

Little Boreland - 70 years in the ownership of the Balfour Paul family

On 22 October 2021 the Balfour Paul family marked their ownership of Little Boreland and the remaining 10 acres of Boreland Wood for 70 years. The only member of the family to live here was Ian, schoolmaster at Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh and Elder of the Anwoth and then Gatehouse Kirk. Since his death in 2010, the house has been used for holiday lets and has been run by Ian's nieces and nephew. We were aware of the need to regenerate the ancient wood and so put in a rough road in 2014. Down this Robert Carson has been able to remove a considerable number of fallen trees, several from storm Ali (September 2018) and now more are being removed following storm Arwen (November 2021) including a number of 100-year-old oaks. Plenty of old fallen timber has been left for wildlife.

Using the cleared space, since 2020 Jamie Balfour Paul (single handed) has planted 500 trees of mixed but native species. If a good proportion of these survive, Little Boreland Wood will continue to at least the 22nd century. Without his work, in say fifty years there would have been no mature timber and the wood would be dominated by ash and sycamore.

The 70 years of the family being at Little Boreland is being marked in an unusual way — the conservation of a double privy! As an avid reader of the Gatehouse News, I was fascinated by an article by David Devereux in 2015 about a double privy at Syllodioch in Cally Mains Wood, dated 1810s. It made me look more closely at the little building housing the double privy at Little Boreland. David later came over and made scale drawings of it.



Our double privy has had a chequered history. It was intact in the 1950s with an open lean to, attached to the far end, but no one knew that it had been used as a privy and it gradually became overgrown. Not until Ian came to live at Little Boreland in 1990 did he clear the years of weeds and rubbish to discover the evidence of the double privy from whence it came to be known by the family as 'The Chummy Loo.'

A crack down the front gradually deepened and we were generally concerned about the fabric of the building, mainly of stone with a brick facade. Its overall beauty was reduced by the large electricity pole placed by the dyke alongside the privy, so it was impossible even to make a decent photograph. In 2018 Scottish Power decided to improve their power lines in the area. Old power lines were taken down in the Wood and a new post installed alongside the little dyke by the Chummy. Despite warnings not to damage the dyke, it was damaged and Scottish Power had to pay for its rebuilding. We insisted that the work had to be done by Stuart Nichol.

In 2020 Scottish Power was given some money to place power cables underground, so out came the new pole and for the first time for many years, the Chummy could be seen standing on its own without the intruding power lines. In view of its structural fragility a decision had to be made either to restore it or let it gradually fall down. Being us, we decided to conserve it in all its quaintness and its patchwork quilt of minor repairs over many years. Stuart Nichol has now finished the work and we are delighted with the outcome which includes repointing all four walls and the ridge and replacing two Lancashire slate tiles, spraying for woodworm. The old crooked lintel which didn't fit has become a garden seat. Stuart fabricated a new lintel and found reconditioned bricks to rebuild and create a sturdy facade. Mark Grieve has fitted new panels to the door so that the entranceway is properly proportioned. Since starting this article, an added bonus this year has been the repainting of both the exterior and interior of the old Dairy complete with its stone shelving. We are indebted to the meticulous Eric and John Grieve. As a footnote on behalf of the Balfour Pauls and their families, I would like to thank the people of Gatehouse for being so kind and friendly to us, outsiders, over so many years and making us feel part of your community. Please see 'The Story of a Magical House' for more information on the history of Little Boreland. Copies from ann@simla.org.uk James Collett-White