

Well travelled cricket bat



A recent addition to my collection carries a lot of history with it. The object in question is in the form of a cricket bat, but not the fairly commonly encountered paper knife. This has the shaped back and exact shape of a miniature bat, measuring 11 inches long.

The transfer shows a large tree with a number of men standing round it 'armed' with axes, clearly about to fell it. The transfer is titled 'The Big Tree, North Inch, Perth'. Below the title is the following quote:

"Made of the Oak of Big Tree which stood for 150 years at the top of the Perthshire cricket ground was famous in the annals of the club and was taken down on the 21st November 1906 in consequence of having been wantonly destroyed". I am indebted to the seller, Sheena Burns, for the following information which she obtained from the Perth Cricket Club. The following was an article originally published in the Perth Advertiser.

*Wood you believe it?
Feb 3 2004*

Pieces of a famous oak tree which stood in the grounds of the Perthshire Cricket Club for 150 years have been discovered in New Zealand. And PA readers are being called on to solve the mystery of how it got there.

The original tree was felled in 1906. Now a small vesta box made from its wood has been found in an antiques shop in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Professor Ian Spellerberg, Director of Isaac Centre for Nature Conservation Environment at Lincoln University in Canterbury, New Zealand is a keen

collector of vesta boxes. He bought the Perthshire box and is interested in finding out more about its history.

Professor Spellerberg explained: "I am a keen collector of vesta cases. These come in many shapes and are made from many materials, but typically metal. As I find vesta cases I try to find out as much as I can about each one. I found this particular vesta in an antique shop in Christchurch. The owner also had a slightly larger matching box for cigarettes. I think the items came from the sale of household effects".

The wooden box Professor Spellerberg bought was engraved with a picture of the tree as it stood and inscribed The Big Tree, North Inch, Perth. On the rear are the words: "Made of the oak of Big Tree which stood for 150 years at the top of the Perthshire cricket ground was famous in the annals of the club and was taken down on the 21st November 1906 in consequence of having been wantonly destroyed".

A quick trawl of the internet soon put Professor Spellerberg in touch with Perth County Cricket Club, who passed his enquiries to the PA. David Armstrong of the Club said: "I had a word with some people, and it was initially thought that the tree was taken down after it was attacked by suffragettes. But that was quickly dismissed. We did find out that it had taken five charges of dynamite to take the tree down though".

Jeremy Duncan at the AK Bell Library tracked down a related article which appeared in the PA on November 23 1906. It reads: "In former days when the Perthshire Club occupied the position of champions of Scotland it was the

ambition of batsmen to drive a ball clear over the tree. In these days, therefore, the tree served the useful purpose of stimulating the ardour of the famous cricketers who were then identified with the game. With the deterioration of the game in Perth and the extension of the playing pitch the popularity of the tree also fell, and it was regarded by some as an encroachment and an eyesore, and last year some malicious person went the length of damaging the tree with an axe".

The article went on to say that the tree was taken down on Wednesday, November 21 1906. The following day "five charges of gunpowder were required to displace the roots of the old oak which was reckoned to be at least 150 years old. Mr J K Taylor has purchased the timber for curio purposes". Presumably Mr Taylor was responsible for having the tree made into at least one vesta and cigarette box.

However Professor Spellerberg would still be interested in finding out more about the tree itself.

It is now clear that Mr Taylor also produced a cricket bat. Given the size of the tree it seems likely that there are a large number of pieces somewhere carrying this curious story.

This interesting piece is surely of interest to a wide range of people, from cricket lovers to Perthshire folk, via Mauchline collectors of course.

Charles Hamer