



FOREST PARK
COUNTRY HOTEL & INN

A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME



Kevin Charity, founder of The Coaching Inn Group.



Adam Charity, chief operations officer.

Welcome to a brief history of The Forest Park Hotel, Brockenhurst, Hampshire. This booklet is one among a series of published histories, which The Coaching Inn Group has been producing since 2016. At that time the company had become established on its specialist mission to acquire and revitalise hotels of heritage, many of them old coaching inns and some with histories dating to the 1500s or earlier.

My father, Kevin Charity, the company founder, and its chief executive until his retirement in 2024, wrote: "While contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be the custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but we can take the trouble to discover more about who were the hotel owners and keepers in the past."

Will Swales, a writer and historian with a background in the hospitality industry, was invited to research and write the series of booklets. His brief was to separate fact from fable, to discover what was true and what had been elaborated or invented during the story-telling process over the years. Will has engaged with other historians, local-history groups, and people with long personal memories of the hotels. He has also searched historic newspapers and local archives to garner new information from sometimes previously undiscovered records. We will always welcome contributions of new information that might be considered for inclusion in future revised editions.

It is hoped that these history booklets will be recognised as memorials to those who were involved in running the hotels in the past, and as heart-felt contributions to the heritage of the communities in which the hotels have played such pivotal roles throughout their existence, and in which they continue to serve today.

Adam Charity
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**“WITHIN THE VAST NATURAL
PANORAMA OF THE NEW FOREST”**

ROYAL HUNTING GROUND



The traditional extent of the New Forest medieval royal hunting ground.

The Forest Park Country Hotel and Inn stands on land that was formerly part of its neighbour, Ober Farm, on the perimeter of the village of Brockenhurst, the largest and one of the oldest settlements within the vast natural panorama of the New Forest.

Established as a royal hunting ground by William the Conqueror in about 1079, the traditional area of the New Forest covered about 150 square miles and stretched from the Wiltshire Downs in the north to the Solent Coast in the south.

Since medieval times, the New Forest has comprised three distinctly different countryside environments: of woodland; of open land of grass, heath, or mire; and of enclosed farmland. Each environment now totals about a third of the whole area. The enclosed farmland was developed and granted to medieval landholders on condition that the king retained the exclusive right to hunt the 'wild beasts' throughout the whole of the forest.

OBBERLANDS AND OBER FARM

A New Forest record of 1670 showed that some of the enclosed land near Brockenhurst was part of a significant landholding called Obberlands, said to have been known within the forest for at least 100 years previously.

Within it was Ober Farm. For most of the 1800s it provided a living for successive tenant farmers, until 1887 when just over half of its land, about 122 acres, was sold by the then-owner, divided into lots for development to allow for an expansion of Brockenhurst village. One of the lots was a large road-side field of 8½ acres, where now stands The Forest Park Hotel. The field was called Lower Aimers.



New Forest ponies graze on forest land adjacent to the hotel.



LOWER AIMERS HOUSE

Lower Aimers field was bought in 1887 by a speculative investor, who quickly sold it to Jasper Wilson Johns, a civil engineer, railway pioneer, and former Liberal MP for Nuneaton.

Johns lived in Kensington. He didn't develop the land but must have paid someone to continue farming it, because after his death, in July 1891, his executors offered for sale by auction: 'a rick of oats, the produce of about 8½ acres, and a rick of excellent clover hay, about 17 tons, standing in a field known as Lower Aimers near Ober Farm.'

Johns' widow sold Lower Aimers in July 1892 to a partnership of two Bournemouth lawyers and an architect's clerk of works called William Cowley, who lived at Ober Farm. During the following 16 months, Cowley built on the field a large, 11-bedroom house, fronting the road and with a substantial stable block and yard at one side and a large garden at the rear. The house was called Lower Aimers.

A NEW HOME FOR THE VICAR

Cowley and his partners sold the land and house of Lower Aimers in February 1895 to Annie Pain, wife of the Rev. Rupert William Pain, the vicar of Brockenhurst.

Rev. and Mrs Pain vacated the official parish vicarage, on the south side of Brockenhurst, and established themselves at the altogether grander house of Lower Aimers. In the following year, Mrs Pain bought the adjacent 5½ acre field of Upper Aimers. However, in the summer of 1899, when Rev. Pain was aged just 44, he surprisingly resigned the living of Brockenhurst. Without a parish to go to, he and his wife moved to the village of Martyr Worthy, near Winchester, where they lived off their private incomes. Mrs Pain put the house and land at Lower and Upper Aimers up for sale.

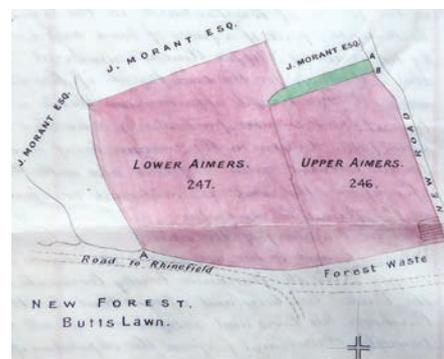


Hampshire Advertiser, 28 November 1891.

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www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk



The two fields of Lower and Upper Aimers, marked in pink and green, which were bought by Mrs Annie Pain, wife of the vicar of Brockenhurst. Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, ref. HA 36M79-E-T7.



PLANS FOR A VERY GRAND HOTEL



The Grand Hotel, East Cliff, Bournemouth.
Courtesy Alwyn Ladell, Flickr photostream,
www.flickr.com/photos/alwyn_ladell/albums.



The Imperial Hotel, East Cliff, Bournemouth.
Courtesy Alwyn Ladell, Flickr photostream,
www.flickr.com/photos/alwyn_ladell/albums.



The Branksome Tower Hotel.
Courtesy Alwyn Ladell, Flickr photostream,
www.flickr.com/photos/alwyn_ladell/albums.

The land and property of Lower and Upper Aimers was bought in November 1899 by Bournemouth's leading entrepreneurial hotelier, 55-year-old William Henry Doré.

The son of a wealthy Southampton draper, as a young man in the 1860s he had converted a mansion on Bournemouth's East Cliff into an exclusive boarding house for wealthy families. He went on to build a portfolio of some of the most prestigious hotels and luxury boarding houses in the town.

In the 1880s he built two large hotels on the East Cliff, the Grand and the Imperial, each boasting more than 100 rooms, while also acquiring the Belle Vue Hotel opposite the pier. In 1892 he bought the mansion of Branksome Tower, located beyond the West Cliff, towards Poole, and by 1897 had converted it into another hotel of more than 100 rooms, his most luxurious hotel to date, which quickly earned an international reputation.

For the Brockenhurst site, Doré planned to build, next to the vicar's former house, a new luxury hotel on the scale of those in his existing portfolio. He said it would be 'of much architectural beauty' and would be built at a cost of £20,000.

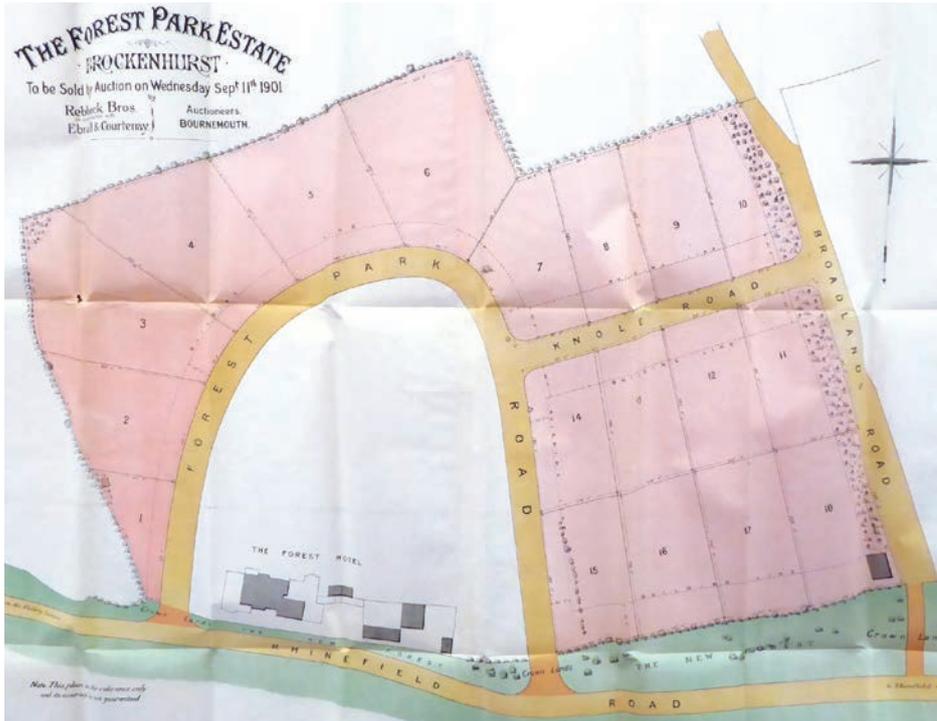
A BRUSH WITH A SWINDLER

However, this ambitious plan soon fell into doubt, according to Doré because of the unexpected death of a co-investor.

It might also have been a consequence of some major upsets in his financial position and his personal life. At about this time, he suffered severe losses after trusting investments with a man who turned out to be a notorious swindler of the period, the politician and newspaper proprietor, Horatio Bottomley. Doré also separated from his wife and moved to Clapham where he started a new family with a much younger woman, with whom he was not married.



A REVISED PLAN AND A NEW NAME



A plan from the 1901 sale prospectus showing the layout of the house plots and new roads including one road in the shape of a horse shoe, looping around the grounds of Lower Aimers House. Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, ref. HA 36M79-E-T8.



A photograph from the 1901 sale prospectus looking across the field of Upper Aimers towards the rear of Lower Aimers House. Note the position of the glass-roofed conservatory at the right. To the left of the house is the large stable block and yard. Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, ref. HA 36M79-E-T8.

Unable to raise the money to build his grand hotel on the Brockenhurst site, in 1901 the Bournemouth hotelier William Henry Doré produced a much-reduced plan.

Having already installed a manager to run Lower Aimers House as a small hotel, he decided to convert and expand the existing house, at an estimated cost of £3,500. It would require less land and would therefore create an opportunity to sell the surplus to raise cash for the building work.

In August 1901 he launched a prospectus for an auction of the surplus land, being the whole of Upper Aimers and part of Lower Aimers, all divided into 18 plots for houses.

A plan (left), which was printed in the sale prospectus, shows that Doré had named the entire site The Forest Park Estate. It also shows in grey, the footprint of Lower Aimers House at that time and, in outline, the planned extensions that would increase the accommodation from 11 to 26 bedrooms. Alongside is the hotel's first-intended new name, The Forest Hotel.

The auction went ahead but Doré must have been deeply disappointed that only seven of the 18 house plots were sold.



WHOLE ESTATE UP FOR SALE

EXTENT OF THE HOUSE

The former Lower Aimers House was described in detail in the 1902 sale prospectus as:

'... entered by a tiled **Porch** and well-proportioned **Entrance Hall**, opening from which is the:

Large Double Drawing Room, with Conservatory attached, giving access to a wide verandah extending along the western side of the building. Adjoining the Drawing Room is a capital:

Dining Room, capable of seating about 30 guests, also opening on to the verandah and lawns. On the other side of the hall is a very cosy:

Smoking Room or Morning Room, and on a separate corridor are:

Large Housekeeper's Room, Kitchen, Scullery, Dairy, Larder, Cellars, and other Domestic Offices, two water closets etc.

On the Upper Floors, approached by an easy staircase and having airy and well-lighted landing are:

Six Best Bed and Dressing Rooms

Two Good Secondary Bedrooms

Three Other Bedrooms

Bathroom, fitted with hot-and-cold water, water closet, housemaid's closet, etc.'

William Henry Doré did not raise enough money to start the hotel extensions, so he decided to abandon the project and sell the hotel as it stood.

In May 1902, another comprehensive sale prospectus was printed, and another auction was held, when potential buyers of the then-named Forest Park Hotel were entertained to lunch in a marquee erected in the hotel garden.

The hotel was stated to be in three acres of land, laid out with stables and coach houses, a vinery, a kitchen garden, and a pleasure garden with croquet and tennis lawns. Also present at the auction were potential buyers for the 11 remaining house plots.

Before the bidding, the auctioneer praised William Henry Doré, for making land available for such a good class of houses and commented that it was his generous guarantee of income to the water company that brought the water main from Lyndhurst to Brockenhurst, which otherwise might not have happened for 10 years.

BACK TO THE ORIGINAL PLAN

Nine of the remaining 11 house plots were sold, but for Doré the disappointment of the day was that bidding on the hotel stalled at £4,700, when it was withdrawn from sale.

He reverted to his plan to extend the hotel and during the next 16 months managed to raise the necessary funding. This included securing a substantial co-investor to share the risk, a London solicitor, James Henry Davidson. In September 1903, work finally started on the extensions, now larger than the original plan. The hotel closed for the duration of the work, which was dogged by problems and not completed until the spring of 1905, more than five years after Doré had bought the site.



OPEN WITH A NEW MANAGER

The extended Forest Park Hotel finally opened for business in April 1905, supported by a nationwide newspaper advertising campaign.

The hotel boasted all modern conveniences including electric lighting throughout. The newly appointed manager was 33-year-old Miss Elizabeth Sarah 'Mollie' Upton, who hailed from a village in the Oxfordshire Cotswolds where she was raised by her widowed mother, a grocer.

NOW OPEN.
In the Heart of the New Forest.
FOREST PARK HOTEL, Brockenhurst,
Hants.—This new Hotel, which supplies a long-needed want, is situated in a most charming and most accessible part of the Forest, is fitted with every modern comfort and convenience, and lighted throughout by electricity. Special attention has been given to the cuisine, an experienced chef being engaged. Hunting, fishing, shooting, golf, tennis, &c. Billiard and smoking rooms. For terms apply the Secretary.

Left: The Field, 27 May 1905. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved.
With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive.
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.



Above: The only known photograph of William Henry Doré, thought to be taken in about 1880 when he was aged 36. Photo from a family album, courtesy Doré's great great grandson Hugh Crouch.

SAVED FOR THE FAMILY

Mounting personal and financial difficulties for owner William Henry Doré came to a head in December 1906 when, at the age of 62, he was declared bankrupt.

His stakes in his earliest-acquired Bournemouth hotels were sold to pay his debts. His flagship hotel, The Branksome Tower, near Bournemouth, and his new Forest Park Hotel at Brockenhurst were saved but not for Doré. They were assigned to his estranged wife, Elizabeth, and her children. Elizabeth's son-in-law, Thomas Haydon of Wimbledon, who was a barrister and an expert in corporate law, is credited with securing the two hotels for the family. The Forest Park continued to be held by the family in partnership with James Henry Davidson.

TENNIS CONNECTION

Thomas Haydon was a prominent member of the Wimbledon All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, and in earlier years had played in its famous tennis championship.



FOREIGN SECRETARY'S VISIT



Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey in 1903, by 'Spy', Leslie Matthew Ward, for Vanity Fair magazine. Private Collection/Bridgeman Images.

Mollie Upton must have done an excellent job running The Forest Park Hotel because it rapidly achieved the hoped-for reputation as a luxury establishment for the wealthiest of guests.

Among the distinguished early visitors was Sir Edward Grey, 1st Viscount Grey of Fallodon, who spent a weekend there in March 1906, only three months after being appointed Foreign Secretary in the Liberal government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Grey would serve as Foreign Secretary for 11 years, setting a still-unbroken record as the longest-serving holder of the post.



A rare hand-coloured early photograph of the rear of The Forest Park Hotel in 1910, showing the substantial additions at both ends of the original house. Note the original conservatory, now between two glass verandahs. On the lawn are the white line-markings of a tennis court. Photograph: Francis Godolphin Osbourne Stuart FRPS, of Southampton. Image sourced by David Bennett, joint author with John Purkess of the series 'By-Gone Brockenhurst.'



ANNIE WHITEMAN TAKES CHARGE

After almost five years in charge of The Forest Park Hotel, manager Mollie Upton resigned her position in October 1909, coinciding with her marriage.

Her replacement was 26-year-old Miss Annie Louise Whiteman, who was a gardener's daughter from Chipstead in Surrey. She was destined to remain the manager for at least the next 30 years. One who would serve for longer was the gardener, Alf Wakeford (flat cap in the photograph below). Alf started work at the hotel on leaving school, aged 12, in the summer of 1900, and when the undeveloped Lower Aimers House had just started trading as a hotel. He would eventually serve 42 years in his post.



This undated photograph of staff at The Forest Park Hotel appears to have been taken in about 1909, when the gardener Alf Wakeford (standing fifth from the left) would have been aged 21. None of the others have been identified but some of the uniforms indicate their occupations. Two men and a boy in hotel liveries were probably porters. The two men in tuxedos and bow ties were almost certainly waiters, the chef is obvious, and the remaining man could have been the bookkeeper. The three women could have been of any rank from manager or housekeeper to maid. Image courtesy Tony Johnson.

MOLLIE GIVEN AWAY BY HER BOSS

As Mollie Upton's father had died when she was a child, she was walked down the aisle and given away by one of her employers, hotel-company director James Henry Davidson.

The groom was a chartered accountant, Frank Greenwood, whose late father, Charles Greenwood, had been the most celebrated horse-racing journalist of his age, writing under the pseudonym 'Hotspur' for Britain's then largest-circulation newspaper, The Daily Telegraph. Naturally, the wedding reception was held at The Forest Park Hotel.



VISCOUNT GREY RETURNS WITH PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

“Roosevelt... wanted to hear the songs of British wild birds...”

Foreign Secretary, Viscount Grey, who had stayed at The Forest Park Hotel in 1906, returned in June 1910, this time in the company of former president of the USA Theodore Roosevelt.

It was just over a year after Roosevelt had left office. He was in England as the USA special representative at the state funeral of King Edward VII. After the funeral and several days of official engagements, Roosevelt requested an opportunity to explore the countryside.

Grey, who was an enthusiastic naturalist, volunteered to escort him on a visit to the New Forest, concluding with a night at The Forest Park Hotel, which he was confident to recommend. The pair spent a full day together, and after tea set off on a linear walk, through woodland towards Brockenhurst. Roosevelt, who was severely visually impaired, wanted to hear the songs of British wild birds he had read about.

After about four hours, the two men arrived at The Forest Park Hotel, wet through and muddy. Roosevelt said afterwards: [We] ‘tramped through the New Forest, reaching the inn on the other side of it at about nine in the evening, tired and happy and ready for a warm bath, a hot supper, and bed.’ In another report, he said the inn was ‘as comfortable as possible.’



Former USA president Theodore Roosevelt.



A commemorative plaque near the entrance to The Forest Park Hotel.



MORE DISTINGUISHED GUESTS

The Forest Park Hotel continued to attract guests from the upper echelons of society, some of whom might have been long-term residents.

At the census of 1911, there were 11 guests, representing five households. Among them was a 48-year-old retired colonel of the Grenadier Guards, William Edwin Cavendish, along with his wife, daughter, chauffeur, and maid. Cavendish had served in the Boer War. He was a younger brother of the late 3rd Baron Chesham and an uncle of the then 16-year-old 4th baron.

Staying alone was a 25-year-old Canadian, Isaac Walton Killam, a ship-owner's son who was already on his way to building a global investment empire that would eventually make him the richest man in Canada. He was in England in 1911 in the middle of a four-year stint managing the London office of a Canadian investment bank. He had been hired by fellow countryman Max Aitken, who was later to become the famous British newspaper baron, Lord Beaverbrook.

HOTEL STAFF IN 1911

On the night of the census in 1911, hotel manager Annie Whiteman oversaw 10 resident staff, including a German chef and a Swiss kitchen porter. Doubtless there were other members of staff who resided in their homes in the village on census night.



An early view of the front elevation of The Forest Park Hotel, photographed in 1910. Image courtesy Tony Johnson.



“Indian soldiers...
from regional
populations
traditionally
considered
warrior races.”

BECOMING AN ARMY HOSPITAL

In November 1914, just four months into the start of the First World War, the War Office requisitioned The Forest Park Hotel.

Along with Brockenhurst's other large country-house hotel, The Balmer Lawn, it formed a new military hospital for wounded Indian soldiers, who had been engaged by the British Army to fight on the border of Belgium and France. They were from two Indian Army divisions, representing a broad diversity of ethnicities, languages, and religions, and all recruited from regional populations traditionally considered warrior races.

The 7th (Meerut) Division was from the northern province of Agra and Oudh, and the 3rd (Lahore) Division was from the adjacent province of Punjab, later to be divided by the creation of the state of Pakistan. Their ranks also included the famously courageous Gurkhas from neighbouring Nepal.

They were engaged at the Battle of Ypres where they suffered heavy casualties along with the rest of the British Expeditionary Force. The wounded were evacuated to England in large numbers, and so several emergency military hospitals had to be set up within easy reach of the port of Southampton.

ANNIE AND ALF STAY ON

Annie Whiteman remained as manager of The Forest Park Hotel during its use as a hospital, probably with a skeleton staff.

One who was known to have stayed on with Annie was the young gardener, Alf Wakeford, who at one stage was transferred into the employ of the hospital, qualifying as a reserved occupation, and exempting him from military service.



EMPEROR AND EMPRESS VISIT



King George V and Queen Mary, the Emperor and Empress of India, visiting staff and patients in the grounds of The Forest Park Hotel military hospital in November 1914. It was reported that the king spoke to the soldiers in Hindustani. Photo by J W Martin. Image courtesy Tony Johnson.



Staff and patients at The Forest Park Hotel military hospital in November 1914. Photo by J W Martin. Image courtesy Tony Johnson.

In November 1914, soon after the first cohort of wounded Indian soldiers arrived at Brockenhurst, they were visited by King George V, Emperor of India, and Queen Mary, the Empress.

The king was patron of the hospital's funding charity, the Order of St John of Jerusalem in England, and the queen was president of its Ladies Committee. Volunteer nurses from the St John Ambulance Association supported the clinical operations at the hospital, which were managed by the Indian Army Medical Corps.

As can be seen in the photograph at top left, indoor space at The Forest Park Hotel was supplemented by tented wards in the grounds. Immediately after the royal visit, conditions in those tented wards were criticised. The pressure was eased by the erection of purpose-built hutted wards on land to the south of the village, at Tile Barn Hill, providing another 500 beds.

The three hospital sites for Indian soldiers in Brockenhurst were named the Lady Hardinge Hospital, in memory of Winifred, the recently deceased wife of the British Viceroy of India, Baron Charles Hardinge.



CULTURAL CHALLENGES

MEERUT ROAD NAMED

In Brockenhurst, local councillors named the lane along which the king and queen had travelled in November 1914, between the Forest Park and Balmer Lawn hospitals, as Meerut Road, the name by which it is still known today.

The diversity of religions among the Indian soldiers presented unfamiliar challenges to the British authorities, especially in dealing with those who died in the hospital.

The bodies of Hindus and Sikhs were cremated at a site near the Tile Barn Hill complex, and Muslims were taken to a newly dedicated Islamic burial ground, 70 miles away in Woking, Surrey, close to the UK's first purpose-built mosque. Three Indians, who were members of the medical staff, were buried in the churchyard of Brockenhurst's St Nicholas Parish Church.



Staff and guards of the military hospital at The Forest Park Hotel in 1914. The guards, who were members of the 3rd battalion, the Highland Light Infantry, were tasked to prevent desertions. Photo by J W Martin. Image courtesy Tony Johnson.

INDIANS DEPART

At the end of December 1915, the two Indian divisions in France were sent to Egypt to reinforce their countrymen fighting against the Ottoman Empire for British control of the Middle East. Consequently, the Brockenhurst hospital closed in March 1916. According to an early report, its three sites had treated 2,629 patients, of whom 37 had died. By another count, the number of Indians who died in the hospital might have been more than 50.



NEW ZEALANDERS ARRIVE

As soon as the Indians left, all the military hospital quarters in Brockenhurst were immediately reorganised and prepared for a new influx of wounded combatants.

In April 1916, the whole of the Infantry Division of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force was transferred from the conflict in the Middle East to serve alongside Australian and British forces on the Western Front in France.

Several hospital sites were selected in England for the New Zealanders. By June 1916, the combined sites in Brockenhurst had been re-designated and re-equipped as the New Zealand General Hospital No. 1, operated by the Royal New Zealand Army Medical Corps. The Forest Park Hotel provided 200 beds and was designated exclusively for officers. Also received were Royal Air Force casualties from flying accidents at the nearby Beaulieu aerodrome.



During a break in a therapeutical game of croquet; nurses and patients at The Forest Park Hotel hospital for officers pose next to a vacant isolation ward in the grounds. Image courtesy National Army Museum, New Zealand, <https://nam.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/5208>.



A patient at the entrance to The Forest Park Hotel hospital for New Zealand officers. Image courtesy National Army Museum, New Zealand, <https://nam.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/5206>.

FOURTH HOSPITAL

There was a fourth military hospital site in Brockenhurst during the war, a convalescent unit established at Morant Hall, the village community hall. It was staffed by the Red Cross and was used initially to cope with overspill from larger hospitals elsewhere in the south of England. Later it was adopted to provide extra beds for Indian and then New Zealand soldiers from the other Brockenhurst sites.



“...conspicuous
gallantry and
devotion to duty.”

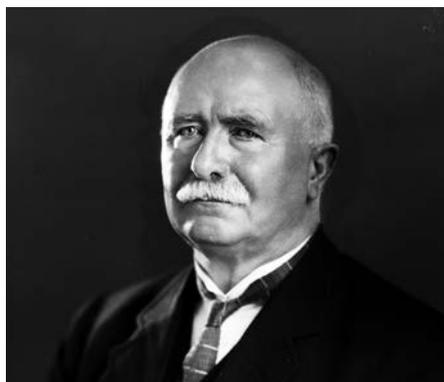
PRIME MINISTER’S VISIT

In June 1918, New Zealand’s Prime Minister, William Massey, visited Brockenhurst while in England attending an Imperial War Conference.

He came to visit the New Zealand troops, and especially his youngest son, 31-year-old Acting Major Frank Massey, who had been shot in the chest and suffered damage to both lungs. He sustained the wound in an action for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order, for ‘conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty.’ It was his second gallantry medal of the war. As an officer, he must have been treated at The Forest Park Hotel. Later in 1918, he was invalided home to New Zealand where he returned to his career as a lawyer. He lived to the age of 87.

Near right: William Ferguson Massey, circa 1920, photograph by Herman John Schmidt. Portrait and landscape negatives, Auckland district. Ref: 1/1-001538-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/22773582.

Far right: Lieutenant F. G. Massey – Rifle Brigade Military Cross [R24184739 AALZ 25044 F521] Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga, Wellington.



BROCKENHURST WAR GRAVES

The war ended in November 1918 and the Brockenhurst military hospital sites were fully decommissioned by March 1919.

During the war, 110 British and British Empire servicemen who died at the Brockenhurst hospitals were buried in the village in the St Nicholas Parish Churchyard. Ninety-three of them were New Zealanders, of whom three were officers who must have spent time and died at The Forest Park Hotel site.



HOTEL REOPENS IN 1920

During 1919, The Forest Park Hotel underwent a complete refit to be returned to its function as a luxury hotel for the wealthy.

It was reopened in March 1920, when Annie Whiteman resumed her more-usual duties as hotel manager. Along with the now long-serving gardener Alf Wakeford, she was joined by a new set of colleagues recruited to deliver all the hotel's usual services to guests.



Pall Mall Gazette, 29 March 1920. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

NEW GENERATION OF OWNERS

Elizabeth Doré died in January 1926, aged 84, by which time control of the family's two hotels, at Bournemouth and Brockenhurst, was beginning to pass from her daughter Florence Haydon to the next generation.

Those most concerned with the Forest Park Hotel were Florence's son Vernon, who at the time of his grandmother's death was aged 26, and his sister Betty, then aged 20. Their father, Thomas Haydon, had by that time become a county court judge. At different times, the siblings, and later their parents, moved from the family home in Wimbledon to take up residence at The Branksome Tower Hotel.



A modern view of the war graves and memorial at St Nicholas Churchyard, Brockenhurst. Image courtesy Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

REMEMBERING THE FALLEN

Plans for the permanent remembrance of the servicemen who were buried at Brockenhurst began as soon as post-war life started returning to normality.

The first reported Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day service was held at St Nicholas Parish Church, Brockenhurst, in April 1921 and has been held annually ever since then.

In 1924, the grave markers of wooden crosses were replaced by inscribed headstones erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission.

In 1927, the ANZAC Day service included the unveiling in the churchyard of a new war memorial to the fallen New Zealanders.



FOREST PARK HOTEL

Brockenhurst, Hants.

In the heart of the New Forest, this comfortable hotel offers you a real country house atmosphere amid beautiful surroundings. Standing in 4 acres of ground, it possesses unrivalled facilities for tennis, hunting and motoring under ideal conditions. Within easy reach of London by road and close to Hampshire's finest golf course. Perfect cuisine and appointments. Self-contained suites. Fully licensed. Two garages.

*Write for Illustrated Brochure
and tariff to Manageress.
Telegrams: 'Foxhound,' Brockenhurst.*



The Sketch, 9 March 1932.
© Mary Evans Picture Library.

A PLAYBOY AND HIS SISTER

Vernon Haydon was a playboy hotel owner. He was a leading amateur golfer, especially well-known for the extraordinary power of his drives from the tee.

He out-drove most professional golfers, then and now, and at a match in 1929 he famously drove a measured 420 yards, no doubt with the benefit of a following wind. He would become the figurehead of the family business, eventually becoming managing director of The Branksome Tower Hotel company, and chairman of The Forest Park Hotel company, where his sister Betty took the greater interest as a director. She married a Royal Navy submariner in 1932 and became Mrs Peacock.

IMMUNE FROM THE DEPRESSION

The Great Depression that began in 1929 and continued throughout the 1930s had little effect upon anyone connected with The Forest Park Hotel.

Its services were advertised and reviewed in several society magazines of the period, including in the example shown left, in *The Sketch*. It reveals that the hotel's target clientele were attracted by the opportunities it provided for tennis, golf, hunting, and motoring, while also offering 'perfect cuisine' and 'self-contained suites'. It boasted two garages, which were presumably converted from carriage houses in the stable block.

The hotel retained a stable of good horses for guests to go riding in the New Forest, or specifically to follow the New Forest foxhounds, which met three times a week, or perhaps the buckhounds, which met twice a week. Occasionally the hunts met at the hotel.



WEALTHY LONG-TERM RESIDENTS

Analysis of a 1939 UK survey, known as the Civialian Register and taken on one night in September that year, indicates that some of the guests at The Forest Park Hotel were long-term or permanent residents.

There were three married couples, one lone man, and six lone women. All the lone women declared themselves as living on private means. Four of them were single or widowed and aged 50 and older. The lone man was William Legh Thursby, a 73-year-old bachelor and retired army captain who is known to have divided his time between the hotel and the Cavalry Club, Piccadilly, London. Also present among the guests were a maid and a nurse.

This aerial photograph of The Forest Park Hotel, dating from the 1930s, shows the hotel estate filling the frame within the perimeter of mature trees. Left of centre is the stable block and yard. In front is a large paddock, a glasshouse, and kitchen gardens. At the rear of the hotel building, minor changes are visible. Image courtesy Tony Johnson.



BARON'S GRANDMOTHER

The Second World War forced The Forest Park Hotel to be focused even more on being a permanent residence for wealthy guests.

In the summer of 1940, most of Hampshire was declared part of the south-coast Civil Defence Area, which placed severe restrictions on free movement and prohibited travel for leisure or holidays. The advertisement (left) might have been a last attempt to attract holiday trade before the restrictions were imposed, or it might have been in anticipation of it. Either way, from this time onwards, new guests could travel to the hotel only for the legitimate reason that they were moving to a new permanent home.

Among the new arrivals in 1940 was 90-year-old Miss Henrietta Townshend along with her niece, 72-year-old widow, Mrs Clara Alice Barrington-Crake. The latter was a grandmother of the then 13-year-old 3rd Baron Montagu of Beaulieu, whose baronial seat of Palace House, Beaulieu, is six miles away from Brockenhurst. While living at the hotel during the war, Mrs Barrington-Crake spent much of her time running a Red Cross hospital supply depot at Palace House.

WARTIME CHANGES OF STAFF

Wartime disruption inevitably caused changes in the staff at the hotel, marking the end of an era.

Long-serving manager Miss Annie Whiteman was 60 in November 1942, when she had completed 33 years in charge and when, around then, she seems to have retired to Bournemouth. She was succeeded at the hotel by a series of relatively short-staying managers. Gardner Alf Wakeford, who was aged 55 in 1942, also seems to have left around then, after 42 years at the hotel, and went to work in the garden of a large private house in the village.



**RETREAT
FROM WARFARE**

There is peace and quiet at the Forest Park Hotel : fresh air and delicious country food. Golf, tennis, riding. The sea five miles away : the forest at the door. Hot and cold water in every room. Ample garage accommodation.

The Hotel is fully licensed.

*Forest Park
Hotel*

BROCKENHURST
Write for illustrated Tariff to the Manageress.
Telephone: Brockenhurst 8.
Telegrams : " Foxhounds, Brockenhurst."

Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News,
7 June 1940. © Mary Evans Picture Library.



LONELY GUESTS OF THE 1950s

After the war and into the 1950s, The Forest Park Hotel continued to be principally a permanent home for wealthy old people.

Hotel managers sometimes advertised in the press for daily companions for lonely residents. Reports of permanent residents dying of old age at the hotel were quite frequent, and included, in 1950, that of 100-year-old Miss Henrietta Townshend, the great, great aunt of Baron Montagu of Beaulieu. Most of those reported to have died, left behind considerable estates of money and assets, large enough to merit coverage in the newspapers.

HEALTH SCARES FORCE A SALE

By 1953, the newly appointed manager was Mrs Agnes Tate, assisted by 19-year-old Daphne Peacock, daughter of Mrs Betty Peacock, one of the owners.

Daphne was the first and only member of the owning family to take a direct operational role in the hotel's day-to-day management. Later, Daphne went to study hotel management at a prestigious training school in Lausanne, Switzerland. On her return to The Forest Park Hotel, she replaced Agnes Tate as manager and became a part-owner.

The family sold its Branksome Tower Hotel in Bournemouth in 1965, after which Daphne and her mother planned to retain and develop The Forest Park Hotel. However, in 1968 both women encountered health scares and instead put the hotel up for sale. After 69 years in the same family, it was sold to an experienced hotelier and restaurateur, 37-year-old Robin Collins, who came from Camberley in Surrey.



In 1954, the owners of The Forest Park responded to local requests to create a lounge bar in the hotel. Pictured above at the opening were joint owners, Betty Peacock (front centre) and immediately behind, her brother, Vernon Haydon. On the left was the hotel manager, Agnes Tate. Two other men pictured were representatives of the famous furniture makers Waring and Gillow, designers and fitters of the bar. Photo courtesy Hugh Crouch.



Owner and manager Daphne Peacock (pictured above) was a very keen horsewoman and a breeder and exhibitor of New Forest ponies. Photo courtesy Hugh Crouch.



COLLINS ERA TRANSFORMATION



Today's bar at The Forest Park Hotel.

“Goon Show comedian and all-round entertainer Harry Secombe... would call in for lunch at the hotel, arriving in his Rolls Royce.”

Robin Collins immediately set about transforming The Forest Park into a modern country-house hotel, appealing to holidaymakers and locals alike.

He revitalised the public areas and, as the old residents gradually departed, or died, he refurbished and modernised the bedrooms. By 1972 he had built a two-storey extension and installed in the grounds a kidney-shaped, open-air swimming pool, a log-cabin sauna, and an all-weather tennis court. A livery business in the old stables was retained to provide riding services for guests. A new public bar was created. A trusted management team established service levels of the highest standard and organised a programme of events, including popular Saturday-night dinner-dances.

Celebrities were sometimes seen at the hotel. One remembered in particular in the 1970s was the Goon Show comedian and all-round entertainer Harry Secombe, who when visiting a film studio he co-owned in Brockenhurst, would call in for lunch at the hotel, arriving in his Rolls Royce.

FORESTDALE HOTELS

Such was the early success of The Forest Park Hotel under Robin Collins, that by 1972 he had bought two more New Forest Hotels, the Lyndhurst Park at Lyndhurst, and the Burley Manor at Burley.

His business continued to expand through more acquisitions in the south of England and grew to an estate of 14 hotels. They were owned within a company named Forestdale Hotels, which brought enormous success to the Collins family for 40 years.



END OF AN ERA

Forestdale Hotels weathered the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008, but in 2010, owner Robin Collins turned 80 and wanted to retire. Early the following year, in a challenging economic climate, he sold the company to a group of investors.

DIFFICULT TIMES

In 2015, Forestdale Hotels went into liquidation. It was broken up and a year later The Forest Park Hotel was sold to a Brockenhurst builder, under whose control it continued to trade but at a much-reduced level. About half of the grounds, including the stable buildings, was carved off and used to build luxury houses. The tennis court became a hotel car park, and the swimming pool was filled in.



The refurbished restaurant.

REBORN AND RESTORED

A rebirth for The Forest Park Hotel came in 2018 when it was bought by a partnership of experienced hoteliers, Brian Shone, Terence Taylor and Kevin Wood.

In 2019, they refurbished the hotel at a cost of about £1.5 million. It was restored to its former glory and very quickly became a highly successful and award-winning business, enabling the partners to sell the hotel in July 2022 to the nation-wide Coaching Inn Group, which could fund further development. Improvements made soon afterwards by the Coaching Inn Group have been in line with the company's commitment to preserving the character of its heritage hotels while also responding to the changing needs of today's customers.



One of the new, individually-styled rooms.



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The Forest Park Country Hotel and Inn, Brockenhurst, is part of The Coaching Inn Group Ltd. The group has a particular passion for lovely old historic inns and is fortunate enough now to have more than 30 of these iconic buildings in our collection, several of them former coaching inns. We have established a reputation for refurbishing, revitalising and breathing life back into these inns, creating elegant, comfortable and well-priced accommodation, tempting menus, relaxed and stylish bars and coffee lounges where friends, families and business people can relax and enjoy everything we have on offer.

Our vision for the future is based around our core value of 'Unlocking Potential'. From our properties to our people and everything in between, we take every opportunity to invest in developing all aspects of our business to give our guests the best possible experience.

As a company we are rapidly expanding and bringing new hotels into the Coaching Inn Group. You can see the latest additions to our group by visiting www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.

We hope you've enjoyed your visit to The Forest Park Country Hotel and Inn, Brockenhurst, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details, please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.



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