



**"BRUSHER" MILLS** Snake Catcher

There is something in the English nature which makes us venerate, the unusual and the eccentric, be it event, custom, tradition or person.

Brusher Mills, was a classic example of the 'person' category.

He had tapped into the physic of his generation, he had become a celebrity. Prim young lady's and sporty young men, enjoyed his company, and listened in awe to his worldly wisdom and his country lore.

They travelled to the New Forest to have their photos taken with him, or to take pictures of him, to inwardly sneer at this denizen of the greenwood, or to listen with respect during his 'Snake Catching Lessons'.

Brusher was a showman and capitalised on the oddity of his chosen, and somewhat vague profession. A profession far removed from the growing materialism of the age in which he lived.

CERTIFIED COPY of an ENTRY OF BIRTH  
Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953

Registration District **NEW FOREST**

40. Birth in the Sub-district of **Lyndhurst** in the County of **Wiltshire and Southampton**

Where born	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden name of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and address of informant	Date registered	Signature of Registrar	Name entered after registration
Nineteenth of March 1840 Lyndhurst Parish	Henry Boy	Thomas MILLS	Ann MILLS formerly STONE	Labourer.	X Thomas of Ann Mills Mother Lyndhurst.	Fifteenth of April 1840.	Isaac Fielder Registrar	

Certified to be a true copy of an entry in a register in my custody.

  
 Superintendent Registrar  
 9. 9. 1991. 11

(20) It is an offence to falsify a certificate or to make or knowingly use a false or a copy of a false certificate knowing it to be accepted as genuine by the public or any person, or to permit a certificate knowing it to be false without lawful excuse.

Many huntsmen have passed stealthily through the glades of the New Forest, many have drifted into the mists of time, but Harry Mills is remembered for the strange quarry he hunted - snakes.

Strange ? Yes, but old countrymen knew old remedies. An adder bite was treated by an ointment made from the adder itself and, before medical aid was readily available, the countryfolk ran quickly to a snake catcher if man or beast was bitten by a venomous snake.

Harry Mills had no fear of adders. He handled them with his bare hand, immunized from their deadly sting, some said, by the amount of rum he drank. Be that as it may, he caught his pray and popped them into an old tin. No doubt he then took his pick to make the precious ointment.

The surplus snakes he sent to the London Zoo to provide delectable morsels for the secretary birds and other creatures who enjoyed New Forest snakes as part of their diet.

Harry Mills took time off from his strange occupation whenever a cricket match was played at Balmer Lawn. He became a familiar figure as he carefully swept the pitch between innings, and so acquired his nickname, "Brusher" Mills.

He was borne in Lyndhurst, and was nearly forty years of age, when he left the town to live in the solitude of the forest. He settled in the woodlands near Brockenhurst, that delightful village where forest ponies wandered at will and stop to drink from the stream that meander's across the main street.

Brusher chose a stout holly tree around which to build his mud hut, knowing that the shiny evergreen leaves would provide a waterproof shelter for his primitive dwelling. This was his home for nigh on

thirty years by which time an old forest law entitled him to claim the land on which it stood. So he decided to build a more spacious hut to give him greater comfort in his old age.

But just as it was nearing completion, the vandals struck. They tore apart his new home and it was a sorry sight that greeted Brusher Mills when he returned from his work in the forest. He gazed at the destruction before him and his heart and his spirit were broken. All he had asked of his life was to be left in peace in the silence of the woodlands. He never recovered from the shock of seeing his new home in ruins.

He died soon afterwards and his friends buried him in the quite church of St. Nicholas, Brockenhurst, said to be the most ancient church in the New Forest. The gravestone bears a carving of the old man at the door of his hut; in one hand he grasps a staff, in the other- snakes. The inscription tells his story; "This stone marks the grave of Harry Mills {better known as Brusher Mills} who for a long number of years followed the occupation of Snake catcher, in the New Forest.

His pursuit and the primitive way in which he lived caused him to be a subject of interest to many.

"He died suddenly July 1st, 1905 aged 67 years" ..

