

The Wearing Papers

Queen Elizabeth Country Park

Notes written for Doug Jones, Buriton Heritage Bank

My background

On leaving Guildford Junior Technical School in 1955, I began work in Alice Holt Forest until National Service (March 1960 – March 1962) with the Royal Sussex Regiment. I returned to Alice Holt for six months before Benmore Forester Training School (Sept 1962 – 1964). Posted to the Forest of Dean and married in November 1964. Involved in nest box schemes, Bird Ringing, a Mammal Survey and wrote the wildlife section of the Dean Forest guide. This followed further training as a Wildlife (Conservation) Forester and a posting back to Hampshire, living at Four Marks. The area covered included, Alice Holt, Rogate, Queen Elizabeth, Forest of Bere, Hursley, Ringwood, Bucklebury and Bramshill. Responsible for the Forest Rangers and wildlife management including deer and forest pest control. Developed a biological recording system. Public speaking and training programmes. In 1975 I was appointed the Park Interpreter at the new Queen Elizabeth Country Park and moved into the staff flat attached to the Park Centre: a move from the Civil Service to Local Government.

Staff at the Park, Forest and HCC

The Queen Elizabeth Forest staff included: Head Forester Alan Catchpole supported by Foresters Gordon Kale and Byron Ballard. The Forest Rangers were David Jacobs (Deer Control) and Jack Istead (general pest control). Among the forest staff were Cecil Gaylard who lived in Bottom Cottage, Tom and Rasher [John] Massey, Jim Adams, Toni Barrow and Steve Neal who later became a Forester.

The Park staff included, Bob Pullen who had been seconded from his job as head of sport in the Recreation Department and was later appointed Park Manager. The Forestry Commission was represented by Tim Laker, a Forester who had trained at the Forest of Dean Forester Training School 1962 – 1964. He was transferred from Bucklebury Forest and acted as the assistant park interpreter. He was already in post in 1975 and had worked with John Holder of the Recreation Dept on researching all aspects of the area. Bernard Massey was already in post as the Butser Warden and had an assistant (cannot remember his details). New staff were selected including Francis Davis who had been working on the Basingstoke Canal. He had agricultural training. Ann Robertson from Hawkley was appointed as the Ancient Farm Interpreter. Tom Munday Jun. as the Park's handyman. This then became a Ranger role. Ruth Moyes was the Park Secretary. Coralie Wearing, Angela Jones (wife of Richard Jones of Hillhampton Farm) and Shelia Blackstone were recruited as the receptionists. Neither Angela nor Shelia returned the following year when Rhona Jones joined the team. Her calligraphy skills were utilised and she designed many park posters.

Colin Bonsey was the head of the Recreation Dept, while Charles Begley was the Conservator of Forests for S.E. England The Chair of the Recreation Dept was Cllr. David Pumfrett, while the Chairman of HCC was Lord Porchester (The Queen's Racing Manager).

The Country Park Concept

Visiting the Butser hilltop Colin Bonsey saw the potential of a large country park straddling the Portsmouth Road. He approached the Forestry Commission and they agreed to the project, the first such merger. For landscape considerations it was agreed to build a park centre on the forest

edge and construct an access road into the forest with a series of grassed picnic sites. It also meant creating the underpass this coinciding with road improvements. Neville Conder of Casson & Conder was appointed architect with an agreed design brief. He saw the building as being draped in Clematis so merging with the natural vegetation. He also proposed a pond, but this only happened when the Fire Service said during the planning stage, a source of water would be needed. An education wing was included with the staff flat above, but following a withdrawal of cash by the Education Committee the plans had to be amended. It seems no thought was given for office space with just a small room between the staff flat and the centre. Ex telegraph poles were used to create enclosed areas, including the garden of the flat.

One of the final jobs before hand over was the sealing of the centre's paved floor. The job was given to a pair of sub-contractors due to be laid off. They liberally spread the sealant on a Friday and left it to dry. On the Monday we discovered each slab had dried with a white ring staining the stone. A specialist Italian company was then employed to grind out the stains. This created clouds of dust which settled on everything and could still be found years later.

Once the majority of this work was completed the new country park opened in April 1976.

Various tasks were contracted out: the Punch & Judy bakery and restaurant ran the café; the Petersfield bookshop supplied books; the Butser Grass Ski Club operated on the slopes above the A3, while the Sky Surfers flew their hang gliders. The Meon Soaring Association were allowed to fly their radio controlled model gliders; powered models were not allowed as the quiet enjoyment was to be maintained. Grass ski hire was made available to the visitors at weekends. Eventually the high cost of insurance and conservation aspects saw the demise of this sport.

Based on the researches made by Tim Laker and John Holder, Robin Wade created the first Interpretive display placed in the park centre. They also designed the structures upon which the displays were mounted. Incorporated within the display was the reception desk, occupying a central position and a small sales area. Prior to the opening Tim, Francis and I often worked late into the evening. We hung a hang glider in the roof space. On one occasion Francis arrived driving a dumper borrowed from the road workers. In its bucket was a mile stone rescued from the roads re-alignment. We borrowed an existing mile stone plaque and made a copy.

A coachman model stood alongside it in the exhibition. A make-up artist had made up the face using a rice crispy as a wart! Wade Associates also commissioned a model of the country park.

A tape/slide presentation was made by a professional. Based on conversations with John Berry of Oxenbourne Farm it featured the shepherds hut. Richard Jones of Hillhampton Farm played the shepherd alongside his own Hampshire Down sheep. Jack Hargreaves supplied the commentary while Bob Copper composed and sang "On the Bare Brow of Butser" as background music. This was shown on request in the 47 seat theatre. It was watched by the Queen during her visit.

We identified the routes of three trails (Butser, The Holt and Centre) which linked the park either side of the A3. We wrote the scripts and the trail guide was designed by the recreation dept's design office. Later, using the same routes and with my new scripts, three new booklets were designed by Mike Goddard, a freelance designer.

Recent History of Butser Hill

The hill had been bought by HCC during the 1960s and was developed as a public open space. Tom Munday senior was already being employed as the Downsman, he continued as a self-employed

contractor, a post later held by the late Dick Berry originally of Oxenbourne Farm. The flat summit of the hill had been ploughed and corn grown.

Queen Elizabeth Forest had been acquired by the Forestry Commission who, during the period 1930 – 1960 planted trees: War Down, Holt Down, Head Down and West Harting Down. War Down was planted with alternative rows of Beech and Scots Pine. The pine which is not suited to alkaline soils was planted to provide shelter for the growing Beech (ie as nurse trees). A wooden fire tower was erected on the highest point of War Down. It had been built atop a tumuli and during its dismantlement a number of ancient artefacts, including a skull were discovered. I believe these are held by the County's Museum Service.

Butser Hill was the subject of early aerial surveys, the resulting photographs showing various features including trackways, tumuli, field systems and earth banks. An area enclosed by banks, now including the Butser car park, may have been a meeting place on the trackways that transferred the South Downs (Ref. the Piggot Papers). During the car park construction a fine flint axe head was discovered. The Roman Villa site on Holt Down was researched (The Maxton Papers).

The mast has long been a feature of the hill. Without it, it would lose character. We found it difficult in those early days to learn much about its use. Today, however a number of internet sites provide information and a series of historical pictures.

The Opening and Ensuing Problems

In the 1970s visiting the countryside had become one of Britain's most popular pastimes. Most visits being made by car following improved road conditions and the closing of rural railway lines. It was considered that a successful visit required three things: adequate parking spaces, the provision of refreshments and information. Most in this leisure sector considered the provision of free parking meant the visiting public would not then question entrance charges. Despite this it was agreed a parking charge should be levied, parking on Butser being cheaper than at the Park Centre. Visitors payed on exit but no car park change machines were installed. The park opened and visitors poured in. The duty staff spent much of the day counting money as the rangers were constantly emptying the machines. It had been planned that money from car parking would be banked each evening, but with barrow loads of silver it quickly became obvious that this would not be possible. This resulted in the tiny staff rest room becoming a strong room. The park centre opened each day at 1000 and closed at 1900. It soon became obvious that few visited the centre during the last hour so closing was reduced to 1800. Those running the cafe always complained of the lack of preparation space. It is usually accepted the area of covers should be matched by preparation areas. The lack of office space was recognised. Three offices were built filling what had been an enclosed yard. This meant the loss of a storage area and the on-site interpreter's garage. A new garage was built and a new room adjoining the cafe created. This was named "The Pumfrett Room".

The Butser Ancient Farm

A group of eminent archaeologist had formed and were anxious to test theories relating to the pre-Roman period. The County Council offered them the Little Butser site. They appointed the late Peter Reynolds (later Dr.) as the director of the project. Jack Langley became his assistant. They built the first round house based on post hole evidence. As such evidence did not include a central post they devised a design of interlocking roof trusses. They also grew primitive cereals and investigated grain storage and iron smelting. They trained two Dexter cows (similar in structure to

Iron Age cattle) to plough, pulling an ard, a primitive plough. There was also a small flock of Soay sheep.

The Royal Opening of the Country Park – August 1976

It was during the hot summer of 1976 that the Queen accepted an invitation to officially open the park which bears her name. Buriton Forest had already been re-named Queen Elizabeth, I think in celebration of the Coronation.

Although hot weather had dominated the summer an awning from the kerb side to the centre doors was erected in case it rained on the day. The local neighbourhood Adder welcomed the shade. Visitors however protested at having to pass the curled snake, so I removed it back to the grassy bank.

On the day of the opening the weather was fine so the awning was removed. The Queen arrived in the Royal Rolls, met local dignitaries and was escorted into the centre by David Pumfrett with Colin Bonsey. We were rehearsed in the protocol on meeting the Queen. You addressed her as “Your Majesty,” then Maam as in jam not Maam as in marmalade. One inclined one’s head and took her hand lightly. On meeting me she asked a question but moved on before I completed my reply. She was shown the audio visual presentation in the theatre.

During her visit she was escorted into the forest where at the Forest Work Site she met Forestry Commission personnel including Tim Laker. She visited the Ancient Farm meeting Peter Reynolds walking with a stick following a recent fall. On the Butser Hill top she met members of the Recreation Dept including Bernard Massey. Conducted by the late Lynton White (later Sir Lynton) she did a “walk about” meeting members of the public. Back at the centre she enjoyed a lunch time gin positioned well away from any photographers. A VIP lunch was served in a marquee, where Hambledon Wine was served. We lesser mortals ate in another marquee. Our flat was used as her “comfort stop”. Coralie met her at the door then withdrew. A policewoman was secreted in a children’s bedroom, sharing it with a wild baby rabbit, a recent rescue.

That evening we retired to the White Horse (The Pub With No Name) where Shelia Blackstone worked as an evening barmaid. It had been quite a day!

Prior to the visit there was concern expressed regarding the overnight safety of the marquees. Bernard Massey’s teenage son (now Prof. Massey), along with a friend, performed an overnight guard. They were accompanied by Bernard’s German Shepherd. However the dog became timid as dusk fell!

A new full colour park booklet was to be published prior to the Queen’s visit. Among the pictures was one of hang gliding on Butser. A hang gliding accident occurred at Lord Porchester’s home at Highclere. It was considered the Queen could not be seen to condone this dangerous sport. The booklet was withdrawn and the picture replaced by one of grass skiing. I wonder how much extra this all cost?

The Queen’s Jubilee Year

Butser Hill was chosen as a beacon site in celebration of the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in June 1977. A beacon made by Steve Pidworth (a Petersfield blacksmith) was erected and a large bonfire built. Princess Alexandra was invited to fire the beacon. On the night heavy rain fell. Despite this thousands arrived parking their cars along the approaching roads. On the hilltop Tim Laker ran a barbecue. Jack Hargreaves provided a commentary. Coralie and I were allocated the park centre.

We did visit the hill top driving up the slope thronged with families making their way up the hill. It resembled a biblical epic.

The Princess fired the beacon, perhaps a little early as it was impossible to see other beacons. The Queen had fired the initial beacon at Windsor. We were back at the centre when the Royal party arrived having become separated from their escort. Wondering what to do we invited them in for coffee. They trooped into our flat, the Princess, her husband, children and Prince Michael. Marina asked "Can I play your piano?" at which the Princess began dancing with her son. She expressed "I have had so much fun today, tomorrow I have to be formal."

The White Horse Controversy

After the Jubilee celebrations we took a holiday. On our return we found a meeting had been organised at the park centre by Prince Michael who prosed a White Horse designed by the sculptor the late David Wynne should be cut into the chalk on the northern slope of Butser. All the local politicians supported the project, but many of us quietly objected on conservation grounds. Such a scheme would have destroyed many acres of valuable chalk grassland. Once the politicians saw that the public were not in support, they quickly changed their minds and the project was dropped.

The First Christmas 1976

As the most recent of sites managed by the County Recreation Department, the park centre was chosen as the venue for the department's Christmas gathering. Bob Pullen acquired a number of damaged turkeys which, missing a wing or leg, were not fit for sale but otherwise perfectly good. These were roasted in the cafe and staff ovens. Coralie cooked one. Members of the department assembled and with added chairs and standing room packed into the theatre to enjoy a melodrama performed by The Solent People's Theatre, one of the groups sponsored by the department's arts officer. A performance that terrified our small daughter.

Education

The ancient Farm attracted many visiting school parties, while others visited the Forest Work Site. We also offered a package of guided walks. An Educational Trail was laid out with a woodland classroom around an ancient Oak on Holt Down. We had to facilitate all ages from infant to university students. Portsmouth's School of Architecture used the park for practical exercises. Tim Laker acquired an ex wooden classroom which he had erected close to the centre. It became known as the Forest Annex and became well used.

I served on the advisory board for the countryside management course at Farnborough Technical College where each year I delivered my lecture "Two Aspects of Conservation" comparing practical management with awareness of the conservation need. I worked closely with Horndean Community School and served five years as a co-opted school governor.

Science students carried out studies in the Oxenbourne Reserve while the music department played at carol concerts and the country fair. I ran several evening classes at Petersfield School's Further Education Dept. This included programmes titled, Introduction to Birdwatching, and Birds, Bees and Bloodynosed Beetles. I also ran a course of Evening Walks concentrating on a variety of habitats.

Each year we took one or two students from Merrist Wood's countryside course as a summer placement. On two successive years we hosted two girl university student from the Netherlands.

The Development of the Park and activities

Colin Bonsey once said he expected a regular weekend event. Based upon this I endeavoured to initiate regular events.

Crafts: Tim Laker found an elderly hurdle maker, Ben Piper, who was willing to demonstrate at the Forest Work Site. He taught the late Jim Adams who continued his craft, demonstrating the art to many school children. He was also onsite during the Queen's visit.

I discovered a variety of local crafts people who were willing to demonstrate at the park Centre. We developed a relationship with these crafts people. They would demonstrate their craft and the park would accept 10% of onsite sales. We would only accept crafts that met our degree of quality. This resulted in a wide range of crafts demonstrated.

Visiting an annual show of the Wessex Guild of Craftsmen at the Hampshire Museum Services at Chilcomb House, we invited members to the country park. They accepted and made the park their base and the venue for future annual shows. Mike and Coralie were invited to join their committee and attended regular meetings.

The Solent guild of Wood Carvers have also made the park their regular site for demonstrations.

Coralie's Toy Fairs became a very popular annual event. Based on her own collection, a variety of toy makers attended. Valuations were offered by Sotheby's.

Other countryside organisations were invited to represent themselves including the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, the Wildlife and Wetland Trust, the Great Bustard Trust and other countryside and conservation based organisations.

An annual event invited other local attractions to promote their sites.

On May Day local Morris Dancers were invited along with dance groups from local schools, some around a May pole.

Following meetings on local farms, Francis organised the first sheep dog trials. This resulted in the formation of the Butser Shepherds' Society and eventually led to the popular Country Fair held each July. This was further developed by Barbara Newbury. A variety of well-known personalities opened the fair including Simon Groom (Blue Peter), Jack Hargreaves (who also provided a commentary for a parade of vintage tractors), Bill Giles (Weather Man) and Trevor Harrison (Eddy Grundy in the Archers).

The late Molly Harris (village shopkeeper Martha Woodford in the Archers) opened a Wool & Spinning event organised by Barbara Newbury. Barbara eventually went on to manage Manor Farm. Spinning became a regular demonstration and led to the group known as The Country Park Spinners.

Weaving also featured and among the weavers was Cora Toas who grew up in The Falklands and met her husband, a Royal Marine Captain, when the fleet re-assembled following the battle of the River Plate. During retirement they visited the Falklands on at least two occasions taking looms with and introducing their art to the islanders.

Book Fairs were supported by the P.B F.A. (Provisional Book Fairs Association)

With official bridleways and designated horse riding trails, interest was expressed in the provision of pony trekking. This was first provided by a riding stable based at Fort Widley. When they

withdrew, Angela Schofield from Wickham Common took over. The Forestry Commission agreed to build a Stable Complex near Bottom Cottage and make the paddocks available for the tenant. This worked well despite the stables being damaged during the storm in October 1987. On another occasion the stables burnt down in suspicious circumstances: a horse was fatally injured and the Wearing pets killed; guinea pigs and a rabbit had been housed at the stable while the Wearings were away on holiday. Following Mrs Schofield two ladies from West Sussex took over. A fatal accident occurred during one of their rides. No blame was attached as the rider had claimed to be competent. Eventually the increasing insurance costs saw the demise of trekking although visiting riders still use the park. Andrea Fairbairn, Colin Bonsey's niece, ran the stables for a while.

The Great Butser Run: sponsored by the Portsmouth Evening News and organised by their reporter Glynn Williams (working with Bernard Massey), this run became an annual event. Among the successful runners were George Atkinson of Lower Farm, East Meon.

David Bellamy

David Bellamy and his twin brother were involved in an advertising feature based on the round house at the Demonstration Farm. Subsequently David Bellamy lead a party of botanists visiting the park. He expressed a need for no publicity, but on hearing of it Colin Bonsey ordered a reception. Bob Pullen was told to order the sherry. He bought an acceptable wine only to be told by Major Rose, the local councillor: "It must be Bristol Cream." So much for his taste in fine sherry!

Dr Who

During a very cold spell in 1985 Colin Baker, as Dr Who, filmed on Butser, in the Forest, at the Ancient Farm and in Buriton (*Revelation of the Daleks*). He returned during 1986 to film *The Trial of a Time Lord*. Three American women came over to watch the filming and my son, Tim, a serious Dr Who fan, took time off school to watch the filming. We were invited to the BBC studios to watch filming on set. Colin Baker's second wife comes from Petersfield and, as a family, we would meet up with Colin when he was appearing in Panto, usually over a meal before the performance. He and my son still meet at Dr Who conventions.

The Warrior Queen

In 1978 Sian Phillips starred as Boadicea in an ITV television series. This was partly filmed at the Butser Ancient Farm's Demonstration Farm. On one occasion, at the end of a day's filming, Sian Phillips was using the Park Centre toilet only to be locked in by Coralie, much to their mutual amusement. A book based upon the series was published.

Mary Rose

Following the successful raising of the Mary Rose the Park Centre hosted an exhibition attended by the project's director, the marine archaeologist, the late Margaret Rule. Rope worker, Albert Kirby from Hayling Island, one of our regular craft demonstrators, had dived on the wreck.

The Solar System Trail

We were approached by Robin Gorman of the Hampshire Astronomical Society to see if we would consider an Astronomy Trail with the Sun to be at the Park Centre and the planets positioned at appropriate intervals along a trail around Holt Down. We agreed. The planets and sun were painted by June Nelson-Thompson while the trail guide was sponsored by Marconi. Patrick Moore

attracted a huge crowd when he opened the trail. During 1986 the park celebrated the arrival of Halley's Comet. A panel depicting the comet was moved along the trail marking its progress. The event was attended by Heather Couper. I was invited to attend a reception on HMS Chrysanthemum moored on the Thames. Again I met Heather Couper, Patrick Moore and the actor Bernard Miles.

The Butterfly Trail was opened by the late Gordon Benningfield.

Duncton Wood

Through the Petersfield Book Shop, William Horwood was invited to launch, Duncton Wood, his first book, at the Park Centre in 1980. I was photographed with William Horwood and book shop manager, Les New. Duncton Wood was the first of six depicting the moles of Duncton Wood.

Alan Titchmarsh

I was approached by a television company if I could identify a badger sett where Alan Titchmarsh could make a short television film. I suggested filming at the Hundry where there was an active set. The film crew assembled and Alan was supposed to walk down the slope, speaking as he went, towards the sett. Unfortunately he constantly fell over and at last, after many takes, they secured their footage. Later he interviewed me as Chair of the Hampshire Bat Group. He asked me a question, I replied, the producer said "cut." I had managed just the single take and boasted the fact for weeks afterwards. Alan Titchmarsh was as equally friendly and charming as his TV persona.

Don Eades

The Country Park story cannot be told without mentioning Don, the local news photographer. He must have attended every event or happening during those early days. His portfolio, now safely secured at the Petersfield Museum, should make a wonderful photographic history.

The South Downs Way

The South Downs Way from Winchester to Eastbourne ran past the Park Centre and on through Buriton. Each summer the South Downs Run took place. Starting at the Park Centre the winner would cover the 80mile route in about eight hours. This annual run is now organised by the Gurkha Regiment.

Wayfaring

Coinciding with the then new sport of orienteering we introduced the Wayfaring Trail. Based on the same principal, participants bought a map at the park centre that showed the position of posts scattered throughout the forest. On locating the numbered post they recorded the accompanying letter. Once they had completed the course they could claim a certificate from the park centre.

The Mountain Bike Trail

Although a horse riding trail was laid out during the park planning, nobody had ever heard of Mountain Biking. Responding to this emerging sport, I laid out the first Mountain Bike Trail with Mike, the forester who had replaced John Cooper. Little did we know just what we had spawned! Today Mountain Biking is a multi-million pound sport with vast sums of money spent on the top bikes. Coralie arranged a concession with a Portsmouth based bike shop but as most visitors already had their own bikes the project had a short life, as did bike hire.

Despite all precautions accidents did happen. One rider who strayed from the trail and crashed in Grandfather's Bottom, complained there was no sign telling him not to ride! Another rider staying in Buriton did not return from his ride, worrying his wife. He was eventually traced to A&E where he had been going into trauma. Eventually Tom Munday linked the lady in distress with her husband. She said her husband was diabetic but did not wear any bracelets that would have alerted the medics. Once they received this information, they quickly stabilised his condition.

Other Accidents

A visiting woman claimed she had injured her leg on a sheep trough hidden in grass. She took the County Council to court. The Judge on learning that she had made previous claims said the grass should have been cut and awarded the woman a penny in damages and charged her costs. Just occasionally common sense prevails.

Guided Walks

Besides the programme of walks for visiting schools, the interpreters produced a programme of weekend walks, usually on a Saturday morning. These became popular. One I planned "Small Mammals" attracted about 200 visitors. A Badger event attracted a similar number. I was leading 80 people along Gravel Hill on a butterfly walk when a Purple Emperor floated just over their heads. I did not have to say anything at this magical moment.

Occasionally we led all day walks with a lunchtime picnic stop. This allowed explorations into the wider countryside. Another initiative was the Wednesday Walk which, with a regular and loyal following, almost became a club activity. I also invited visiting experts to lead walks based upon their particular interest e.g. Lichens with Dr Francis Rose and Mosses with Rod Stern. The walks did not really suit Ramblers who always seemed intent on getting as quickly as they can from A to B. We dawdled, looking at things: perhaps a sun bathing Adder or an interesting plant.

Christmas at the Country Park

The Forestry Commission ran their Christmas Tree Shop in the centre's car park. We decorated the Centre and made Christmas items available in the shop.

I played the first Father Christmas. I would be hidden in the wood and visiting families were invited to seek me. They would then accompany me back to the centre. At first I would be driven in a pony and trap, then in later years I rode back on a quad bike. On one occasion I was accompanied by an estimated 500. I would then enter my grotto and issue presents to visiting children. Later Tim McKilroy took on the role and we began a booking procedure. Eventually this led to the weekend appointment of a professional Father Christmas who operated during the weeks before Christmas. It was controlled by a booking system. Coralie had to estimate demand and buy presents suitable for the various ages of the children. The grotto would be built by the Rangers.

On the last Sunday before Christmas I organised a carol concert. On several occasions a local folk group, Taylor Maid, led by Graham Brown compered the singing. Music was provided by the Horndean School Orchestra in which my son played the violin and the conductor was Head of Music, Peter Gambie, a bird watching friend.

On three successive years our Christmas dinner was interrupted by visitors requiring car park change.

Snowfall

Whenever snow fell, Butser was besieged by skiers and tobogganers. They would cause chaos by parking along the A3 and damage by climbing fences. They even continued their activities through the night and into the early hours. Once the snow melted the Rangers had the job of clearing up. Of course such problems were caused by the few. Many families just enjoyed their winter sport.

Easter at the Park

Egg Rolling has become an annual park event. When I held the first roll eggs, supplied by Dick Berry who had a chicken farm on Harvesting Lane, were hard boiled in the centre cafe. These were numbered by participating visitors. Carrying a large cut-out egg I led the rollers onto the slopes of Butser. Small children were the first to roll. We lined them along a lynchet back and I commanded "roll". I was not prepared for what happened next. They threw their eggs then noisily chased after them, picked them up and rolled again. They continued across the valley bottom and only when they came up against a fence did they stop, by which time all that was left of the eggs were yolks. It was impossible to choose a winner. The local crows relished this unexpected food source. When the older groups rolled we were more careful with our instruction.

The event continued but eventually, for conservation and health and safety, artificial eggs are used.

One Easter I organised an Egg Hunt sponsored by the Evening News with a prize of cross channel ferry tickets. We based the competition on the Wayfaring principal. Numbered cut out eggs were positioned throughout the forest, their location marked on maps available at the centre. On finding each egg, participants had to record the letters which re-arranged spelt Easter. As I laid out the eggs with Robin Trusscot our vehicle was chased by early visitors trying to complete the letters before we had a chance to position the eggs!

Halloween

Despite my misgivings, for I feel this is not a traditional event but another American import, 'Fright Nights' late in October have become a regular and very popular event. The late Rod Green, who became a popular Assistant Park Manager following Bernard Massey's retirement, developed these nights supported by students from the Guildford School of Acting. Rod first arrived at the park as a team leader in the Nature Reserve having been manager of the Hornpipe Theatre.

Promotion and Marketing

Each year we published list of events and advertising was placed in suitable publications with further publicity through onsite posters, often designed by Rhona Jones, and a weekly press release sent to all local media contacts. I was pleased when the magazine "The Interpretation of Britain's Heritage" stated "Mike Wearing of the Queen Elizabeth Country Park runs the perfect information service."

Again, when attending a marketing course, our promotional leaflets were displayed as excellent. On the course we were told one had to identify the product, then define the marketing objective. I was challenged that we did not know either our product or our marketing objective. I replied that our product was "countryside, our objective the conservation of that countryside."

Occasionally I would be interviewed by TV or radio, sometimes onsite or in the studio. We had, with the help of the Blendworth Centre which provided horticultural training for people with

learning difficulties (attended by our daughter) established a Wildlife Garden close to the Centre. Radio Solent requested an onsite interview. To my surprise I then heard the interview being played on the Radio Four Today Programme. I finished the interview expressing the need for wildlife ponds and said "Not stocked with goldfish, cannot stand them." The late Brian Redhead linked with the comment: "Strange man, doesn't like goldfish!"

On another occasion I carried out an onsite TV interview for South Today discussing Adders. It finished with the interviewer asking: "If you come across an Adder, what would your advice be?" I replied: "Look at it, admire it and walk on by." The studio link was provided by the late Nigel Farrel "look at it, admire it and walk on by, Ugg!" Just the response I was hoping to avoid. A while later I met him when he opened my daughter's school fete. I tackled him about his previous response and received an apology. Apparently a number of viewers had complained about his ill-judged link.

Following Alan Titchmarsh's visit I received letters accusing me of highlighting a badger sett, putting it in danger from badger diggers. There had been a spate of badger digging incidents at the time. Badgers being dug out and dogs set upon them as a "sport." I pointed out we had been careful not to identify the sett's location.

The blind radio presenter, Peter White, occasionally visited the park with his family. On one Country Fair day he presented a live show from the show ground. I never listen to local radio apart from one occasion when I was adjusting our radio. Suddenly I heard Peter White say, during his "Pick of the Week" programme, the other Day I heard my old mate Mike Wearing on Radio Solent. He then re-played an interview I had given about Badgers. How and why I chose that moment to inadvertently tune in to Radio Solent?

Butser Bill

When I was interviewed for the post of Park Interpreter, all the interviewees were invited to explore the site on the day before and produce, for the interview, the outline of an interpretive trail. My presentation included a cartoon character from pre-history. Later when in post he re-emerged and I was asked by Sally from Wade Associates, was he Butser Bill. The name stuck, and later when writing the Country Park Notes I was able to resurrect him.

Brenda Mizen was a local teacher and involved her country dance team in our May Day celebrations. She also brought her dancers to the park to mark my departure. She had two children, one of whom was studying film. He was commissioned to produce a Butser Bill tape and slide presentation on the theme of the Country Code. Rhona Jones, through her folk contacts found a singer, I think Rob Sibwort, who wrote and performed the Butser Bill song. Butser Bill also appeared in our puppet show.

The Puppet Show

Based on a seaside Punch & Judy show we created our own country park presentation. I had a plywood theatre built large enough to hold two glove puppet operators. I painted the outside with a downland scene. Tim McKilroy made the puppets with paper mache heads. Butser Bill, Granny Vandal, her two horrible grandchildren and a Fox and Badger.

With Steve Peach among the watching children and with Tim and I operating the puppets we attempted to convey the country code. At one time while Granny Vandal was picking wildflowers the horrible children scattered litter. This was seized on by the watching children and thrown back showering we puppeteers with litter. Despite our best efforts it was the traditional "It's behind you" that gained the greatest response!

Wildlife and Conservation

Since the opening of the country park during the hot summer of 1976, the countryside has seen dramatic changes, many associated with the rapid climate change, and others through modern agriculture and the move away from traditional farming methods (often government led).

During that first year Corn Bunting sang from local field hedgerows. One even sang from the pylons that stretched across the open eastern slope of Butser. A Nightjar churred from the edge of Oxenbourne Down just above the A3 cutting and Turtle Doves trilled from patches of downland thorn scrub. Willow Tits could usually be encountered during a walk and a Grasshopper Warbler uttered its distinctive song from the bank of the main road near Bottom Cottage. Visitors would appear carrying a long tail feather discarded by a Golden Pheasant. All species gone or rarely encountered.

Lapwing once bred on adjoining fields and Grey Partridge could more often be found. On a spring evening the plaintive whistling of migrating Whimbrel could be heard and occasionally a small party would pause on Butser.

Not all is doom and gloom: the steeper slopes of Butser that avoided the war time ploughing continue to support a rich mosaic of wild flowers which in turn support an insect population. Although butterfly numbers have declined, the nationally scarce Duke of Burgundy Fritillary is thriving and introduced Silver Spotted Skippers have become established. The Wall butterfly however seems to have vanished from the site.

Gradually traditional chalk grassland is re-establishing into the previously cultivated areas. The northern slopes present a Cowslip spectacular in the spring among them a scatter of Early Purple Orchids. Orchid hunters are attracted to chalk grassland. A number of day-flying moths may be encountered on Butser including Wood Tiger. Moth trapping had become more popular among naturalists in recent years, perhaps reflecting a desire to do less travelling. I regularly run a trap in my own Portsmouth garden. I have on three occasions, along with others, run my trap on Butser in support of Tim Speller's Bio-blitz weekends: all records collected by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.

Although much of the forest was planted on chalk grassland there were existing small areas of ancient woodland. These areas, typically The Hundry and the slope above the Buriton to Chalton road, can be identified by an annual carpet of Dog's Mercury and patches of Woodruff. Yellow Bird's Nest occurs along with the occasional Bird's Nest Orchid.

Following the construction of the Centre Pond, Common Carp were introduced. These bred producing a profusion of fish. As a threat to other wildlife they were eventually removed. Bernard Massey finding homes for them in local fishing ponds.

I introduced a few Common Toad in the early days. I think now an illegal practise. The toads thrived and on early spring evenings as darkness fell, hundreds could be found making their way back to the pond to breed. For years I asked could we not lock the forest barrier each evening, but always my request was refused. So, many toads were crushed by passing cars. My son was featured in the local press when he rescued bucketfuls of toads. After many years it was agreed the barrier could be locked at night although toads remain at risk from key holding evening barbecue bookings. Common Frogs also find their way to the pond producing a mass of spawn.

Smooth Newts occur along with those that live in Holt Pond. Besides these amphibians, four species of reptile occur. Adders are comparatively common. In the early days they suffered from the public fear of snakes and a number would be killed each spring when they were at their most obvious. I think a more enlightened attitude exists today.

Grass Snake, Common Lizard and Slow Worm make up the park's reptile list. A Grass Snake may be seen swimming across the pond while Slow Worms are always in danger from grass cutting, especially strimming. Steve Peach, with the help of volunteers, has carried out a study of the park's Adders. A number of melanistic examples have been found.

Although the park has lost bird species during the past four decades, others have made a comeback. Common Buzzard now rival Kestrels as one of the most common raptors, while Red Kite have become a regular sight. This follows the very successful re-introduction in the Chilterns. Ravens have returned with several pylon nests in the area, a site also used by Peregrine. Although Goldcrest have always been common, they have now been joined by the similar Firecrest.

In good Beech mast years, and especially if the European mainland crop has failed, large flocks of wintering Brambling, accompanied by Chaffinch may occur. Ring Ousel pass through as spring migrants often found around the slopes of Grandfather's Bottom. They may also appear in the late autumn often arriving among the first Fieldfare flocks. Another late autumn arrival is the Black Redstart often to be found around the buildings of the Buster Tower. Northern Wheatear make an annual appearance as passage migrants especially in autumn when they may linger about the short grass of Butser's summit.

At one time shepherds on the South Downs supplemented their income by trapping Wheatears and selling to the London markets. When suitable weather conditions occur passage migration can be spectacular. I was once on the hill on a May day when the wind blew from the SE. Swifts were sweeping through, hundreds at a time. In similar autumn conditions, Common Redstart and Pied Flycatcher may appear with Whinchat sitting atop Gorse bushes. During the spring of 1955, a Roller appeared on the hill.

In winter mixed tit flocks roam the woodland, Blue, Great and Coal. They may be accompanied by Treecreeper and rarely a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Its larger cousin the Great Spotted is common while the Green Woodpecker could be the Park Bird. Breeding in an excavated tree nest hole, they spend much of their time on the grassland seeking ants. The hills of the Yellow Meadow are typical of ancient chalk grassland. The ants apparently occupy the dry eastern side of the hill leading to the name "Shepherd's Compass."

In recent years the hill has become a reliable site where to hear a Cuckoo in the spring. Mediterranean Gulls have become a regular spring and summer feature with large numbers about the hill, especially following an emergence of the beetle, Garden Chafer. These birds probably coming from the Langstone breeding population. I have noted five species of owls in the park.

I have recorded 28 mammal species within the country park. Rabbits featured in the early management on the Bonham Carter estate. Early aerial photographs show the blocks of gorse that were planted on War Down. On rabbit shoot days, Rabbits were chased into the gorse then driven out before the guns. I have heard it said that War Down Rabbits could be identified at market as they were the fattest. Brown Hares occur.

My first involvement with deer was when, as a Conservation Forester, I had to organise the annual census upon which the cull was based. David Jacobs hung the culled deer in the deer larder at Dean Barn for collection by a game company. It was during the 1960s that the Roe Deer

population exploded, perhaps coinciding with the cover provided by the new plantations. Fallow Deer occurred on the West Sussex downs but remained east of the railway. In recent years they have expanded their range and be can found on farmland around Chalton and in the wooded area of the country park. As yet I do not think they have crossed the A3? I only once encountered a Muntjac but I think it is only a question of time before these small deer, already well established in parts of Hampshire arrive. I believe the FC have a shoot on sight policy with this species.

The organisation of Grey Squirrel control was also part of my brief. Fred Courtier, a forester from the Alice Holt Research Station, working with the Buriton keepers, developed a trapping system. These were named Legg traps.

I was anxious to involve the forest rangers in a variety conservation issues including wildlife surveys. I invited Prof Stephen Harris who, as a student, studied Harvest Mice. We chose Queen Elizabeth as the venue where Stephen Harris showed us how to locate Harvest Mouse summer nests, usually concealed in a tussock of Cock's Foot grass. He found number of nests along the Holt Down boundary.

Having discovered a hibernating Dormouse at the Holt Down Roman villa site in 1974/5, I then found them in bat boxes I had placed at another Holt Down site. Another Hibernating Dormouse was discovered by a work part in the Oxenbourne Reserve.

On a summer's evening Pipistrelle Bats could be seen around Gravel Hill. At the time considered Britain's most common bat. Now however they are divided lto two species, Common and Soprano which can be separated using a bat detector. It is thought they occur in about equal numbers. A further complication has been caused by the discovery of a new species in the Petersfield area, Aleathoe Bat. They could well occur in the park area.

On midsummer evenings the large Serotine Bat would patrol their regular flight paths over the eastern slopes of Butser and over the A3. A Brown Long-eared Bat regularly rested on the wall along the passage opposite the easy access toilet, where it would devour its prey leaving a litter of moth wings. On a busy Spring Bank Holiday Sunday a Brown Long-eared Bat appeared over the Centre Pond flying among the recently returned swallows. It constantly dipped to drink until it misjudged its flight and fell in. It swam to the pond edge from where I retrieved it. Allowing it to dry out, we released it none the worse, later that evening.

Following the Badger Act, Badgers seem to be more common. They have always been part of the park's fauna with a number of large setts both in the forest and on Butser. At one time an albino Badger lived in a Hundry sett.

Stoats and Weasels it seems have become less common. On two occasions members of my guided walk "enjoyed" the sight of a Stoat catching a Rabbit. I can call a Weasel by sucking on the back of my hand. Polecats may have moved into the area as a number of Polecat/Polecat Ferret have been killed on the A3.

Foxes have always occurred, their winter mating barks and screams being very much part of the park night. Today they seem to be even more common. Shepherds have always accused Foxes of killing lambs, but when challenged few can actually record a witnessed incident. At lambing there are always still births, so one cannot automatically assume a Fox with a carcass has killed it.

The park's most common mammals are Wood Mice and Bank Vole. Short-tailed voles occur in the grassland while Yellow-necked Mice are not uncommon. An agile Yellow-neck perfected a technique for getting onto a peanut feeder hanging from our garden bird table. Perhaps the most

unexpected was the arrival of Water Voles that took up residence at the recently created centre pond. They even bred. Where did they come from, for there are no other ponds or streams in the vicinity? Unfortunately they did not survive probably succumbing to the warfarin placed by the Rangers to control Brown Rat. Rats could often be found attracted by the cafe waste appearing especially after harvest. Water Voles have recently been re-introduced to stretches of the River Meon in a project coordinated by the South Downs National Park Authority.

Oxenbourne Down

Oxenbourne Down has always been an important part of the country park story. At the time of the park opening it already existed as a Nature Reserve managed jointly by the County Council and The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Naturalist Trust (now the Hampshire Wildlife Trust) but owned by the Leydene estate who retained the sporting rights. It lies east of Hog's Lodge Lane and includes Wascoombe Bottom, Hillhampton Down and the two fenced blocks of Yew woodland on the eastern slopes of Butser. Although Oxenbourne and Hillhampton are farms north of Butser in the Meon Valley they probably folded their sheep on the respective downs.

A dominant feature within the reserve is the Yew Coombes. These, unlike the ancient yews of Kingley Vale, have developed in relatively modern times. They were studied by the ecologist A.G. Tansley in the 1930s. The Insects of Oxenbourne published in 1973 by three eminent entomologists, highlighted a number of conservation concerns and suggestions for future management. One of their recommendations was the retention of old fence posts as they were used by a very rare wasp. As with all conservation issues it is often difficult to satisfy all disciplines. Ewart Jones who studied Hampshire birds favoured the retention of scrub while botanists wanted the clearance of this habitat to promote the flower rich grassland. I have always favoured a mosaic of habits that maintained the maximum diversity. Dr Francis Rose, who served on the management committee, alerted to the fragility of the steep flint screes which support a number of rare lichens.

It was almost by accident that I became the Voluntary Reserve Manager. It became my happy hunting ground where I could seek solitude in my, almost daily, evening ramble. At management meetings I had to reconcile the interests of the Wildlife Trust who saw it as a Trust Reserve and my employee the County Council who carried out the management.

With Trust support I organised weekend volunteer work parties when we cleared scrub burning it in large bonfires. Using the various government employment schemes, we employed a number of team leaders who supervised parties of trainees. We also employed a number of team leaders. One an ex Merrist Wood student established the Butterfly transect. I walked this regularly for several years recording all Butterflies encounters in a two meter corridor. Another team leader was Robin Trusscot who introduced a small grazing flock of sheep into the reserve. New fences were constructed within the reserve allowing controlled sheep grazing. The reserve was bought by the County Council and, when Butser was designated a National Nature Reserve, Oxenbourne was included. Previously access had been controlled by a permit system, permits being issued to visiting naturalists at the centre's reception desk. In recent years a small feral flock of Manx Loughlin type sheep were living in the reserve until culled.

Abandoned and Rescued Animals

Pet dumping has occurred, the throwing of domestic Rabbits from cars has been reported and Goldfish appear in the Centre Pond.

At the party marking Tim Laker's transfer, a cat joined the celebration. At first he lived under the "classroom" but gradually became bolder and eventually moved into our flat, becoming a member of the family. Another cat frequenting the stables gave birth to three kittens. Coralie supported this family and, borrowing traps from the Portsmouth Cat Rescue, was able to capture them and have them neutered. On catching the final cat she received scratches which necessitated a trip to A&E. I joined her having been bitten on the finger by our German Shepherd when attempting to administer eye drops. We both ended up on a first aid course with hands in a sling!

Another cat attached itself to the stable cats. At first we tried to keep him away but gradually he became accepted and lived for many years. Newey, as he became known lived for at least 25+ years. When the Rangers dismantled their shed Coralie bought a small shed and fitted it out for the cat. When Coralie was not on duty the other receptionists gave him his food.

Another remarkable case of survival was a cat, who when less than a year old escaped from a visitor's car. A year later he was trapped and identified by an implant. He was now a fine, healthy adult cat. He had survived a period of heavy snow and bitter cold. Apparently on returning home he settled in the house as if he had never been away.

On returning home one evening I found Coralie in our greenhouse with a White Ferret on her head. She became a delightful pet. Coralie fitted her with a harness and took her for walks when she seemed intent on digging leading to her name "Digger." Friends offered us another ferret as a companion for Digger, but they did not bond. Until neutered, Polly the Polecat frequently bit Coralie, but after the operation these attacks ceased and she became as tame as Digger. We still had Polly when we moved to Portsmouth.

We have also looked after some Badgers as temporary residents. The first a recovering road casualty which we housed in the room that later became the Pumfrett Room and later a cub found abandoned in a Purbrook ditch. Coralie volunteered to look after this orphan and, with her care, it survived. At first it was in a trunk in our kitchen, but it would escape and disturb our sleep by scrabbling on water pipes. This promoted the turning of our garage into a Badger sett. We avoided making a pet of "Becky" knowing we would eventually return her to the wild. She would always hide if anybody but Coralie appeared. Following a short holiday away, others fed and watered her but she remained hidden. On our return, Coralie entered the garage when Becky immediately appeared and clambered onto her lap. Fitting her with a harness, always a struggle, Coralie took her out for walks. Not an easy task, as Becky would either pull Coralie along or insist on walking between her legs. Sometimes she would dig her feet in and just stop. As she matured I dug a sett below our living room window and when we thought she was ready we released her into my sett. We never saw her again. We have no idea had we done the right thing?

Through connections with the Hampshire Bat Group we also fostered three bats. Two Pipistrelle each of which had a wing amputated by a vet, probably following a cat attack. The third was a free flying Brown Long-eared which had been reared from young. As young bats depend on being taught to hunt by a parent, it could not be released. We eventually took it to a New Forest Wildlife Park. Various birds including in different years two Tawny Owl chicks brought in by members of the public. One in particular following release would return to our bedroom window.

On a Country Fair day a Hedgehog was recovered from under a cattle grid where it had been trapped. It was covered in parasites and was suffering from maggots. Following treatment by the onsite vet, the only animal he treated all day, it was taken into care by a fellow member of staff. She a little later took leave, so the hedgehog moved into our green house. It flourished and being

of sufficient weight was released. Several months later I came upon a Hedgehog at a forest picnic site. It showed no fear and on examination I could still see traces of powder applied by the vet.

A craft demonstrator arrived with a young Rook. It flourished, and named Emsworth, the place where it was found, it took up residence in and around the centre. Sadly, it was eventually found dead, perhaps killed by a Rat.

Glynn Guy, receptionist, raised a Fox cub which often hid in inaccessible places around the Centre. During the first year a stray dog, which she named Butser, was adopted by Shelia Blackstone. Another dog, owned by a well known Buriton resident was constantly being collected having strayed. When challenged by Molly who was running the cafe, the owner retorted "Well you better keep him then". She did.

A phone call from Bernard Massey led me to Luxford Cottage where a Peacock had settled in the garden. "It will be easy to catch." I said, "they do not fly much," at which point the bird took off and flew strongly away across the A3 where it landed in the garden opposite and where they did capture it. I do not know the eventual outcome, or where the bird had originated.

A variety of other creatures all briefly intruded into our life at the country park, Rabbits, a Jay and Little Owl. When I took up post I was studying some captive dormice and we did have a tank in our office containing live Harvest Mice. The children's pet Hamster vanished only to be found several days later asleep and very dusty, in the back of our piano.

Photography

I have an extensive collection of slides and much more on disks and hard drives. It would require months of work to catalogue these as they are mixed with other material.

Michael F Wearing
December 2019

Country Park History – Some Random Notes

Conservation

As I lectured on the subject I thought I ought to define conservation as I understood it:

Conservation is the correct or appropriate management of a resource for the well-being of all the identified components of the resource. This can apply equally to an area of countryside or an artefact in a museum. I say "correct or appropriate" as conflicting interests may mean compromises. I define the "component parts" as all those identified. In the case of countryside it means the collection of species list. At times this can lead to differing opinions. e.g. plants versus insects. If I was asked today for a definition, I would emphasise conservation must reflect the "whole". Any conservation exercise must reflect the wider environment. No site or situation should be viewed in isolation.

Interpretation

My job was advertised as a "Park Interpreter" and this was, I believe, the first time in Britain a job had been so described. At the time this job description was ridiculed in the Daily Telegraph but in the USA Interpreters had been employed for a long time in their National Parks; their role being to introduce the environment to the visitor.

The standard work, "Interpreting our Heritage", which set out six Principles of Interpretation was written by Freeman Tilden in 1967. We based our approach upon these principals, but found the name "Interpreter" puzzled our visitors.

On seeing my name badge visitors would approach and address me in French. We overcame this confusion by changing our title to "Countryside Interpreter." The title is no longer used in countryside management, most employees being called "Rangers."

Yew Trees

Although the ancient Yews at Kingley Vale may be at least 1,000 years old, the Yews on Butser are of a much more recent origin. Early aerial photographs show very few.

On chalk, Yew forms a climax woodland with the deep shade created suppressing all other growth. A few Whitebeam may grow among the Yews. Being shade tolerant, Yew seedlings will flourish under other vegetation until it eventually outgrows and suppresses the cover.

It has been suggested that the present Butser Yews developed under the cover of Juniper. A few skeletal remains of Juniper can be found under the Yews. Yew and Juniper along with Scots Pine are the three native conifers. Nowadays, Yew is more likely to develop under thorn scrub.

Although poisonous to some cattle and horses, it is browsed by Roe Deer and Rabbits. Some Yews in Oxenbourne have been so heavily browsed they resemble Bonsai trees.

I often heard Tawny Owls calling from the yews during daylight hours: probably encouraged by the darkness created by the trees.

Butser Hill

Although the highest point along the South Downs ridge, Butser Hill is not the highest point in Hampshire. The summit of Inkpen Beacon lies in Berkshire, but the highest point on its slope and in Hampshire is higher than Butser. HJ Massingham, writing about the South Downs, describes Butser and the line of old thorns above Ramsdene Down: "Butser will rise its Titian head when rebel man is no more." Butser will survive Global Warming, despite the failures of our kind.

W.H. Hudson

Hudson was born in the Argentine in 1841 and moved to England in 1874, where he established himself as one of our most celebrated nature writers. His classic work "A Shepherd's Life" influenced our thinking regarding shepherding on the Downs. I was later to discover "Nature in Downland" that especially identified the South Downs.

In 1900 Hudson discovered Buriton. This inspired me to write the walk leaflet for EHDC and I created a WH Hudson exhibition for the Park Centre, which was subsequently displayed in Buriton Church. I was also invited to present a lecture at a Literary Festival in Grayshott which I illustrated

with slides taken in many parts of the country to support the lecture: "The Rural Writing of WH Hudson." I spoke, using the slides as my guide, while Coralie read excerpts from Hudson's writings. Hudson opposed the plume trade and was a leader in bird conservation. His portrait hangs in the library of the RSPB.

Shepherding on the South Downs

It was the constant grazing by thousands of sheep that created the flower-rich downland sward. The grazing prevented any one plant becoming dominant. Hudson's "Living Carpet": *Nature in Downland*, 1900. South Downs sheep were the most widespread breed on the Sussex Downs while westwards from Butser, Hampshire Downs were preferred. The shepherds constantly attended their flocks bringing them onto the hills in the morning then at dusk taking them back to the home farm where they were folded for the night. Sheep mainly dung at night so their droppings enriched the lowland fields that would carry crops. It also meant that dung was not deposited upon the down thus further creating this unique habitat. The only time the shepherd stayed on the hill was at lambing. Using Hazel hurdles he/she would create sheltering pens. A shepherd's hut would be drawn alongside providing the living quarter for the whole of the lambing season. Writers have described the vast flocks filling the landscape, as many as three flocks in view at any one time. Sometimes controlled by a boy or girl.

The modern shepherd does things differently. The flocks spend much of their time on the hill and are brought back to the home farm for lambing. This changing practice does affect the downland ecology for the enriching dung is deposited upon any existing chalk grassland. During the Second World War much accessible downland was ploughed and grew crops. Many of these fields are still cultivated today. Where conservation is paramount some areas are being allowed to revert, but it is a long process which has to be supported by subsidy, sometimes using European funding. This may cease and will a British government see conservation as their priority?

Bloody-nosed Beetles

During the early days of the country park no summer walk over chalk grassland was complete without discovering these fascinating insects. Both the Greater and Lesser proliferated, but today they seem far less common. A perfectly harmless little beast thriving on a vegetarian diet. The name comes from their habitat of exuding a reddish liquid from their mouth parts as a displacement activity to deter a predator. I found they only did this under extreme provocation, mostly just quietly crawling about the hand until released.

Glow-worm

The female Glow-worm can produce a neon light at her tail, which attracts the flying males. She is flightless and does not look like a fully formed adult beetle. The male however does conform to the accepted beetle build. They flourish on the chalk as they prey upon the abundance of small snails. The various downland snail species can, in their feeding, extract calcium which helps harden their shells. Where Glow-worms are common they can enliven a summer's evening, but like so many other creatures, have much declined.

Art in the countryside

Ever since I saw the sculptures in Grizedale Forest (Cumbria) it inspired my interest in "Art" in the countryside. Working with ex forester John Cooper, himself a talented painter, we attempted to create an Arts Trail. We chose a route through the forest with John wanting to create windows in

the canopy while I hoped that we could install sculpture and creative writings displayed on trailside boards. We took the trail close to a dead, but safe, Yew whose outline had a sculptural quality. Unfortunately a lack of communication led to it being cut down. Unknown to us two forest workmen were told by the F.C. to walk the trail and remove dangerous trees!

A sculpture, a Giant Chair, was installed in a forest picnic site and we also began designing a Woodland Theatre site. Although the Centre did hold frequent art exhibitions, other plans were not followed up although there are now sculptures along the Shipwrights Way.

Forestry and transplanting trees

Forestry work had begun on Wardown in the 1930s with rows of beech being planted with rows of Scots Pine planted in between as nurse trees. Conifers were planted on Holt Down where the soils were a bit deeper. Early employees included Percy Legg and Jack Legg from Buriton. Fred Courtier, from the Research Unit at Alice Holt, worked with Jack Legg to invent a trap to catch grey squirrels which were great pests to young trees. It was also common for warfarin poison to be used and for sparrowhawks to be shot.

New trees were grown from seeds in seed beds, lifted when one year old into transplant beds where they grew for another 1-2 years before being planted out in their final home. When lifted and bagged ready for planting in the forest they are identified by the length of time they spent in their previous homes (eg, one year in a seed bed and two in a transplant line is described as a 1+2)

A large forest tree nursery existed at Iron Hill, Rogate. At one time seed was collected from any tree of the required species, but now trees are genetically selected.

Grandfather's Bottom (Rake Bottom)

Grandfather's Bottom is a spectacular steep sided valley cutting back into the north face of Butser Hill. The South Downs is a ridge of chalk that formed from the bodies of marine animals on the bed of a warm shallow sea. About 60 million years ago violent earth movements caused ripples that pushed up this sea bed forming a gigantic dome of chalk. This has since worn and weathered away leaving today the encircling North and South Downs.

Chalk absorbs water and it is estimated that it takes rainfall 60 years to re-emerge as a stream. In the case of Grandfather's Bottom, water carved out an underground cavern. Eventually the roof fell in leaving the steep sided valley. Although much of the soil in the valley bottom has washed and weathered away it is still deeper than the usual soil cover on the chalk. Apart from grazing by sheep and rabbits, which has controlled scrub development, the Bottom has been undisturbed for many years. It supports a thriving butterfly population, including a healthy colony of Duke of Burgundy Fritillary.

When giving talks about the subject I would say that Grandfather's Bottom was on the backside of Butser. This seemed to amuse audiences.

The Portsmouth Road

During the coaching era, Butser presented a steep climb to breast the down. Gradually the Butser Cutting was dug lessening the steepness. The road was maintained by the road mender who sat at the roadside breaking flint collected from the fields. During bad weather the road became impassable when an alternative route from Buriton to Gravel Hill may have been used? The

finding of a silver coin by Francis Davis and a 1797 cartwheel penny found by Donna Barrow may support this theory. Apparently passing travellers would throw a coin to wayside children. During the 1970s the cutting was further deepened. This created bare chalk steep sided banks, terraced on the Butser side. The county arboriculturist planted Juniper which became well established. That is until a misguided road engineer had them cut! Luckily some survived and still help dress the banks.

Bottom Cottage

Thought to be the inn described in David Copperfield.

When we moved into the park centre flat Cecil Gaylard, living at Bottom Cottage, was our nearest neighbour. Mrs Gaylard had grown up in the cottage. They had three children, Chris the oldest worked for Dave Pike. Veronica lived at home and I believe their other son worked as a medic.

While doing my basic forestry training at Alice Holt I often worked with George Strugnell, a native of Buriton. He lived at Holt Pound and his wife was a sister of Mrs Gaylard. George served in the Hampshire Regiment during the war and saw action in North Africa and the Italian campaign, which included Monte Casino.

When we moved to Four Marks from the Forest of Dean our house had been occupied by Ken Trodd who eventually became a Chief Forester in Kielder Forest. He was a brother of Mrs Gaylard and had grown up in the cottage. A third sister was married to a forest worker at Rogate.

Military Training

For many years the slopes of Butser saw military training. Edward Gibbon, when living at Buriton, was a member of the local militia.

Target bottom served as a firing range during the First World War and it continued during the Second. Mortar shells, some still live, can still be found.

Folklore suggests that an overturned truck of cannon balls gave rise to the name Cannon Ball Corner (now realigned following the late 1970s road works) but actually the name is a derivation of an older name, The Warn Cannon Bow.

The Portsmouth road was always an important link between London and the Portsmouth Naval Base. Samuel Pepys made a detour to avoid the footpads lurking in the Royal Forest of Bere. Prior to D Day the road would have seen much activity.

Although I never saw it, an underground chamber was discovered, I think on War Down. Below a hidden trap door was a brick lined chamber. I believe a shovel was found. Apparently such underground chambers were dug to house local resistance fighters who, remaining hidden, could emerge to engage an invading army during the Second World War. I assume this and other such chambers still exist and are worthy of further research.

The Great Storm: 15th October, 1987

During October 1987 I made my first of now many visits to the Isles of Scilly. I had enjoyed a week of rare birds including a first for Britain. I was camping with other Hampshire birders on The Garrison on St. Mary's. We had set up our tents close to a sheltering wall and we were sheltered by trees in which a Red-eyed Vireo appeared as we settled. It was our last evening and we retired after our usual evening meal in the Bishop and Wolf.

I slept soundly and awoke to calm conditions and a clear blue sky. Outside the ground was littered by conifer needles and much of the campsite had been devastated. Tents swept away their occupants now sheltering in the campsite toilets. Gradually the news of a devastating storm that had swept southern and eastern England filtered few. As we travelled home we heard more news. Apparently there had been a wreck of Sabine's gulls and Grey Phalaropes all along the south coast. Travelling in darkness we saw nothing of the storm's effect.

Back home, Coralie told me of how she had spent the night listening to falling trees. In the morning I saw the damage for the first time. Swathes of trees on Holt Down had been swept away. It was back to work dealing with the many phone calls from both the press and public. New habitats had been created overnight and following the storm I never again recorded a Golden Pheasant.

January 1992 saw another storm sweep through. Although lacking the wind strength of 1987 it did do much damage.

John Brown

The late John Brown from White Dirt Lane, Lovedene, was the Park's plumber. He had a unique knowledge of the layout of Butser's water system. He also attended to any plumbing problems at the Park Centre. John never wasted any material. Rather than use a new section of pipe he would use three pieces connected together if he had them in his store.

During a Christmas break John appeared at our door to say there was an injured fox lying on the old A3. I contacted the police and received their permission for Bernard Massey to dispatch the injured animal. John returned to the fox still lying on the road. Bernard arrived, assessed the situation and returned to his land rover for his gun. On seeing the gun the fox arose and was several fields away before anybody could react!

Police

One cannot tell the story of the country park without reference to the local police force. John Warner grew up in Clanfield and we knew him well as the local policeman living in Buriton. He patrolled the A3 on a motor bike. He was a keen photographer. He was a frequent visitor. On one occasion a Mallard had hatched a brood of ducklings near the pond. She did not stay at the pond but led her brood through the underpass where the ducklings fell through the grill of a roadside drain. John lying over a lower drain plucked the ducklings out as we flushed them through with buckets of water. We returned them to the pond but later that evening she was seen leading them along the A3. She had, however left one behind. Rescued "Downy" became yet another of Coralie's orphans.

One evening John found Coralie locked out of the flat, the door having slammed shut. He stayed with her until I arrived home. On another occasion he helped search for my daughter who became lost on a school cross country run in Cowolain. She eventually found her own way back. She had stopped to tie a shoe lace losing the other runners! On moving to Portsmouth I met John's brother Ken at the allotment. Ken served an apprenticeship with John Brown.

After John's retirement, Tiny, another larger than life character always willing for a lengthy chat, was moved to Clanfield and the park became part of his beat. He tells a story of how he moved on a group of travellers. He returned from holiday to find them camped. "Pity you have parked here." he said, "I often do a bit of shooting here and I'm not a very good shot." Apparently they moved

on waving two fingers at Tiny. "I'm the smallest of three brothers", was another oft quoted remark. Tiny had never learnt to drive and he dwarfed his small motorbike. He was also a skilled stick maker.

Dave Baker the East Meon constable became another regular visitor. He became very involved in the local farming community and ran a small flock of sheep. He also overflowed the area in his microlight.

The road patrol often paused for a cup of tea at the reception desk. Wishbone and his partner Dave were regulars. Dave became friendly with Jo Berryman a PACS potter who occasionally demonstrated at the centre. On retirement he became involved in antiques.

The Country Park Cricket Team

Each year a number of park staff played in the County's inter-departmental knock-out cricket team and in 1976 we won the trophy. Bob Pullen usually scored a heap of runs as he did as captain of Petersfield. He had also played rugby for the county. I contributed by taking a few wickets. I later organised a team made up of park staff, ancient farm staff, craft demonstrators and friends. I think we won all our matches? We even beat Buriton helped by our six foot six Merrist Wood student.

Cricket is the greatest game ever invented and I also played for the Butser Ancient Farm against a team of visiting archaeologists on a makeshift wicket at the farm. Tea was taken in the round house and I remember returning to complete the match only to find the two Dexter cows had decorated the wicket on a length at each end!

The Hampshire Bat Group

I had become interested in bats when carrying out a Mammal Survey in the forest of Dean. Towards the end of my time as a Conservation Forester the BBC's evening programme, Nationwide, launched a Bat Box appeal. A donation of £1.50 would support a box. They received far more donations, allowing for a number of bat box schemes throughout the country. Dr Bob Stebbings of what was then the Nature Conservancy, was the project manager. Bob was acknowledged as the country's leading bat expert. Three hundred boxes were placed at Bramshill Forest, the intention being to attract bats into plantations with no natural roost sites. It was on an early box inspection that I first met Bob, by which time I had transferred to the park. The boxes were positioned on the trunks of Scots Pine, two groups of four each box facing a point of the compass. On my first visit we found roosting Pipistrelles and nesting Treecreepers.

In 1981 the Wildlife & Countryside Act afforded all bats full protection. This meant licensed volunteers were needed to investigate matters regarding bats especially where bats in buildings faced vulnerable situations. Along with another bat worker in north Hampshire I was asked would I be prepared to take on such a role. I agreed. Bob along with the late Colin Tubbs, the regional officer of the Nature Conservancy, were anxious to form county bat groups. I volunteered to host an inaugural meeting. This was attended by both professional and amateur naturalists and all the New Forest Keepers. A person was chosen to chair this new group which would function as a section of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust.

I reported the success of the meeting held at the park in my regular Petersfield Post's Notes where upon Sara Raper from Clanfield volunteered to become the group secretary. A post she then held for many years. Sara, who was a regular follower of my guided walks, also became an enthusiastic and licensed bat worker. Sara also has a fine singing voice so with her choir we organised musical evenings at the park in support of the bat group. On one occasion their pianist had to pull out so

Area Manager, Martyn Guy volunteered to provide accompaniment. Unfortunately Martyn was out of practise and much to everybody's amusement ended one piece several bars behind the choir. It all added to the jollity of the evening. At the end of the group's first year I took over as chairman.

I was privileged to attend a winter survey led by Dr Stebbings of a West Sussex ex-railway tunnel hibernation roost. Here I saw the now extinct in Britain, Greater Mouse-eared Bat. Bat inspections could lead to bizarre situations. I had been asked to investigate a situation in Lovedene. The elderly residents had just returned from their honeymoon. He was in his eighties his wife in her seventies. He was very angry and she had been prescribed tranquillisers so stressed was she regarding the bats. I climbed into their loft but found no bats in residence but droppings suggested it had been used as a summer roost by Serotines. My recommendation was the roof should be sealed while the bats were absent as it was obvious they would never receive any sympathy from this couple. As I was about to leave the lady demanded, "You say there are no bats, but when will their eggs hatch out?"

In 2014 David Ball, who had also served as chair, Sara and myself were made honorary members of the group.

Michael F Wearing

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