

# Miss Felicite Frances Hardcastle

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By Carl Whiteley



Miss F. F. Hardcastle.

**Miss Felicite Frances Hardcastle, of Atkins Plot, Burley, has a great interest in local history and after nearly 30 years of research believes there is sufficient material in Burley to form a very interesting collection of museum pieces.**

In her small cottage in the grounds of Long Pond House, she told me of her ambition to open a village museum at Burley. "I think it is a great pity that local 'finds' should be whisked away to the other end of the county instead of being placed in a local setting for local people to see," she said.

"Everybody agrees with my idea but the difficulty is finding a suitable room where the collection can be displayed I am afraid it is just a 'castle in the air' at the present."

Miss Hardcastle has the nucleus of a collection which, she said, could be added to by other people in the area. She is confident that sufficient material could be collected to have at least a small room with three or four large display cases.

**Among Miss Hardcastle's very interesting collection is a pewter mug which belonged to Thomas Eyre, who built the chapel at Burley in 1780.**

The mug was dredged from the River at Ringwood, in front of the old Fish Inn, and on it is the inscription "Thomas Eyre, Burley Manor, born 1750."

Another museum piece is an old bread shovel which was used to take loaves out of the old type of deep oven. It was found locally in an old barn. She has also many documents, maps, wills and deeds.

## FATHER—AN ASTRONOMER.

Miss Hardcastle was born at Oxford in 1902 and was educated at Godstowe School, High Wycombe, and Oak Dene, Beaconsfield. Her father, Mr. J. Alfred Hardcastle, was an astronomer, appointed to the observatory in Armagh in 1916. He died within 18 months of the appointment and the family moved to Burley in 1918.

Her father's grandfather was Sir William Herschel, the great astronomer, who discovered the planet Uranus. Her mother's family was in the Indian Civil Service for about 200 years.

Up to four years ago Miss Hardcastle lived at Long Pond House, the family home since the move from Ireland.

## VILLAGE WITH A HISTORY.

Miss Hardcastle has always taken an interest in the historic side of places where she has lived and on coming to Burley realised it was a village with a long history. In 1930 she took an active interest in the district and in 1936 commenced to write a book "Records of Burley", published in 1950. [*Revised and Extended Edition 1987*].

The search for records took her to Somerset House, London Records Office, Diocesan Registrars Office, Winchester, and several libraries and museums in the surrounding district.

## ARCHAEOLOGY.

Miss Hardcastle is also interested in archaeology and is a keen amateur botanist. She has travelled extensively abroad and always prefers to explore the out of the way places.

Lapland is one of her favourite countries and she has memories of the great herds of reindeer in the summer camps beyond the North Cape. As a botanist she found the northern flowers of great interest and one of her most memorable "finds" during a visit to Lapland was the flower "Linnaea Borealis" in its home ground on the top of Mount Njulia.

Miss Hardcastle spends a good deal of time in her garden and also enjoys a good long walk through the New Forest.

She has carried out a certain amount of excavation work in the New Forest, Dorset and Somerset, and is on the Council of the Hampshire Local Historical Association, of which the Bishop of Winchester is chairman.

**Vice-chairman of Burley Parish Council, she is always of great assistance in matters concerning rights-of-way in the district, and has been able to produce evidence before the Commission.**

A Scouter since 1927, Miss Hardcastle ran the Wolf Cub Pack in Burley for more than 25 years, and was Assistant District Commissioner for 14 years. She is also assistant secretary of the Burley Flower Show.

Since her book was published, Miss Hardcastle has traced further historic details of the area, and is sure there is a great deal more to be found about Burley in its past history. At present she is compiling a photographic record of the village, particularly including views of places likely to be destroyed by modern development.

## RESEARCH.

Miss Hardcastle believes that research helps one to link the past with the present. "It makes it possible see how agricultural has developed and how families have settled themselves in their own particular plots of land.

"You discover how big historical events are reflected in local events like the French Napoleonic Wars, reflected in Burley by the advent of French names in the village," she said.

"Research," she added, "has provided me with a great deal of interest and satisfaction, lots of new friends and human interest".

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## BURLEY'S MISS HARDCASTLE DIES AT 85



MISS FELICITE FRANCES HARDCASTLE, B.E.M., well-known Burley historian, lecturer and naturalist, and great-granddaughter of the astronomer Sir William Herschel, died on Tuesday at the age of 85.

She was born in Oxford where her father, Joseph Alfred Hardcastle, was a lecturer to the Oxford Extension Delegacy. Mr. Hardcastle, like his illustrious grandfather, was to make astronomy his chosen field. He was secretary of the British Astronomical Society from 1904 to 1910, and in his 49th year was appointed Director of the Armagh Observatory, but died before he could take up his duties.

Miss Hardcastle's mother, Theresa Salina Bayley, was born in India where her father, Sir Edward Clive Bayley, was for 36 years a statesman and archaeologist. With several generations of ancestors on both sides of her family having been involved in the natural sciences, it was perhaps inevitable that Felicite should manifest similar interests in her own life.

When her mother retired to the New Forest in 1920, Miss Hardcastle immersed herself at once in a variety of activities. She developed a keen interest in young people and for nearly three decades was Cubmaster in the village, a service that earned her the Scouting Medal of Merit.

Just before the outbreak of the second world war she contributed the first off her "Nature Notes" to the Burley parish magazine, and she continued this column until 1986.

During the war Miss Hardcastle volunteered to be a telephonist in Burley. With a major air base nearby, Allied troops stationed within the parish, and a small armaments industry in the village itself, the enemy might have had good reason to know what was going on in the area. But Britain's shores were never safer from penetration than when she manned the switchboard.

In 1951 her local history, *Records of Burley*, was published. The volume was unusual for its extracts from deeds from virtually every home in the parish. These included historical background, chronology of title changes, acreage and precise geographical location. Though rarely found in local histories, this feature was not the only noteworthy one in her book. Recognising that older inhabitants possessed the only record of village life over the past three generations, she quickly and methodically set about recording their impressions and taking their photographs. During most of the past year, although confined to her room at Highcroft nursing home, she revised and expanded the history, which was reprinted and distributed nationally in December.

Miss Hardcastle was a parish councillor and school governor for many years and, as archaeologist, took part in rescue excavations organised by the New Forest section of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society.

When the local horticultural society years ago established annual floral arrangement competitions to be judged according to standards set forth in national handbooks, she displayed her contempt for rule-bound exhibits by inaugurating a floral arts competition that would be decided only by public vote.

She lectured widely on the history of the New Forest and its natural sciences. Her eager listeners included thousands of young people who came every year to the nearby national youth centre at Avon Tyrrell. Many of them were handicapped or from deprived urban areas, and they were to gain lasting impressions of the wonders of the New Forest from her lively illustrated talks.

An optimist as well as a fierce individualist, Miss Hardcastle never lacked faith in young people. She was quick to spot the promising boy and girl and invite them to tea (itself an "institution") and offer inspiration, example and assistance at the crucial moment of their development. Deeply religious, she was ever generous and outspoken when injustice threatened.

She was awarded the British Empire Medal in December. In the official citation she was called the "grand old lady of the New Forest."