

The Goblets made from the original Whitty Pear

MIKE AVERILL

What happened to the goblets that were made from the old Whitty Pear or Sorb tree in the Wyre Forest?

In the many articles about the Wyre Forest Whitty Pear tree there is often the mention of four goblets that were especially made from the wood of the old tree and the question is often posed as to where they are now. This is the story of two of those.

The True Service or Sorb tree *Sorbus domestica* has always had a special place in the history and folklore of the Wyre Forest and the best known of these trees originally grew in the woodland called the Parks. The origin of the tree has been the subject of much speculation over the years since it was first recorded by Edmund Pitt in 1678. It was thought to be the only tree of its kind in the country at the time, although it was known to grow on the Continent. This tree was visited by many naturalists and interested parties and had become a good luck symbol and talisman for traveller. But unfortunately it was set on fire in 1862 by someone who had a grudge against the landowner. One man who kept a close eye on the tree and often took people to see it was George Jorden a local naturalist. He was a member of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club (WNC) and he took several pieces of the tree after the fire and these were made into four goblets. One of these was presented to William Mathews in 1864 (who was one of the founder members of the WNC) in recognition of his service to the club as Honorary Secretary. Some years later a second cup was presented to John Hill White in

1902 again for services to the club, but the whereabouts of these two cups isn't known today. Interestingly the presentation of the cup to John Hill White was made by Mrs Jane Lees the widow of Edwin Lees and her name had been Mrs Matthews before she was married to Edwin in 1883. Spelled slightly differently, there was no connection with the first Mr Mathews to receive a cup. This left two cups which were in the possession of Jane Lees after Edwin Lees the co-founder of the club died in 1897. So who was Jane Lees and where did she come from and why did an Australian poet nearly spoil this story?

In the 1851 census Jane is mentioned as the seventeen year old daughter of Joshua & Mary Bridges living in the Kings Head Inn, St John's, Worcester. Apparently Jane was fond of horses and had met a young man called Adam Lindsay Gordon who had been at Worcester Grammar School, and was also keen on horses, and they had become very fond of each other. He got into an argument with a local horse owner who had promised to lend Gordon a horse to enter the Steeplechase at Crowle, but the horse was impounded due to the owners debts. Gordon was incensed and fought with the owner and was forced to appear before the local magistrate. He was bailed out after that but it was an indication of how impetuous he was and his father arranged for him to emigrate to Australia in an attempt to give him some kind of purpose. Before leaving he appealed to Jane in case she might want him to stay, but it wasn't to be and so he



The two Whitty Pear goblets

Mike Averill



Rim of one of the Whitty Pear goblets

Mike Averill

left and joined the South Australian Mounted Police. All these experiences obviously had an influence on Gordon and he became a much loved poet in Australia as well as a jockey and politician. Not long after this, in 1856, Jane married a local auctioneer John Matthews and they had a son Joseph Bridges Matthews. Joseph became a solicitor, married Marie Florence and they had two children.

Jane was widowed in 1879 but she had met Edwin Lees, and she married him in 1883, his first wife also called Jane having died in 1878. Edwin died in 1887 but by that time Jane had herself become involved with the WNC, presenting one of the original cups to John Hill White as already mentioned. The last two cups that were in Edwin and Jane's possession passed to her son Joseph Bridges Matthews and then to his daughter Beatrice and then to her daughter Peggy Margaret and finally to her son Richard Man who lives in Cornwall.

The cups, 8 cms across the rim and 16 cms tall, were turned from a single branch which shows the growth rings. Each cup has a silver bezel on the base and the rim and liner is also silver. The rim has foliage and flowers engraved on it which could be those of *Sorbus domestica*. With the cup the owner has a wonderful painting of Jane Matthews as a young woman dated 1861, painted by a local artist E. Davis of Northwick, Worcester.

The cups are the proud possession of Mr Man now and thanks must be given to him for kindly sharing pictures of the cups and of Jane, and it only remains now to wonder if the other two cups are still in the family of

the original owners.

The Whitty Pear that was burned down lives on of course in the many saplings that have been planted from its seed in the Bewdley area. One is planted on the same spot as the original tree in Wyre and now 100 years old it is still frequently visited today. Yet the same question has never been fully answered. Where did that old Sorb tree come from?

Thanks also to Garston Philips from the Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum for help in tracing the cups.



Jane Matthews 1861

Mike Averill