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Title	Byron at Scriven
Date	1806
Source	Atkinson Papers
Prime Source	Harrogate Library

Peer or Commoner

Source, The Atkinson Papers.

This is a rubbing, made some years ago, of the bark of a sycamore tree standing in the avenue in Scriven Park, near Appleby Carr. Lord Byron stayed at the Crown Hotel in Harrogate in 1806 (Grange, p.200); but this tree-carving was probably the sport of some Knaresborough resident of that name. The growth of the tree has broadened out the letters.

Was Lord Byron ever at Scriven? The name is certainly carved upon one of the trees in Scriven Park, and though there were persons of that name resident in Knaresborough, that fact does not in itself dispose of the possibility that the poet himself may have a paid a visit to the place, and in an idle moment upon the beech beech bark.

In the summer of 1806 Lord Byron visited various health resorts making the journeys in a carriage, and accompanied by a groom and valet and a couple of dogs, one a bulldog and the other a Newfoundland. In autumn he was in Harrogate with his friend Picot,

staying down down the Crown, where, though he dined in public, he courted retirement and was quiet and shy, making few acquaintances. He met with Professor Hailstone of Cambridge, to whom he was more than usually courteous.

There was trouble with the dogs, Nelson and Boatswain, which were enemies, and fought furious battles, whenever they could meet each other unmuzzled. Onn such occasions they could only be separated by violent measures and poker and tongs were frequently in use. Nelson got out into the stable yard one day without his muzzle, and gripped a horse by the throat. He could not be made to relinquish his hold, and eventually their poets and valet, taking one of his master's pistols, shot the dog through the head.

The "Hours of Idleness" had not yet been published and Byron must have been most remarked for his eccentricities, his erratic genius, and the strangely chequered fortunes which had preceded his succession to the peerage. While in Harrogate he wrote the verses "Is a Beautiful Quaker".

In Scriven Park there is an avenue of beech trees extending from the north west corner of the hall for nearly half a mile towards the Knaresborough and Pateley road, and ending close by Appleby Carr, a pond well-known to skaters in Harrogate and district. The trees are fine and tall, not very old, as the age of trees is reckoned, but rather in their prime. Nevertheless, the avenue loses some of the effect which it might have had if it had been straight, or if the trees had been set a little further apart. The carriage road which they enclose a little more than 6 or 7 feet wide, and the trees are only about twice that distance apart, measured across the track, and often considerably less, measured from tree to tree along the sides of the way. Indeed, in some instances the exposed roots of adjacent trees almost touch each other. As a result of this clause arrangement the trees had to throw their main branches outwards, and seemed to be a little one-sided in their growth; while owing to the winding of the avenue, vistas are shorter than they need have been. The impression which is produced is rather that of fine forest glade than that of an avenue.

The tree which bears the name by Byron is the 2nd on the left as the avenue is entered from the gate at the corner of the Carr, a tree standing a little forward at the 1st bend of the path. The name is cut at a height of 4 or 5 feet at the back of the tree as it is seen

from the road. The tree is like the others, a little smaller and less mutilated than the average, and it is about 8 feet in circumference where the name is carved.

The name itself is clearly and evenly cut in letters about an inch in height, the capital about one half taller than the others, but the growth of the tree has widened out the vertical cuts. Exclusive of the long tail of the last letter domain is about 9 inches long. In style and character, due allowance being made for distortion produced by the growth of the tree, it is not unlike the name carved by the poet on the panels of the old schoolroom at Harrow. There is a vertical cut, a sort of tick, under the middle of the name but with this exception of name stands alone. There is nothing to indicate the date when the name was carved. On the next tree there is the date 1770 and this is one of the earliest, if not quite the earliest to be found on any of the trees in the avenue. Many of these, of which there are about 150, have been carved and scored mostly with initials, some of which are probably those of successive Slingsby's. But speaking generally it is a cryptic collection, and little of interest can be made out of them.

As already said, there were Byron's in Knaresborough in days gone by. The name occurs, and indeed has a certain prominence, in records dating back to 1780 or earlier, and onwards in the other direction to the middle of last century or later. But at present, there is nothing to show that any of these persons carved his name on the tree in Scriven Park, and thus the question with which this paper commenced remains unanswered.