A gory story of the two bears

Once upon a time there were two little grey dancing bears. All the children gathered around as they danced and twirled in the Forest of Dean.

But as evening drew on and the pubs opened, the story of the bears changed.

They had mauled some children, it was rumoured in the Cinderford pubs.

The cry went up: " After the bears."

Armed with sticks and stones an angry mob followed the bears for three-and-a-half miles to Ruardean Hill, stoning them as they went.

One of the bears collapsed from exhaustion. A kindly farmer fetched his shotgun and killed it to put it out of its misery.

The other bear stumbled

JAMES WOOD — the only man who remembers the bear-shoot

on for another mile until it too was killed by the mob.

Their four French keepers ran away in fear.

Then it was discovered that the story which caused all the trouble was quite untrue.

The muzzled baby bears were harmless.

BLAMED

At Littledean magistrates' court, several foresters were fined for their part in the bear hunting.

And the incident, 75 years ago, has never been forgotten. The people of Cinderford always blamed the Ruardean ruffians.

But the Ruardean residents always blamed the Cinderford neighbours.

It was a brave stranger who went to the Forest of Dean and asked: " Who killed the bears?"

The only man who can remember that evening now is Mr. James Wood, aged 84, of Ruardean woodside.

"The forest was a rough place in those days," he recalled. "It was civilised but they had very rough ways. It's a lot quieter now.

BEAUTY

"If you had come to Ruardean a few years ago and asked who killed the bears you would have had to run for your life, but the young people don't know anything about it.

"Times have changed from the days when there were 3,000 to 4,000 miners here. I was in the pits for more than 50 years.

"I can remember that night quite well, although I was only a boy of eight. I remember hearing a lot of shouting. It was about eight o'clock. You've never heard such a noise as those angry men made."

And when it was all over and the police had been called to restore order, the little bear killed at Ruardean was buried near one of the finest beauty spots in the Forest of Dean.

"It's only a few yards from the top of the hill where you can see nine counties on a clear day," said Mr. Wood.

"It was such a shame they were killed because they were only baby bears."

by Jill Limbrick

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