous 19th century radical, William Cobbett. He was a

farmer, a journalist, member of Parliament for Oldham and for a time a prison inmate. He disapproved of governments, of the unreformed Westminster Parliament, of the aristocracy, of landowners and a good deal else. He was particularly interested in the situation of the agricultural labourer whom he considered to be oppressed. Between 1821 and 1826 he made a number of journeys on horseback throughout rural England and in 1830 he published his book *Rural Rides.* It's a classic of its kind—colourful, opinionated, spikey. He never minced words.

He visited the New Forest in October 1826. One day he sets out from Lyndhurst, clearly taking the route of the present Lyndhurst- Beaulieu road. We went, he says, "about six miles over a heath, even worse than Bagshot Heath, as barren as it is possible for a land to be." He is obviously talking about the heath country around what is now the station at Beaulieu Road.

As he progressed to Beaulieu he saw many thousands of pigs. Remember it was October, the pannage season. At one point he stopped his horse and counted 140 pigs within 50 yards. When he reached Beaulieu he met a villager and, pointing with his whip towards the ruins of the Abbey, asked whether there was a bridge to get across. The villager at once said that the building he was pointing at was not the Abbey. That, he said, was four miles further on, at a farm occupied by a person called John Biel. The Biels were an old Beaulieu family who for decades ran St. Leonard's farm. When Cobbett got there he quickly concluded that this was not the site of Beaulieu Abbey but, he wrote, the situation of St. Leonard's was a thousand times finer than that of the Abbey which he was to see later. He was really impressed by the views of the Needles, the Isle of Wight, Spithead etc.

He went to the ruined chapel at Saint Leonard's. He thought the exterior beautiful but found inside a pigsty and a goose pen. Later, having downed bread, cheese and beer provided by John Biel, and having lectured him about the origin of the name Beaulieu, Cobbett came back to Beaulieu village. He passed under the walls of the Abbey but didn't bother to investigate the ruins, stating rather pompously that you "seldom make much out by minute inquiry", and proceeded over what he called "again the intolerable heath" towards Marchwood.

He was clearly not a man for nature in the wild. He liked land on which you could grow turnips and produce what he thought were the essentials of life—bread, beer and bacon. I would give a great deal to learn who the villager was who told him that the building he was looking at was not the Abbey and diverted him to St. Leonards. Probably a well-rehearsed Beaulieu procedure for getting rid of unwanted strangers.

He is the only writer I have come across who, so far from being impressed by the Abbey, walked past it without even going to inspect it.

But now two writers whose imagination *was* fired by the Abbey.

X is kindly going to read for us the two opening paragraphs of a novel published in 1891. You may care to guess the book and author:

"The great bell of Beaulieu was ringing. Far away through the forest might be heard its musical clangour and swell. Peatcutters on Blackdown and fishers upon the Exe heard the distant throbbing rising and falling upon the sultry summer air. It was a common sound in those parts—as common as the chatter of the jays and the booming of the bittern. Yet the fishers and the peasants raised their heads and looked questions at each other, for the angelus had already gone and vespers was still far away. Why should the great bell of Beaulieu toll when the shadows were neither short nor long?"

"All round the Abbey the monks were trooping in. Under the long green-paved avenues of gnarled oaks and of lichened beeches the white-robed brothers gathered to the sound. From the vineyard and the vine-press, from the bovary or ox-farm, from the marl pits and salterns, even from the distant iron-works of Sowley and the outlying grange of St. Leonard's, they had all turned their steps homewards."

Any guesses?

So these are the opening words of *The White Company,* the novel which Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, published in 1891. This excellent novel is set during the Hundred Years War between England and France. The description of the mediaeval New Forest is very fine. Two of the main characters in the story are Hordle John, a Cistercian monk expelled from the Abbey, and Alleyne Edricson, a clerk from the Abbey..

What led Conan Doyle to start his book with the Abbey? He lived in a cottage at Emery Down for two or three years while researching it. So he did not have far to come to get to Beaulieu. He apparently visited the Abbey several times. A novelist of his quality would obviously have wanted to study the monastery in situ and sense its history and atmosphere before putting pen to paper. But he may have had other reasons for coming. There were many stories about the Abbey, then as now, involving the sighting of ghosts and other psychic phenomena. Sometime after publishing *The White Company* Conan Doyle became a spiritualist and wrote a good deal about spiritualism. Was he perhaps attracted by the ghost stories? We know from Lisa Varley's admirable book *Honourable Rebel* that he came here in 1926 having heard press stories of an archaeological excavation at the Abbey. This had revealed an oak coffin beneath a stone coffin, and in the oak coffin was the skeleton of a man with a hole in his skull. Lisa writes: "He was accompanied by a lady with long flowing clothes who, as a medium, made her own investigation. Initially unsuccessful, they were rewarded on a second visit when the medium saw a figure with a gold crown rise up out of the ground." Lisa Varley states that as a matter of fact.

By then Conan Doyle had bought a bigger house in the Forest and spent much time the area. When he died he was first buried with his wife in the grounds of his house in Surrey. Later, when the family sold that house, their bodies, were reinterred at Minstead, outside the church graveyard because of his anti-religious views. But the graveyard has since expanded and now includes their grave.

Whether or not Conan Doyle was interested in the Abbey for psychic reasons It is a considerable testament to the impact Beaulieu made on people that such a fine author should choose the Abbey to set the tone for one of his best novels.

Perhaps you would like to play the guessing game again. Y will read to us an excerpt from a much more recent novel. Who wrote it and what was it called?

"Of all the times, during the long years of his blind existence, it was on those sunny afternoons as he sat quietly meditating in the sheltered north wall of the Abbey cloister that Brother Adam felt most serene. It seemed to the younger monks that, being obviously very close to God, Brother Adam was in a silent

communion that it would be impious to interrupt. And sometimes he was. But sometimes, also, as he smelled the grass and the daisies in the cloister, and felt the warm sun ....it was another thought that filled his mind with joy and delight which, if it led him down even to perdition, he could not help.

I have a son, Dear God, I have a son.

And sometimes, he thought, if his punishment was to be cast out of God's garden into some darker place, then still, for the sake of his son, he would do it all again. So, for many years, Brother Adam lived with his secret, in the abbey of Beaulieu".

So, scandal at the Abbey.

The author is Edward Rutherford who was born in Salisbury in 1948. In 1987 he published a historical novel called Sarum, based on Salisbury and Stonehenge and covering 10,000 years of history. It was a great success and he has since written similar novels on London, Paris and Russia. They follow a pattern in that he invents a few fictional characters and takes them through historical situations, usually covering several centuries. This book, *The Forest,* was published in 2000 and deals with the period 1099 to the early 19th century. It opens with the killing of William Rufus and a story about a deer. But then there is a chapter of over 100 pages entitled "Beaulieu 1294". He has clearly researched the history rather well and as will be clear from the extract quoted, it is a good, quite spicy read. It is noteworthy that with the whole Forest to choose from Beaulieu occupies so much space in the book though Lymington and Brockenhurst get an innings as well.

Now, a travelogue. In a book published in 1927 the author tells how he believed he was dying in Palestine in the First World War. He thought a pain in his neck was the first sign of spinal meningitis. Miserable, he climbed a hill overlooking Jerusalem and was struck by a wave of home-sickness. He realised that, homesick as he was, he in fact knew little about England. He writes "I took a vow that if the pain in my neck did not end for ever on the windy hills of Palestine, I would go home in search of England, I would go through the lanes of England and the little thatched villages of England, and I would lean over English bridges and lie on English grass, watching an English sky". And that is just what he did. His itinerary was carefully chosen. The places he went to

were carefully selected, not all that numerous. The title of the book was *In Search of England.* The author was H.V. Morton. I find it interesting that with all of England to choose from, by the second chapter he is in Hampshire and in Beaulieu.

He writes "On a sunny afternoon there is no place known to me in which you would be more likely to see a ghost in daylight than the ruins of Beaulieu Abbey. But it would not be a horrid spectre; it would be a pleasant lay brother walking to the ruins of the laundry with a basket over his arm, or sauntering slowly in the direction of the kitchens carrying a platter of shelled peas, stopping to steal one and to wiggle a stone from the toe of his sandals . It is a quiet place, full of kind ghosts. Tall trees lean from soft grass, and little blue flowers grow in clumps from the ruined cloisters. There is a colony of primroses over the walls of the chapter-house. When the sunlight slants from the grey stone walls the air becomes lazy with the drone of bees."

Apart from his admiration for the beauty and quietness of Beaulieu, he had a talk with Miss Aimee Cheshire, a young woman who lived alone in the ruins of the Abbey and explained to him that strange things did happen at night. She heard steps, she heard a choir singing. But she said: I won't have anything to do with them. I just turn over and go to sleep."

H.V. Morton went on to become a highly successful and popular travel writer, with books about several European countries and about South Africa to which he eventually emigrated. But it was *In Search of England* that first established his reputation.

HEATHS

Now, heaths. It may surprise you, as it did me, to discover how often travellers to this area wrote about the heathland around the village. I refer to three areas: the heath around Beaulieu Road, second the heath, unnamed on the Ordnance Survey map, which we cross when we take the road from Hilltop to Dibden Purlieu and third, Beaulieu Heath itself, between Hatchett's Pond and Brockenhurst.

You remember William Cobbett fulminating about the barrenness of the Beaulieu Road area. "Worse than Bagshot Heath". King George the Third used

to pass through the Forest on the way to his favourite watering place at Weymouth. His comment on the Forest was also "Worse than Bagshot Heath". What is it about Bagshot Heath? Little did the King and Cobbett know what they were missing.

2006 saw the death of a wonderful naturalist, writer and film-maker who made a really notable contribution to English literature. Roger Deakin. In his book *Wildwood. A Journey through Trees,* published in 2007, he tells how as a schoolboy he returned year after year to camp at Beaulieu Road with fellow schoolboys and their biology teacher, Barry Goater. Deakin says that "It was traditional for each generation of us sixth form naturalists to return there again and again and taste the intoxicating pleasure of exploration and discovery in the wild for ourselves. Each of us had a particular project, literally a field of enquiry, and the work we were doing was genuinely original. We learnt the scientific disciplines of botany, zoology and ecology and we kept our eyes open as all-round naturalists. What we discovered was particular to the place and, best of all, it belonged to us." And here is a quote for you which you never thought you would hear: "Beaulieu Road was our America. We were pioneers...."

He attended 24 camps there between 1955 and 1961 and everything he and his friends found or recorded was logged in two large volumes called the *Beaulieu Tomes.* They discovered 353 species of flowering plants, over 100 mosses, 21 liverworts and 735 ferns. Many other discoveries, of insects, birds, reptiles are discussed in his book. This, he says, is where he learned his understanding of nature. So one of our finest writers on nature learned his trade at Beaulieu Road. So much for the barrenness which Cobbett and King George saw in the same place.

The *Beaulieu Tomes* were never published. When Deakin wrote his book he said they were in the possession of his former teacher, Barry Goater in his cottage at Chandler's Ford. I have made some effort to trace Mr. Goater, without success. He would now be of a considerable age. He was, by the way, himself a renowned naturalist and published important books on moths.

Half a century earlier another eminent naturalist wrote of another heath, the one between Beaulieu and Southampton Water. W.H.Hudson grew up in

Argentina and established his professional reputation there, in particular with a book called *Far Away and Long Ago.* He settled in England in 1874 and published a series of books, including in 1903 *"Hampshire Days".* In this book he describes Beaulieu as having "a distinction above all Hampshire villages, ...unlike all the others in its austere beauty and atmosphere of old-world seclusion and quietude."

Just in case you think that like modern tourist publications he praised all the villages he saw, here he is on Lyndhurst:

"Lyndhurst is objectionable to me not only because it is a vulgar suburb, a transcript of Chiswick in the New Forest ...but also because it is the spot on which London vomits out its annual crowd of collectors who fill its numerous and ever-increasing brand-new, red-brick lodging houses, and who swarm through all the adjacent woods and heaths, men, women and children (hateful little prigs), with their vasculums, beer and treacle pots, green and blue butterfly nets, killing-bottles and all the detestable paraphernalia of what they would probably call "Nature Study"."

It's a good job that he liked Beaulieu.

His description of the heath beyond Hilltop is lyrical. He talks of the richness of colour, of wading through acres of myrtle, of nightjars, snipe, redshank, stonechat and peewit.

As the sun set his attention was caught by the last sunlight falling on the prehistoric barrows which surrounded him. "Here, sheltered by the bushes, I sat and saw the sun go down, and the long twilight deepen till the oak woods of Beaulieu in the west looked black on the horizon and the stars came out: in spite of the cold wind that made me shiver in my thin clothes, I sat there for hours, held by the silence and solitariness of that mound of the ancient dead." And then he reflects on those long buried in the mounds around him. "They had all their faces turned towards Beaulieu. Evening by evening for many a century they had looked to that point, towards that black wood on the horizon where there were people and sounds of human life. Day by day for centuries they had listened with wonder and fear to the Abbey bells and to the distant chanting of the monks." He concludes that these people from prehistoric times

did not resent his presence and would not resent it if he was to come and dwell with them forever.

So when you next drive to Dibden Purlieu take a different look at the heath. It's not just space for dog walkers.

And then there is our very own Beaulieu Heath- beyond Hatchett's Pond. Horace Hutchinson who wrote about country life and sports at the beginning of the 19th century said this:

"Now this affair of the sun's uprising is one that does not enter much into the day, according to the reckoning of man's ordinary hours, but if, for once, the visitor to the New Forest can shake himself out of his common groove, and will arise on a fine summer's morning and go forth to a (place with extended views)
and I would name Beaulieu Heath, and watch this marvellous spectacle .. he will be well repaid the trouble. To describe it, who shall attempt without the palette of a Turner?---the first faint greyness stealing over the dark of night, the greyness tinged to a tender yellow, the outlines of the distant island dimly becoming visible, the earth winning back some of the colour of which night has robbed her, the mists becoming luminous, the gossamers on the nearer heath shimmering into light, conspicuous with the myriad dew-drops spangling them, the distant outlines every moment becoming stronger and touched with a constantly warmer colour, until the great ball of the sun, distorted by the haze, comes like a lantern over the far horizon ....Who can even suggest the glory of it all?"

I'm fond of Beaulieu Heath myself. It has the great merit that, when the rest of the Forest is too wet to walk on as now, you can always walk on the heath thanks to the remains of the roads from the former aerodrome. And it does have wonderful skies and views of the island.

Perhaps we need to recognise the value of the heath country more. Past visitors were in no doubt about it.

THE RIVER

William Bowles was an English priest, canon of Salisbury and later St. Paul's, a poet and critic and a literary figure of some importance in the

late 18th and early 19th centuries. He wrote a poem, possibly around 1789, called *Water Party on the Beaulieu River.* I don't think it is very good but I give you one verse. With the sun setting on the river he urges Wilmot, whoever he or she is, to start painting before the colours fade:

"Mark the sun that descends o'er the curve of the flood,

Seize, Wilmot, the pencil and instant convey,

To the tablet, the water, the banks and wood

That their colours may live without change and decay

When these beautiful tints die in darkness away."

Not too bad but Keats dealt with the theme much better in his *Ode to A Grecian Urn.*

The vicar of Boldre, William Gilpin, published his *Remarks on Forest Scenery* in 1791, a lovely essay. He describes a trip up the river from Needs Ore to the village and says "The simple idea it presents throughout is that of a winding tide-river flowing up a woody and uninhabited country, which is a singular character for an English river to assume. Here and there we see a house and a few spots of cultivation; but so little that they make no impression on the general character of the river."

He was surprised that there was so little habitation and activity. The river wasn't quite as deserted as that, however. A couple of years later a writer called John Bullar refers to the pleasant valley in which the village of Beaulieu is situated and continues "At full tide there is good water scenery. The river which runs through it adds to its comforts, as well as beauty; being well stocked with fish. Small vessels come up to Beaulieu. The only manufacture carried on is that of twine and sacking. There are tolerable accommodations at the principal inn." As indeed there still are, but now with a Michelin one-star cook thrown in.

Very much later, just after the end of World War Two, a book was published that is partly set around the Beaulieu river. Can you gather precisely where the author sets the following scene? And which is the novel? Kindly read for us by.....

"That evening the two girls wandered around with mixed feelings, bemoaning the fate that had landed them in a place where nothing operational was going on and which was ten miles from the nearest movie. At the same time, they were forced to realize that the Navy had sent them to one of the most lovely country houses in England. It was a stone-built, fairly modern country house in the grand style, with a flagstaff flying a white ensign on the lawn in front of it. All afternoon the girls wandered up and down woodland paths between thickets of rhododendrons in bloom, each with a label, with water piped underneath each woodland path....They found a rock garden half as large as Trafalgar Square that was a mass of bloom; they found cedars and smooth grassy lawns They found long ranges of greenhouses and they learned with awe that the staff of gardeners had been reduced from fifty to a mere eighteen old men. And finally, wandering entranced through the carefully tended woods, they found the Beaulieu River running up between the trees...."

Any guesses?

The quote comes from *Requiem for a Wren,* the novel by Nevil Shute. Born in England in 1899, he emigrated to Australia in 1950 and died in 1960. He was an enormously successful popular novelist. Vintage Books reprinted all 23 of his books in 2009. But he also had a career as an aeronautical engineer. That profession often brought him to the Beaulieu River during the Second world War. In particular he carried out trials of the Swallow, a rocket-powered, radio-controlled, pilotless aircraft and he worked on the development of a rocket landing craft designed to bombard the enemy occupied beaches before the D-Day invasion.

When he came to write *Requiem for a Wren,* published in 1955, he incorporated some of this material in his plot. In particular, the main female character's story begins when she is a wren at HMS Mastadon i.e. Exbury House. He also used an incident involving a German aircraft which crashed at Exbury and which he witnessed. But the references to Beaulieu are few and there is little evidence that he was inspired by the beauty of the river or the surroundings in general. Of course it was wartime and he did not live in the immediate area. He spent much of the war in Portsmouth and London. But his descriptions of Exbury Gardens and the preparations of the roads around Beaulieu for tanks and other vehicles are very vivid.

In my opinion, the best piece of all the writing about Beaulieu is John Betjeman's poem of the 1940's, *Youth and Age on Beaulieu River.* It is quite short. Let's hear the whole piece from Z

Early sun on Beaulieu water

Lights the underside of oaks,

Clumps of leaves it floods and blanches

All transparent glow the branches

Which the double sunlight soaks;

Clemency the General's daughter

Pulls across with even strokes.

Schoolboy-sure she is this morning;

Soon her sharpie's rigg'd and free.

Cool beneath a garden awning

Mrs. Fairclough sipping tea

And raising large long-distance glasses

As the little sharpie passes,

Sighs our sailor-girl to see.

Tulip figure, so appealing,

Oval-faced, so serious-eyed,

Tree-roots pass'd and muddy beaches.

On to huge and lake-like reaches,

Soft and sun-warm, see her glide-

Slacks the slim young limbs revealing,

Sun-brown arm the tiller felling

With the wind and with the tide.

Evening light will bring the water,

Day-long sun will burst the bud,

Clemency, the General's daughter,

Will return upon the flood.

But the older woman only

Knows the ebb-tide leaves her lonely

With the shining fields of mud.

You can listen to Betjeman on Youtube explaining to the Poetry Association in 1967 how he came to write the poem.

"I once had an operation---nothing bad but of course one thought one was going to die-- and I went to recover on the shores of the New Forest at a place called Beaulieu where they have sharpies---little boats. And while I was there a most beautiful girl came by in a sharpie and asked the time. I didn't know it, I just made it up, I couldn't do anything, I wanted to oblige her in every possible way. And when I got back to my hosts I asked who she was and they said she was called Clemency Buckland and she was the daughter of a general." In his autobiography Lord Montagu says that he knew Clemency well as a child and that her father, Brigadier Buckland, was responsible for the SOE training school coming to Beaulieu in 1948. The Brigadier lived at Curtle Mead. Following an operation at the Acland Nursing home in Oxford, Betjeman was convalescing at Friar's Oak on the opposite bank of the river, as a guest of people called Jack and Vera, father and stepmother of his friend Arthur Mackenzie.

I have heard this poem described as "a typical piece of Betjeman girl-worship." It is true that he wrote many young women of the Joan Hunter-Dunn variety. But I think there is much more to the poem than that. Betjeman is usually witty, often funny but there is almost always an underlying note of seriousness. And here it is his preoccupation with mortality that makes the poem. Nearly all of it is about youth, the young girl Clemency, tulip figure, slim young limbs etc. But it is the last three lines that are the core of the poem:

"But the older woman only

Knows the ebb-tide leaves her lonely

With the shining fields of mud".

The Beaulieu river, when the tide is in, is for youth, for fun, for beauty. At the ebb tide the mood changes. How many parents have felt that as their families leave after a weekend here, especially if their departure coincides with the ebb tide. Sad and lonely. Betjeman is meditating on death. Just a brief visit to the village and he encapsulates the river with its changing moods perfectly. The master poet at work.

Just before I leave the river I should mention that some tourist books claim that Jane Austen made trips on it. I have not so far found any evidence that that is so. There is a letter of hers which contains the sentence "If circumstances are favourable that will be a good time for our scheme to Beaulieu". Intriguing but it doesn't get us much further. I have asked the Jane Austen Society whether they can help but their research seems to be taking a little time.

We've done the abbey, the heaths and the river but I have not said much about the village itself. I have found very little but what there is is quite interesting. H.V. Morton, in *In Search of England* says that Beaulieu is "a strange, lonely place in the middle of the last of England's great forests. I am inclined", he continues, "to think it one of the strangest places I know. The people are slow Saxons, well-mannered, deferential people, with their wits about them and their tongues padlocked....the place, like the people, encourages a delicious slowness. It would be fatal to stay too long in

Beaulieu;." Tongues padlocked, indeed! He probably asked all sorts of nosey questions which Beaulieu people had no intention of answering.

Richard Heath, a reformer in the Victorian age, wrote in 1893 about peasant life in the New Forest. "The cottages in the New Forest are beyond the average. There are some miserable buildings at Beaulieu Rails, belonging to squatters, which are merely mud huts; but elsewhere they are very comfortable. At Beaulieu every cottage in the parish belongs to Lord Henry Scott, and has a living-room, scullery and pantry, and two or three bedrooms, with a good water supply and thorough drainage. Each cottage has a pigstye, and at least twenty perches of garden. The rent charge is only a shilling a week; the average rent for a cottage throughout the Forest is £4 per annum". So Beaulieu rents were well below the average.

The only other nugget I can offer on the village comes from a poem by the nineteenth century historian Lord Macaulay. The poem is about the coming of the Spanish Armada and the preparations being made in southern England to resist it:

"O'er Longleat's towers, o'er Cranbourne's

oaks The fiery herald flew.

He roused the shepherds of Stonehenge

The rangers of 'Bewley"

With great respect to the Lord Macaulay I am not sure he knew how either to spell or to pronounce Beaulieu. Neither the English Beaulieu nor the French beau lieu can possibly be made to rhyme with the word "flew". And I don't know what the rangers of Beaulieu were. Perhaps someone here does.

To conclude, I think virtually all the writers I have mentioned were attracted by the obvious beauty of the place, the valley, the river and the surrounding heaths. They loved its Englishness. The ruins of the Abbey with its atmosphere of holiness, other-worldliness, even mystery, were a particular magnet. But there is something else, perhaps more important.

Around 1912 a series of books called *Beautiful England* was published for the first time. Commenting on Beaulieu the writer says: "In these modern days,

when towns are increasing on every side, and the new idea of the garden cities threatens to swallow up what little is left of the true country, it is good to remember that in one quiet corner of Hampshire lies a sanctuary".

Fifty years earlier, John Wise, that fine writer on the Forest said something similar:

"In these days we are surrounded by noise and excitement. Everywhere is haste and its accompanying confusion, (He could be talking about Heathrow airport but this is 1863). It matters not what we do, the fever of competition ever rages. We travel as though we were flying from ourselves. We write the history of things before they are accomplished, and the lives of men before they are dead. Surely there is some profit to be found in coming to a quiet village like this, if it will only give us some glimpses of a life which stands out in such strange contrast to our own"

Wise's book inaugurated a strong wave of conservationist writing. More and more people were concerned at the effects of creeping urbanisation and industrialisation. One response was the cult of the god Pan, in which many well known writers and thinkers were involved. Pan was the pagan god of the countryside and was invoked as a symbol of resistance to these modern developments. Some people here may remember that Anne and I gave a talk when this Society began about our own house in Beaulieu. Its first owner named it Pan's Garden and she had an altar to the god constructed in the sitting room. For all who were concerned about the countryside, whether followers of Pan or not, it was the changelessness of Beaulieu that was appealing. When so much of the rest of the English landscape was changing so rapidly, Beaulieu represented a sanctuary, a piece of the past preserved. Since the time most of these writers wrote Beaulieu has not escaped change. But most of the things they described—the abbey, the village, the heaths and the river are remarkably unchanged. Maybe for many of us that is why we like it here.