

**THE PEACOCK AT ROWSLEY:
WHERE ANDREW, ALEXIS, AND
THE NATURALIST MET; AND
WHAT CAME OF THEIR VISIT**

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The Peacock at Rowsley: Where Andrew, Alexis, and the Naturalist Met; and what came of their visit by John Joseph Briggs

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JOHN JOSEPH BRIGGS

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THE PEACOCK AT BOWSLEY.

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BY

JOHN JOSEPH BRIGGS, F.R.S.L.

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P R E F A C E .

SOME years ago, when on a trip through the Peak of Derbyshire, it was our good fortune to halt for a short season at the "Peacock," and we were so much struck with the quaint character of the house itself, the picturesque nature of the scenery around it, and the many interesting objects, and associations of the district, that we determined to make it the scene of a series of papers. Bringing several persons of different tastes, pursuits, habits, and modes of thought together, we made them discourse to each other upon their favourite topics, and occasionally making allusion to places, objects, and circumstances in the neighbourhood. These papers appeared originally in the *Field*, and apparently created considerable interest, judging by the repeated requests which have been made to us to re-print them in a collected form. We now comply with that request. Of the Peacock itself, it seems necessary to give a few particulars, and we cannot do better than quote

the following, which appeared about ten years ago in the columns of the *Illustrated London News* :—

“There is nothing, perhaps that more enhances the pleasure of travelling to an Englishman than meeting with good and comfortable accommodation at the various hotels he may visit ; and, though great has been the outcry against hotel keepers generally—for they are nearly always looked upon as grim ogres who will most certainly eat up either your purse or your person—still there are exceptions to the rule, where every comfort is to be had, and where even invalids may rest quietly for the night without fear of their malady being increased by the sight of the *bill* in the morning.

“The accompanying Engraving of the Peacock at Rowsley lays before our readers the *beau idéal* of a snug country hostelry. It was our lot to be travelling through Derbyshire a few days ago, when fortune brought us under the shade of its roof. Who has not heard of the Peacock ? Its fame seemed on inquiry, to have spread through the length of the land ; but, as it had not been a portion of our luck to call there and enjoy its calm repose before, we thought that some portion of our readers might not be the less grateful to us for calling their attention to it, especially if they should be in that part of the country. The inn reminded us forcibly of the wayside inns mentioned in Sir Walter Scott’s novels, built in the Elizabethan style, with abundance of windows, filled with heavy stone mullions, surmounted with gables and battlements. It requires no stretch of imagination to carry us a century or two back, and view over the door the sign of the “Bear and Ragged Staff,” or a troop of Leicester’s mounted retainers quaffing ale and cracking jokes with the landlord. When inside, such a snug and cosy feeling comes over one, produced by the unscrupulous attention to our creature comforts, that, gazing at the old beams forming the ceiling, with our feet brought within the rays of the glowing fire which ever and anon blazes forth and dies away, leaving us in momentary darkness, we almost forget that we are creatures of to-day, and should scarcely start did a damsel clad in ancient garb appear with venison pasty and clouted cream from the buttery.

“Rowsley is a small hamlet situated at the junction of the Wye and the

Derwent, both of which streams afford much gratification to the disciples of Isaak Walton, who may be seen dotted about on the bank, following their piscatorial pursuits, and who make the Peacock their head-quarters.

“ Rowsley is seven miles from Matlock Bath, and three miles from Bakewell. It is the terminus* of the railway from Ambergate, whence run coaches to Buxton, Manchester, &c. In these days of steam it is a refreshing sight to see the old-fashioned coach-and-four rolling along—to hear the wind of the horn as it nears its destination, contrasting with the shrill whistle of the engine, which seems like an intruder in that peaceful valley, where formerly the only sounds were the song of the shepherd, or here and there the soft ripple of the stream, whose course, at intervals impeded by craggy fragments, forms fresh beauties to delight the eye. But these are not all the attractions of Rowsley. Within three miles is Chatsworth, the “Palace of the Peak,” with all its beauties of natural scenery and modern art. Here may be seen the germ of the Crystal Palace, and the hand and genius of Paxton visible at each turning—its waterfalls, its fountains, its towers, and varied walls all testify to the liberality and taste of its princely owner and the skill of the designer. Of the house and its contents little need be said, for the costliness and beauty of the gems contained in it are too well known.

“ From this point the tourist should retrace his steps, and half way between Rowsley and Bakewell he will find Haddon Hall, one of the most interesting of baronial ruins remaining in this country, situated on the side of a hill, sheltered from the north wind, imbedded in the richest foliage, and with the busy babbling Wye running close under its battlements, it forms a picture to be seen only to be appreciated. On entering the building and closing the wicket a bygone age bursts upon the visitor. The rude porter’s lodge and bedstead on which the retainer last slept—the chaplain’s apartments—the chapel (part of which is of the 12th century)—the courtyard, all vividly and forcibly carry us to the time when the Baron issued forth attended by his suite to enjoy the sports of the field. Passing through the first court we come to the dining-hall, with raised dais and table—the only distinguishing mark between master and servant. In immediate proximity are the kitchens

* Formerly it was the terminus, but now the line is carried forward to Manchester.

and larders, all looking as if the domestics had only retired for a short time. We then come to the dining, drawing, and ball rooms, all clean and dry, as when abandoned as a human habitation; and, as we paced along this latter room with polished floor, the hollow sounds of one's footsteps led us to the contemplation of the time when the gay Elizabeth, surrounded by her Court, honoured the Vernons with her presence, and made the room echo with the shouts of merry laughter. A long day may be spent in wandering about the gardens, terraces, and shady walks; the door is pointed out to us through which eloped Di Vernon and her faithful lover: which route they took is left to the visitor's imagination; perchance they crossed the remarkable stone foot-bridge. Suffice it to say the escape was perfected, and adds additional interest to the romantic ruins of Haddon Hall.

"It was now time to wend by the wandering banks of the river, to our old friend the Peacock, which accords so well in its outer garb, with Haddon Hall, that it adds to making the illusion complete; and, as the time arrives for our leaving, we look back with a sigh as one of the connecting links between a bygone age of chivalry, and the present time fades from our view.

"HYEMS."

