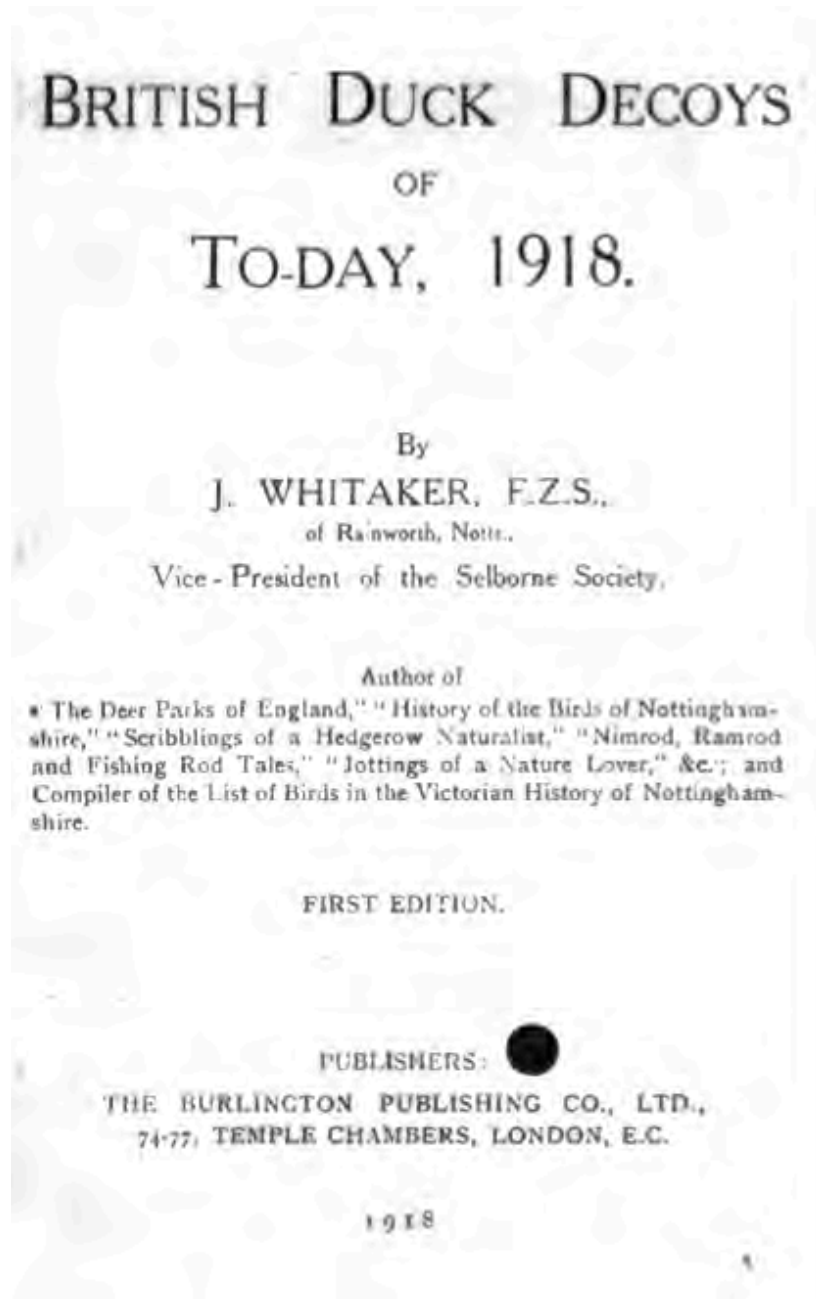


Item 35.8

Whittaker, J. (1918)

British duck decoys of today, 1918

Burlington Publishing, London



of which time he lived under the Aston family as decoyman for 60 years; this decoy has not been worked for a number of years now.

" Here lies the decoyman, who lived like an otter,
Dividing the time betwixt land and water;
His hide he oft soaked in the waters of Perry,
Whilst Aston old beer his spirits kept cheery.
Amphibious his life, Death was puzzled to say
How to dust to reduce such well-moistened clay;
So Death turned decoyman and 'coyed him to land,
Where he fixed his abode till dried to the hand.
He then found him fitting for crumbling to dust,
And here he lies mouldering as you and I must."

OAKLEY PARK DECOY (APRIL, 1918).

Finding I could combine a visit to my sister at Clevedon, in Somerset, and to Oakly Decoy on my way back, I wrote to Mr. Bruce, Lord Plymouth's agent, asking for permission to see it. He most kindly consented, and asked me to stay a night at Prior's Halton with him. After spending ten days, during which time I saw the beautiful surroundings of Clevedon, I left on April 19th, and had time on my way to see the fine church of St. Mary's, Redcliffe, at Bristol, and the Cathedral at Hereford, I arrived at Ludlow, where Mr. Bruce met me, and as we passed through the old town I saw the church, a large and fine one, and the grand old castle, which played so great a part in the long past days. After a dish of tea, we proceeded to the headkeeper's, and found him waiting for us. In walking to the decoy, Mr. Bruce showed me a splendid oak, great in girth, long in bole, and with a grand

spreading top. It is a magnificent specimen of a grand old English tree, and now at its very best. Close by are the ponds, one of which is the decoy. The River Teme runs through them. The nearest to the decoyman's cottage is called the Upper Pond, and is about 6 acres in extent; then comes the Decoy Pool, $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres, with some nice reed beds at one end; then the middle one, this is the largest, just over 9 acres; and the fourth is the lower pond, $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres. The Decoy Pool is a perfect one for its purpose, large enough, but not too big, surrounded by a plantation of 13 acres, in which are some grand trees, especially silver firs. These are very tall and of great girth, and here and there big Scotch firs, long in the stem, clean of bark and ruddy in colour. It was cold, but the sun shone and birds sang. The decoy has four pipes—north, south, east and west. Here they are called *Flues*. Nowhere else have I heard this name used for a pipe. They are shorter than any I have seen, and are from 52 to 54 yards long, and do not cover so much water as in other decoys. The hoops are of iron, fastened to oak posts, and the covering string nets. The screens are of reeds, and not more than 5 feet high, less in some places. The entrance of pipes is about 9 feet high and 16 feet wide. The exposed parts of the banks have reed screens, and on the head of pond spruce boughs drawn through rails. No dog is used. There were nine mallards on the water. No doubt their partners were sitting in the bracken in the park, and I saw two pairs of coots. The decoyman, who had joined us, pointed out a bird on the water on the far side of the next pond, and said there is a Spanish goose, the first we ever had here. I put my glasses on it, and saw it was a great-crested grebe. I was surprised, partly at

the wonderful name given it, and also that it was the first they had ever seen, and the place such a likely one. After a delightful hour we left this interesting spot, and I was pleased to have seen another of the now only too few decoys in England, and I felt much indebted to Mr. Bruce for his kindness in giving me the opportunity of doing so.