

**Bird-nesting and
other Notes**

Vol 1 & 2

by

**C.S. & D.H. Meares
1892 to 1949**

FOREWORD

The two Meares brothers, Douglas and Cecil, sons of Thomas Meares, were born in 1881 and 1883 respectively. The family home where they were born was Clive Hall, Clive, near Shrewsbury. Their father must have been a wealthy man judging by the look and size of Clive Hall. He was able to send both boys to Preparatory School at Bilton Grange, near Rugby in about 1892 when they were aged eleven and nine.

It was possibly at Bilton that they were first encouraged to keep a 'natural History' diary by one of the masters, Mr Southcomb. In that first year of their diary entries, the boys recount the finding of a Red-backed Shrike's nest "on a Sunday walk", the eggs of which "were confiscated by Mr Moss and regained by Mr Southcomb". At any event the boys met up several times with Southcomb some years later in the south of England for bird-nesting forays.

The early entries in the diary are mainly lists of sightings and localities for birds and dates of arrival of summer migrants. This latter information should be of interest to modern researchers studying the effects of 'global warming' on migration dates. Interesting too is that fairly early on in the entries, the boys knew and went bird-nesting with Chance and Gilroy. At Bilton, Douglas was in the School Shooting XVIII and went on to be the Captain.

In about 1897 both brothers were sent to Public School at Uppingham in Rutland and here Cecil proved that he also was a good rifle shot, being in the Shooting XVIII. He shot at Bisley and there missed winning the Public Schools Prize Cup by one point in a shoot-off. Apparently he also excelled at mathematics and after his school days became a Chartered Accountant whilst Douglas joined the London Stock Exchange, both brothers moving south to live in Kent. They occasionally still visited the family home at Clive as the diary entries show.

At the outbreak of the First World War both brothers enlisted, Douglas attaining the rank of Lieutenant and Cecil that of Captain. Douglas did not see active service because, although, according to Walpole-Bond he had a "splendid physique" he suffered from ill-health. In 1916 Cecil was killed aged 33 at Deville Wood in the Battle of the Somme and is buried there. By pure chance, whilst preparing the diary for publication I saw that Cecil's war medals were being offered for sale 'on-line'. I contacted the seller who kindly provided me with the picture of Cecil in uniform.

For ten years or so after his brother's death Douglas showed little interest in birds-nesting. Eventually he settled down to a family life and married a Yorkshire lass, Minie Ambler, eventually raising three sons. Douglas and Minie moved from Sidcup in Kent to Sunningdale in Berkshire in 1935. On the local heathland and commons Douglas

encountered new speciality species and soon got to grips with Dartford Warbler, Woodlark and Hobby, the latter being a 'scarce' migrant at the time, numbering perhaps a hundred pairs, breeding mostly in the southern counties. Douglas discovered many breeding sites for this bird and one is even now still named after him; "Meares Wood" which is on the Crown Estate near Sunningdale.

In 1938 Douglas and Minie moved to Ash Vale in Hampshire and here Douglas was within easy walking distance of more Hobby breeding sites on the surrounding commons and Army Ranges. In 1941 tragedy again struck the Meares family when his youngest son Stanley was killed in a mid-air collision at the age of only 25. He was a Squadron Leader leading his American Eagles Group in practice formation-flying. He had earned the D.F.C., was a veteran of Dunkerque, The Battle of Britain and was credited with shooting down two Me109s and damaging two others. He is buried in Brookwood Cemetery.

The final few years of diary entries are mainly about the Hobby and Douglas was often accompanied by his friend Neville Coltart who I came to know later. When Douglas died in 1949 the diaries were left to Neville. When I later got to know Neville he kindly gave me his B & W photo negatives of people he had been bird-nesting with. One of these photos was the one of Douglas on Camberley Common in July 1938 in obvious Hobby breeding habitat.

It's a coincidence that I was at boarding school in Shropshire, not far from Clive, and that when I started employment with the Forestry Commission and moved south in 1962, I came to live not far from Ash Vale and soon got to know Neville Coltart. He first lent me the diaries then, so I have known them for 50 years. During that time they have assisted me in my Hobby "adventures" and I am sure that many others besides myself have followed in the Meares' brothers footsteps. I especially recall the Eagle at Dundonnell, the Dotterel on A'Mharconaich, Grampians and the Hobbies at Meares Wood, Bisley, Bramshill, Hankley Common, Broadmoor and all the rest!

The first Hobby that I saw and heard was in 1963 in company with Neville Coltart, Gordon Douglas and Les Montgomery from Dublin, and was in fact at Meares Wood. We approached by car along a forest track and came to a padlocked Crown Estate gate with a 'No Unauthorised Entry' sign. I was most impressed when Neville produced a key, opened the lock and we drove through. As we got out of the car near the scattered pine tree site, we heard a Hobby give what Neville described the "egg-squeek" uttered when the bird returns to its eggs. We then saw it fly into its eyrie in an old Crow's nest near the top of a tall spindly pine. In fact this same old nest was used by a Hobby for several years afterwards. (See the photo I took of M. Dawson standing in front of the tree on page 27 of his book *The Red Kite*).

A few years ago a transcribed edition of just the second of these Meares diaries was produced with the inevitable spelling errors and of course lacking the contents of the omitted volume. I have elected to overcome these problems by having the two diaries laser-scanned and then produced in a single volume. I would personally prefer to see the original hand-writings rather than an impersonal typed-out edition. Where there were any blank pages or spaces in the manuscript, I have added relevant photographs and a period map which I hope adds a little interest and colour.

**T.A. (“Tony”) Waddell.
Headley Down
Hampshire.
2017.**



Hobby with Dragonfly



c/3 Hobby
in an old Crow's nest



British Birds

CAPTAIN CECIL STANLEY MEARES.

CAPTAIN C. S. MEARES was killed whilst leading his Company into action on July 30th, 1916. Born in November, 1883, he was the youngest son of Thomas Meares of Clive Hall, Shrewsbury, and was educated at Bilton Grange and Uppingham, where he was top of the school in mathematics. He represented his school at Bisley for several years in the shooting VIII., and on one occasion tied for the coveted Public Schools' Prize, the "Spencer Cup," and lost on the tie being shot off, by one point.

He was a chartered accountant by profession, and had practised in the City of London for some years. A keen and most energetic sportsman, from his earliest days he had always been particularly fond of the study of British birds, their habits, nests and eggs. As an indefatigable and observant field ornithologist, he had few equals. He made, together with his brother D. H. Meares, an excellent scientific collection of British birds' eggs, which contained perfect clutches of eggs, of nearly every British breeding bird, supplemented by profuse and accurate data of their localities, notes and habits. In the course of his rambles he penetrated most of the out-of-the-way haunts of rare birds in the British Islands, including the Orkneys, and during recent years made special studies of such rare birds as the Dotterel, Hobby, Marsh-Warbler, Montagu's Harrier, Greenshank, Kentish Plover, Quail and Garganey. The only record of the Siskin breeding in Shropshire mentioned in Mr. H. E. Forrest's "Fauna of Shropshire" was made by him. An excellent paper, "British Breeding Ducks," was written by him and printed in *Transactions of the London Natural History Society*, 1914. This paper was reviewed in *British Birds*, Vol. IX., pp. 277-8.

On the outbreak of war, Meares enlisted in the Public Schools and University Corps, afterwards called the "19th Service Battalion Royal Fusiliers," and was

soon given his Commission as Second-Lieutenant rising rapidly to the rank of Captain.

In his spare moments, even within sound of the guns, when in rear for rest purposes, he would take walks and rides through the country to observe the bird-life. He saw a number of Golden Orioles, Crested Larks, Ortolans, etc., and several Harriers. On June 26th last he found the Hobby breeding in a wood quite close to the front line. He reported that Quail were common and that Owls and Kestrels hawked the trenches regularly for rats and mice which abounded.

Eventually, after many exciting minor engagements in Northern France and several very narrow escapes, he was ordered to another part and was killed in action at the head of his Company.

In the numerous letters of sympathy received by his family from officers and men who had served with him, as well as from those with whom he had worked in civil life, two points stand out specially, viz. the love and devotion of those who had served under him, all of whom pay a lasting tribute to the great personal interest which he took in them and in their welfare and comfort : all "the boys" were devoted to him, and officers and men nicknamed him "Daddy." The other point was his almost reckless bravery, and he was continually being urged to take less risks in the presence of the enemy.

These two points were typical of this big, genial, great-hearted fellow.

He died as he would have wished, and his death has been most keenly felt by all his numerous friends, who have lost in him a real and true friend. The memory of Stanley Meares, however, and his cheery companionship, will never be forgotten by those whose privilege it was to know him.

P.B.Smyth.



D.H. Meares
(1881-1949)

Camberley Common, Berks.
July 6th 1938.

Photo by N.B. Coltart.

C.S. Meares
(1883-1916)

Killed in action
July 30th 1916.



Birdsnesting

& other notes.
Vol. 1.

1892

April - May; Clive

Goldfinch

Coot

1 Cuckoo's egg

Lesser Redpoll

Garden Warbler

Pheasant

Bullfinch

1892

{ D.H.M.
C.M.

1893

April - June; Clive & Bilton

King Ouzel¹

Coal Tit³

Tree-creeper

Blackcap²

Long-tailed Tit

¹ Found Lim Hill, 21st April, clutch 4.

² Very numerous at Bilton Grange.

³ Young birds early in May, in old Sand-Martin's hole.

1893

{ D.H.M.
C.M.

Note. Prior to 1892, 3 Lesser Redpolls, 1 Blackcap, 1 Garden Warbler, Stockdoves, Whitethroats, Spotted Flycatchers and other common nests made the bags.

Note. Nests found annually are not inserted.

1894

April - June ; Clive & Bilton

Goldfinch
 Red-backed Shrike¹
 Lesser Redpoll
 Carrion Crow²
 Kestrel
 Turtle Dove
 Goldcrest
 Long-tailed Tit
 Sedge Warbler
 Great Tit
 Blackcap
 Garden Warbler
 Marsh Tit
 Bullfinch

1894

{ D.H.M.
 { C.A.M.

¹ Eggs found at Bilton on a Sunday walk by D.H.M., confiscated by M^r Moss, and regained by M^r Southcomb.

² Common at Bilton.



Bilton Grange Preparatory School,
 Dunchurch, Rugby, Warks.
 Founded 1873.

1895

1895

April - mid May ; Clive

{ D.H.M
C.M

Coot

¹ 2 Cuckoo's eggs

Jay

Kestrel

Jackdaw

Skylark

² Turtle Dove

¹ With a Skylark and Pied Wagtail respectively

² In August

May - July ; Bilton

{ D.H.M
Chance
C.M

Green Woodpecker

Carion Crow

Reed Bunting

Redstart

Sedge Warbler

Whinchat

Tree Sparrow

Garden Warbler

Blackcap

Great Tit

Marsh Tit

Bullfinch

D.H.M and Chance were responsible for nearly all the above, C.M finding but little.

1896

April - mid-May; Clive

1 Siskin

Creeper

Meadow Pipit

Lesser Redpoll

2 Sand Martin

Blue Tit

Marsh Tit

Jackdaw

Sky Lark

1 Nest and 1 egg found in the 'Birchen Coppice'
 at the extremity of a fir, about 20 ft. high,
 on April 22nd by D.H.M. A few days later
 the eggs were found broken below, the
 work presumably of a Jay.

2 In August.

1896

{D.H.M.

{C.H.M.

May - June; Bilton

C.H.M.

Coal Tit'

Goldcrest

Whinchat

Tree Sparrow

Sedge Warbler

Blackcap

Redstart

Great Tit

1 Nearly fresh eggs in a tree stump, May 16th.

1897

1897

5.

Arrival of Summer Migrants

March	24 th	Wheatear	Uppingham
"	31 st	Chiffchaff	"
April	11 th	Nightingale	Folkington
"	15 th	Willow Wren	Clive
"	"	Swallow	"
"	17 th	Martin	"
"	20 th	Sand Martin	"
"	22 nd	Cuckoo	"
"	"	Grasshopper Warbler	"
"	25 th	Redstart	"
"	27 th	Whitethroat	"
"	30 th	Swift	"
May	3 rd	Turtle Dove	Shrewsbury
"	4 th	Corncrake	Clive
"	"	Sedge Warbler	Leebotwood
"	"	Blackcap	"
"	"	Garden Warbler	"
"	13 th	Spotted Flycatcher	Uppingham

April - June; Leebotwood, Clive & Uppingham

Dipper

Coot

Pheasant

Marsh Tit

{ D.H.M.

{ C.M.

very little real nesting was done.

1898

1898

Arrival of Summer Migrants

April 7 th	Chiffchaff	Uppingham
" 11 th	Swallow	"
" 14 th	Wheatear	Clive
" "	Willow Wren	"
" "	Tree Pipit	"
" 15 th	Sand Martin	"
" 21 st	Cuckoo	"
" 23 rd	Whitethroat	"
" 26 th	Martin	Shrewsbury
" 29 th	Blackcap	Hawkestone
May 3 rd	Corncrake	Clive
" 1 st	Sedge Warbler	"
" 4 th	Swift	"
" 10 th	Spotted Flycatcher	"

**Siskin.**

The first recorded breeding
of Siskin in Shropshire by
D.H. Meares on April 22nd 1896.

(Page 4).

1898

1898

April-mid-May; Clive

Partridge

Kestrel

Jackdaw

{D.H.M

{C.M

On April 18th a brood of young Crossbills were about the Birchen Coppice. These birds were fairly plentiful during the years '98 & '99

May 5th; Leebotwood

Grey Wagtail'

Dipper

'5 eggs, nearly fresh.

{D.H.M

{C.M

May-July; Uppingham

Nightingale

Tree Pipit

Redstart

Sand Martin

Garden Warbler

Skylark.

{D.H.M

{C.M

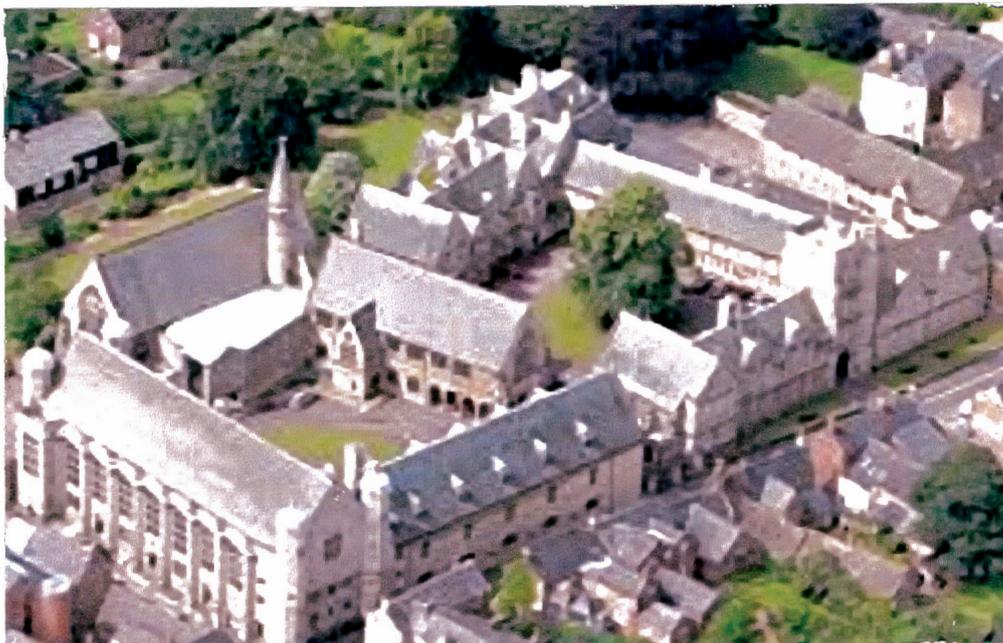


Clive Hall, Clive, Shrewsbury.

Birthplace & early home to the Meares brothers.

Arrival of Summer Migrants

April 4 th	Chiffchaff	Uppingham
" 13 th	Willow Wren	Clive
" "	Wheatear	"
" "	Swallow	"
" 14 th	Tree Pipit	"
" 15 th	Redstart	"
" 21 st	Yellow Wagtail	"
" 22 nd	Sand Martin	"
" 23 rd	Blackcap	"
" 22 nd	Corncrake	"
" 24 th	Martin	"
" "	Whitethroat	"
" 27 th	Cuckoo	"
May 1 st	Swift	Leaton
" "	Whinchat	"
" 3 rd	Turtle Dove	Harmer Hill
" 7 th	Nightjar	Clive
" "	Grasshopper Warbler	"
" 15 th	Spotted Flycatcher	Uppingham



Uppingham School,
 Uppingham Rutland.
 Founded 1584.