



# Friends of Sherwood Forest

## Woodhouse Warbler September 2010

### MAJOR HAYMAN ROOKE

Born in 1723, the well known soldier, historian, astronomer and antiquarian, Major Hayman Rooke FSA, spent the last 30 years of his very full life at Woodhouse Place, a listed, period built gentleman's residence situated on Leeming Lane South, Mansfield Woodhouse. The Rooke coat of arms is described by the College of Arms as -- Argent on a chevron engraved between three rooks sable, three chess rooks argent. The crest is an arm embowed in armour sable, garnished Or, and the hand holding a pistol purpure.

The family motto was Pro Rege et Patria. - For King and Country. His family tree can be traced as far back as the early 17th century and his ancestors had lived on the family estate at Monks Horton, in Kent. The seed of interest for astronomy could have been set by Hayman's great-grandfather Lawrence Rooke who was professor of astronomy and later of geometry at Gresham College, London.

Lawrence and many like-minded and learned men of the day such as Christopher Wren, Robert Boyle and Hayman's maternal great-grandfather, the physician Thomas Millington, joined ranks and by 1662 this group had received a charter and was recognised as the Royal Society. Lawrence was only 40 years of age when he died but not before he had married and sired nine children. His wife, Barbara Heyman, gave her name to be included in the next three generations of Rookes. His son, James, married Mary in 1707, a bastard daughter of Charles II. Hayman's grandfather, Major General Heyman Rooke, started a career in the Army during Charles II's reign and as a young officer he was involved in the Dutch Wars. Later he raised his own foot regiment and served all the way through to the War of the Spanish Succession. But by 1712 the year before the Treaty of Utrecht his regiment was disbanded. He pleaded for it to be re-instated especially as his son, Brudenell Rice Rooke, (Hayman's father) was one of its captains, and he had hoped that his cousin Sir George Rooke would save the day but all to no avail. (Sir George Rooke was admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet, which had captured Gibraltar.)

Major General Heyman Rooke had already sold the family manor at Monks Horton and when he died in 1723, the year that his grandson, Hayman, was born, his worldly goods were split between his sons, Brudenell and James, his wife, Disney Rice and two men, Simon Lestrangle and Joseph Ashton. James married an heiress in Gloucestershire, started a dynasty of Rookes at Bigsweir House, and later became MP for Monmouth. Hayman was a frequent visitor to his cousin's house there.

Brudenell Rice Rooke (Hayman's father) joined his father's regiment as an ensign in 1704 aged 12 and served in Spain under the command of the Duke of Argyll. He received his captaincy there in 1710. After the regiment was disbanded in 1712 he remained on half pay until his death in 1776.

It was in 1722 that he married Anne Millington and they moved to live in Berkeley Street, Piccadilly. They had at least 10 children, six reaching adulthood - Hayman (born 1723),

Robert (born 1727), Selina (born 1731), Elizabeth (born 1734), Henry (born 1742) and Charles (born 1746.)

To further illustrate the influential circles in which they as a family mixed, Lord Beaufort was godfather to Brudenell's son, Henry.

As the family had a famous military background, it was befitting for all Brudenell's sons to join the Army...

### Hayman's Army Life

...When Hayman was a young boy, he was sent as a page to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Duke of Devonshire. Then at the age of only 14 in 1737, his Army commission was bought and he joined the foot regiment of a family friend, Lieutenant General Bisset, as a Second Lieutenant. Although he had not attended any major schools or universities, Hayman was well versed in Latin and classical writers and was expected to succeed in the Army up to the highest levels.

As a young captain he spent a lot of time billeted in Ireland and his regiment was renamed the 30th Foot. He was not called up to fight with any enemy, at home or abroad, until 1746 when Britain was fighting France in the War of Austrian Succession. The following year the 30th Foot helped to capture nine French ships. Then from 1749 to 1755 the regiment was resting in Ireland, where he was able to enjoy much hunting and riding and view the beautiful landscapes which in his later civilian life would stand him in good stead for he sketched many a romantic picture.

Hayman was very fond of physical exercise, in fact he had taken his customary daily horse ride on the morning of his death, aged 83.

From one letter sent to him by family, he was asked for his assistance and learning for some private theatricals and it became obvious that he was respected, had strong family bonds, and sounded full of fun, a man willing to make a fool of himself on stage. They were a close-knit family and looked out for each other all their lives.

Fearful of a return to absolute monarchy the people were very apprehensive of having a large standing Army, and it was usually undermanned during Hayman's time. However a good deal was expected from this stunted Army in wartime and at home, the various scattered regiments being the only effective police force the Government could use to contain public disorder.

The start of the Seven Years War in 1756 saw the price of provisions rise, leading to public rioting. Great numbers of troops were deployed to quell the disturbances and Hayman's regiment was sent to Gloucester to keep the peace. Promotion was becoming quite elusive - even Lord Bath in 1759 tried to use his influence in facilitating Hayman to the rank of Major.

It was during one final sortie against Bell Isle, off the coast of Brittany in 1761, that Hayman was appointed Aide de Camp to General Hodgson. Hayman did indeed achieve his majority during that expedition but within another regiment, that of Colonel Grey's regiment of Foot, later to become the 98th. After the French commander surrendered, Major Hayman Rooke had the great honour of bringing home the dispatches. He was received by King George III, and Pitt also received him, with open arms. Peace followed, and Hayman Rooke was able to retire on full pay as a major.

## Hayman Rooke moves to Woodhouse

Henry Willoughby Rooke stated that after leaving the Army, Hayman settled at Mansfield Woodhouse, to be close to his Army friend Sir William Boothby, who had property there. Hayman became a magistrate and a deputy lieutenant of the county. The earliest indication of his interest in pre-history, are some notes dated July 1761 in which he described various Derbyshire burial mounds and a Roman camp. Very few of his sketches are dated, but there is one in 1763 of a Sussex burial urn. Later he may have acted for the Welbeck Estate in some role, for some deeds bear his name and a memo from 1768 lists him among the guests at a masked ball at Welbeck Abbey. There is a glimpse of the extrovert nature of the man here, for the description reveals that he appeared in three guises, first as an old woman, then as a harlequin and then as a running footman.

His love of travel saw him venture as far as Newfoundland and his many sketches include some of an iceberg drawn in 1773. He joined the Society of Antiquaries and became a Fellow in 1775 and wrote several articles for the journals *Archaeologia* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

### Woodhouse Place.



It seems likely from his correspondence, that he moved to Woodhouse Place about 1777. Hayman's father died in 1776 and his mother, the year after, both intestate. He was authorised to dispose of their estate as he saw fit, which could explain why he was in a position to acquire Woodhouse Place that year. Woodhouse Place is thus described by William Harrod, in his *History of Mansfield and its Environs* as being 'nearly surrounded by lofty evergreens, the windows admitting a dim religious light.

The pleasure grounds were planted with much ingenuity and taste, and inside were things valuable to a mind like that of its worthy possessor.' To be noted - the pointed Gothic windows with the Y tracery was Hayman's work. The battlements were added after the Second World War.

His devoted servant of some 30 years, Walter Within (or Willim), died in July 1796 and is buried in the churchyard at Mansfield Woodhouse, his grave featuring quite an elaborate headstone. Hayman became a very well known and

respected authority on antiquarianism, especially within Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. He was the mainstay of a small group of like minded people who shared their discoveries and ideas and encouraged each other to help these into print.

He and one such man, the Rev Samuel Pegge, the incumbent of the parish of Whittington, near Chesterfield, worked together on various projects. One was Pegge's history of Bolsover Castle, which Hayman illustrated. He visited Pegge regularly and kept him supplied with cucumbers and melons from his garden, and hares and venison from his times spent hunting. When Pegge, who was some

20 years older than Hayman, could no longer get about, Hayman undertook several excursions into Derbyshire on his behalf, to describe and draw monuments and buildings for him.

### WOODHOUSE PLACE - Fairy Stones

Hayman was always a welcome guest at Hopton Hall, in Derbyshire, the home of Philip Gell. Many artefacts were discovered on Gell's estate as he pushed new roads through valleys to link up with the lead mines and the canal network. One such artefact was a Neolithic hand-axe, which Gell's wife, Dorothy, drew. Another unearthed along the Via Gellia, an iron dagger, is housed in the Rooke Collection in the Ashmolean Museum.

Closer to home, he began to hear of how local folk were picking up what were referred to as fairy stones in the ploughed Northfield, near Pleasley Vale. Realising what they might be, he investigated further and later that year in 1786 he oversaw the excavations of what turned out to be the foundations of two Roman villas, villa urbana and villa rustica. The so-called fairy stones were in fact the tiny tesserae pieces used to make up a mosaic pavement. The excavations, which were well documented, were afterwards covered in and a wooden shelter placed over the site. The shelter stood the test of time for many years but eventually fell down and was never replaced. His discoveries were published in *Archaeologia* VIII, 1787.

In the 1790's Robert Thoroton's *Antiquities of Nottinghamshire* was being revised by John Throsby, who sought Hayman's help and advice. Several of his drawings appear in these volumes.

### Druids

Hayman produced an account of Druidical remains in Derbyshire, which was published in *Archaeologia* Volume XII. He firmly believed that the Druids were the chief representatives of ancient British culture. They fired his imagination and he was bent on discovering evidence of their rituals.

He was particularly interested in the Nine Ladies' stone circle on Stanton Moor in Derbyshire. It is a prehistoric site dating from the Bronze Age and is thought to be connected to fertility worship. It features nine small stones set upright in a circle some 35 feet in diameter. Outside the ring of stones about 100 feet to the south stands a single one called the King Stone.

To commemorate Rooke's bicentenary in 2006, and his connections with Mansfield Woodhouse, Pleasley Vale and Stanton Moor, a modern circle of nine stones has been made at the beginning of the Meden Trail at Pleasley Vale. Mystery also surrounds the Butter Stumps that stand outside the boundary wall to Woodhouse Place. Did he attempt to create his own stone circle? Were they just a piece of décor for his garden? Or perhaps they were used as a resting perch for the baskets of the farmers' wives as they made their way to and from market. On the other hand maybe they were an 18th century version of the concrete bollards, which our present day councils use to cordon off and protect roadsides.

William Harrod's "A History of Mansfield and its Environs", printed in 1801, owed so much to Hayman's involvement that the author dedicated the book to him. Between 1785 and 1805 he compiled a meticulous meteorological register and tried to forecast the weather using barometric and other indicators. He published records of the weather and other natural phenomena. One of his drawings features a meteor he witnessed, as seen from a field behind his house. An engraving of that appeared in Harrod's book of 1801.

## The Greendale Oak

Hayman's book called "Descriptions and Sketches of Some Remarkable Oaks in the Park at Welbeck in 1790", was published in 1791 at a cost of 7/6d in boards and was printed by J. Nichols and sold in Mansfield by P. Sheppard, bookseller. One of those trees featured in the book was the Greendale Oak. In 1724 the first Duke of Portland bet that he could drive a coach and six horses through the Greendale Oak. The tree was hollowed out and he duly won his bet. The Major recorded in 1790 the dimensions of the hollowed arch as 10ft three high and 6ft three wide. The Duke's bet meant the certain demise of the tree because it did not survive much longer after Rooke's description of it. The Major Oak (formerly the Queen Oak)

Rooke also wrote about another tree in Sherwood Forest, and his name will be forever linked with it, it is the Major Oak, perhaps the most important and well-known tree in England. It was named after him because he had such admiration for this magnificent tree.

## Memorial Stone

He maintained contact with his family, his two soldier brothers kept him informed of London events and progress of wars. Colonel Charles Rooke was allowed by George III to reside in the stone tower of Windsor Castle in recognition of his raising a regiment called the Windsor Volunteers. Charles was an attentive brother. He supplied Hayman with spectacles, arranged for him to have therapy for a sprained ankle, and sent all sorts of remedies for his neuralgia. Major Hayman Rooke died on 18th September 1806, and his memorial stone lies near the altar in St Edmund's Church, Mansfield Woodhouse.

## Snippets from The Nottingham Journal: 5th January 1793

--The Major attended a general meeting for the inhabitants of Mansfield and vicinity at Mansfield Town Hall for the purpose of publicly testifying attachment to the king and constitution of the monarchy of George III.  
14th June 1794 - At a County meeting it was resolved to raise by voluntary subscription a Corps of Cavalry, composed of yeoman. -All subscribers of 20 guineas or more will form a committee, whose first meeting will be at the Swan, immediately after the County meeting. More than 200 gentlemen subscribed immediately, including Major Hayman Rooke (£21). At their first meeting the committee requested that all wishing to serve as officers or privates in the yeomanry, should contact them as soon as possible.

13th June 1795 - chairman of the Yeoman Committee was Hayman Rooke. A decision was made that £3 per troop would be allowed for new jackets for each volunteer and helmets were to be procured. 20th June 1795 - a date for the reception of Yeomanry standards was set at 14th July. 21st April 1798 - six volunteers from Mansfield Woodhouse are serving in the Yeoman Cavalry and about 50 fine stout young fellows have offered their services for the protection of the neighbourhood. {Would it be too much a stretch of the imagination that Yeoman Hill Park was so called because the yeomanry practised their drill there.}

8th

September 1798 -- Major Rooke as one of many present at the anniversary celebrations for the County General Hospital, Standard Hill, Nottingham.

9th

March 1799 -- the Major was on the panel of jurors at County Assizes with reference to the affairs of taxes and duties on income. Sources: Resurrection Major, a biography by Pamela McInally. Mansfield in the News 1791 to 1806 by David J. Bradbury. Secrets of Sherwood by D. J. Bradbury. Arthur Mee's Nottinghamshire. List of gravestones in Mansfield Woodhouse churchyard at 1800 transcribed by Heather Faulkes in 2003 from the History of Mansfield and its Environs by W. Harrod published in 1801.

NB - Please note that the family name is spelt in two ways, either Heyman or Hayman.

(I would like to take this opportunity to thank Pamela McInally, for with her invaluable research and subsequent biography about the Major, we now have more of an insight into his family background and about the man himself.)

Ann Edgcombe.

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