

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Colin Howes (part 1)

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Interviewer: Lynne Fox

This is Lynne Fox for the Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project. It's the 22nd September 2006 and I'm talking today to Colin Howes at Doncaster Museum, good afternoon Colin.

I wonder if first of all you could just tell me what your position is at the museum.

Tenuous probably! The actual post I have at the moment, which is not remotely what I actually started out here doing, is called Museum Officer (Environmental Records), right. A short while ago it was Keeper of Environmental Records, a while earlier than that it was Assistant Keeper of Environmental Sciences, I think before that it was Natural History Assistant.

My background is in Yorkshire, but actually not this part of Yorkshire. My home town is Scarborough on the North East coast, went to school there. On leaving school I got a job at the museum in Exeter, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. The reason for that was in Scarborough, there was and still is, a museum called Woodend Natural History Museum and when I was a nipper there in Scarborough, a school boy, dead keen on natural history as many youngsters were, Brooke Bond, the tea company had brought out a series of tea cards. I think it was in the days before tea bags, so you got loose tea, and in your Brooke Bond tea packet you had these British Birds cards and that absolutely fired up a whole generation of youngsters with an interest in well, birds and natural history generally.

At the museum in Scarborough there were two absolutely natural teachers, inspirational people. A bloke in charge, the curator was a chap called Geoffrey Watson and his assistant was Michael Clegg. I suppose people generally remember him as Mike Clegg of Cleggs People fame on Yorkshire television but in those days he was the assistant curator at Woodend Natural History Museum. Well they ran a junior natural history society on a Saturday morning and Friday evenings, within the same- and it attracted, I don't know, trillions of kids, I mean it was just sort of black with swarms of kids on a Saturday morning down there at the museum. I mean, I doubt if any museum has the same enthusiastic patronage that they generated and it was, it was partly the subject but it was largely there interpretation of the world of wildlife.

In Scarborough was the Scarborough Natural, oh, Scarborough Field Naturalist Society which was a more traditional natural history organisation one of many probably, fifty or sixty, which set up across Yorkshire. Most towns of any note had their own Natural History Societies and these tended to kick off round about the late nineteenth century, you're talking sort of probably eighteen fifties, very, very early, but eighteen eighties, eighteen nineties, that most of 'em started. And many of them are still going and still going strong., curiously enough the one in Doncaster for instance is extremely active and it's a hundred and twenty five years old, well a hundred and twenty six years old now. But the one in Scarborough I joined as a seven year old and I was rubbing shoulders with, effectively the survivals of Victorian natural history. Some of the Entomologists, that's people who study insects and some of the Botanists and Mycologists, that's people who study flowering plants and fungi, they had been interested in those subjects, certainly for fifty, sixty, seventy years. I mean some of them were very elderly people and these wonderful people were the individuals that had

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

published important articles and species lists and so forth in the scientific literature that you just sort of take for granted, but there they were as living beings from an earlier era, I found it just totally fascinating that society.

So as a school boy I just couldn't think of anything other than working in some aspect of the natural sciences and because of my contacts with Woodend Natural History Museum I felt that this would express itself more effectively working in, through the medium of a museum. I had no idea that other museums simply weren't like that at all. On leaving, as I say, on leaving school, various jobs presented themselves, but the one that particular fired me up was a trainee assistant at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. Well I was down there for five years. Exeter was a fantastic place to live and work, the, you know, the Exe Estuary, Dartmoor, the heaths and commons, the deciduous woodlands, the climate! It was all so different to what I had experienced up in the North East. But it was a bit, it was sort of unreal. There wasn't the work ethic as it were, not to be cruel about it but although it was a fantastic place to be and to be on holiday, shall we say, it didn't have the grit and punch of, and purpose I think of working up here.

A job came up at Doncaster Museum in 1969 as Natural History Assistant. Now I'd heard of Doncaster Museum, it was the first post-war, brand new, purpose built museum and some extraordinary people had worked here. The chap who started it off from its earlier beginnings, a chap called E F Gillmore, Elphinstone Forest Gillmore, was the first Curator, or Director I think he was called, he was of international fame in the world of Entomology. His, probably rather patronising to call him protégé but, Gilmore knew of Peter Skidmore, who quickly became the Keeper of Natural Sciences here. But Peter who came from Oldham, went to the Oldham Natural History Society, like me had a very highly significant background in the natural sciences through the local, his local natural history society and in the Oldham Nat's there were and had been some extremely important naturalists of all hues, but certainly entomologists and certainly botanists. Peter, after a period at Oldham College of Art, was head hunted to work at a biological supply firm called Flatters and Garnets and they supplied equipment such as collecting nets and microscopes and so forth to schools and colleges and individuals who are interested. They also supplied biological specimens, so he would be detailed to go out and collect what was required. Therefore, he had to know what he was collecting, he couldn't collect randomly.

And was he already here when you came here?

Peter was here when I came here, and he came here because he also was, he was again head hunted. Gilmore who was the Director here, as I have mentioned, was running the museum but he was also involved a huge amount of entomological research, research on a world scale, I mean he was publishing scientific treatises all over the world, so he needed somebody to sort of take an element of that off his back so that he could, he had more freedom to run the museum and develop new activities within the museum.

[Phone Ringing]

Oh gosh, what were we talking about! Peter Skidmore.

Yes, you were talking about how you came to be in Doncaster really.

Yeah. When I applied to come, oh that's right, I'd mentioned earlier on, I'd mentioned Mike Clegg as being a great mentor of mine in Scarborough, well for a period when this museum was being set up, so you're talking sort of 1962 to about 1964/5, Mike operated as Keeper of Natural Sciences here. Now although Mike Clegg was interested in, as museum naturalists are, in all aspects of

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

natural sciences, his particular expertise was with birds and mammals, to an extent reptiles and amphibians but, and fish, but birds and mammals mainly.

Pete Skidmore came and joined the staff, but ready to take over the entomological side of things. Quite quickly after that, although Peter and Mike got on absolutely like a house on fire, they were absolute buddies. I suspect life in those days was very much like the Goon Show here, they had a similar interest in that sort of humour, that sort of patter. Well, oh and Mike was a great raconteur, I mean there was- we had a cafeteria here in the museum and at lunch time the museum staff would go through and have their sandwiches and a cup of coffee or a cup of tea and the place would just fill up with people ear wiggling what they were saying and the place was just sort of guffawing with laughter, just sort of heaving with, it was almost like stand up comics at the Edinburgh Festival. But Mike left in I think it was about 1965 or '66 after various moves he became what was known as the depute, not deputy but depute director of the museum in Dundee and then after several years there he came back to Yorkshire to run the Yorkshire Museum and he was at the Yorkshire Museum for, well literally until he retired and from the Yorkshire Museum he did, you know, he entered into this broadcasting career.

Now, when I joined the staff Peter Skidmore was the head of the Natural Sciences Department and there were two Natural History Technicians, Chris Devlin and Albert White. Now at the old museum on Waterdale, in Doncaster, at Beechfield House to the rear of Beechfield House, was a zoo. Now this was a zoo that Mr Gilmore had set up. Gilmore was dead keen on zoos, I suppose what you might nowadays call safari parks, but in those days they didn't exist, but he had that sort of vision and what he was trying out was to see if a zoo of any description in Doncaster was gonna take off, was going to be appealing to local residents. So this small zoo was set up at the rear of Beechfield House in the grounds of the old hall there and this was run by Albert White, who came up for the job from, he was at Regents Park Zoo in London in charge of the parrot house there, very prestigious job, and he took the risk to come up and start this new zoo in Doncaster. Chris Devlin who was again another dead keen local naturalist and he'd trained at Doncaster College of Art for a couple of years, he joined the staff as a Zoo Keeper. However when Beechfield Museum was demolished and the zoo had to be disbanded, in about 1960 to about 1962, that was all demolished to build Doncaster Technical College, or Doncaster College as it now is, and it was at that time that the current building in Chequer Road was designed and developed and established. So Albert and Chris, instead of being out of work they were subsumed as technicians into the Natural Sciences Department at the new Museum.

What kind of things were at the zoo?

Well they had a pretty wide range of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, I think nowadays it would be heartily reviled by people, but at the time it was spectacularly successful. The attendance figures were absolutely sky high and you had to pay to go in, you had to pay six pence to get in, but it had the great advantage of being situated next to the then Doncaster Bus Station. So, you know, people waiting for buses would come in. You know, if you were waiting at the coach station probably for quite a long time with unruly kids you came into the museum, no, you came into the zoo. The attendance figures were just phenomenal. Gilmore wrote regularly in the local newspaper, he was a fantastic publicist, anything that happened at the zoo, whether it was a birth or a death or an escape, very often an escape, the press absolutely lapped it up, they loved it. I think the local police were quite keen as well 'cause anything to spice up a dull, chilly winter evening, you know, if the deer had got out and had to be sort of chased off down the High Street, there are many anecdotes, many stories of a whole range of species getting out, porcupines turning up in people's coal houses and, you know, you name it.

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

And had that all been demolished and the move had already taken place here when you came?

That had all happened. I remember being very impressed by the range of species represented in the very extensive natural history displays here at the museum and it was only literally years and years afterwards that I realised that a lot of these things had actually come from the zoo. These were just normal, natural sort of mortality incidents at the zoo which instead of being, you know, fed into the incinerator were, it was very much of a recycling make do and mend culture of course in the fifties and sixties, so if you had a hornbill or a toucan or a, I don't know, kinkachou, or something like this, you didn't simply get rid of it, you sent it to a taxidermist and most of the stuff was sent down to a chap called Frederick Ashton in East Anglia, in Norwich, sorry.

When Chris and Albert came across here they were working along with Mike Clegg and Mike knew about the preservation of specimens and taught them skills of taxidermy and animal preparations. They were doing everything from making plaster of paris and fibre glass moulds and casts of fish, snakes, they were pressing plants, they were skinning birds and mammals for the technical collections, but eventually, and I think it was largely Chris who went in for this, he was actually mounting specimens for display and he became a pretty competent taxidermist. Eventually he took on taxidermy, 'cause in that there were very few taxidermists anywhere in Britain at that time, he took on taxidermy apprentices. Not particularly for the benefit of Doncaster Museum, because, you know, in learning the trade as it were, you're turning out some ghastly material that you just can't use, but it was to support the whole business of taxidermists, so that there were animal preparators out there capable of competent, professional standard work. And one of his, I think his first and most notable apprentice was a young man called Graham, a school leaver again, Graham Teesdale who became, ultimately one of the leading professional taxidermists in Britain and took on some pretty impressive international contracts. These being work with museums, to an extent collectors, but mainly museums abroad.

Can I ask you what, at what point you made an entrance into this work?

Right, well, good point, when I came here, the team was Albert and Chris and Peter Skidmore. They were the natural history team and it really was a team they worked, they shared the same humour, they got on extremely well and they were all extremely motivated. I'd never come across people who were just buzzing with work, they were very, very hard working.

And what was your role in that team?

At that stage we were involved with a big series of new geological displays, well displays of all sorts, but initially geological displays and these took the form of what we refer to as dioramas, so that these were sort of big landscape- landscape based exhibitions. So I suppose I spent the first few weeks here, burning bits of paper, this was- using Jurassic- fossils of Jurassic plants, I was trying to produce illustrations of the plants of that time so that I could model them out of card and paper and, the burning them business was to try and get them to sort of curl over. Which sometimes worked, sometimes didn't work, it curled round in a sort of naturalistic sort of sense. So I suppose in a sense it was craft work, but it was craft work based on solid geology, very solid geology and we were trying to create a series of displays showing a range of landscapes, plants and animals at various geological stages through the history of the earth.

I, my, I didn't realise at the time but Peter and Chris were, in terms of design, were very, now then what can I say, very painterly. Chris was a fabulous model maker as well, he made some superb- well anything he turned to it was just excellent- superb models of woolly rhinos, mammoths, a range of dinosaurs, Jurassic dinosaurs and going back to Devonian times and Silurian times there

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

were. He and Peter were modelling marine invertebrates and sea anemones, graptomites, all sorts of things that, sea lilies and you name it. They were basing this art work on actual geological specimens, so you got the full, you got an interpretation of a sea lily in full graceful movement as it were, and next to it you'd have a chunk of rock with fragments of sea lily stem, so you could see the evidence and then you could see an interpretation of the actual creature.

Why would they be creating a display of sea lilies in Doncaster museum so far from the sea?

Well at various stages we have been under the sea of course. We had a, quite a wide ranging geological collection which had representative specimens from most geological periods.

From Doncaster? From this area?

Not, well, from Britain. I mean we certainly didn't have a parochial attitude, I mean the natural history displays were not parochial, some of them could be parochial, there's an urban, a sort of back yard natural history display which was what you would find in urban and brown field type situations in Doncaster. But generally it was, well one of the first natural history displays, this might explain it, one of the first natural history displays I did was on the subject of owls, well I was looking at owls as a specialist evolved group of organisms, group of birds. I was looking at their similarities, what made the owlness of an owl, what made them owls, in terms of classification and their specialisms, which separated them from other families of birds. And within the owls you then separated them according to the various specialisms so that they weren't competing with each other. They went for different slices of the predatory pie as it were and you were also looking at owls around the world. You were always trying to stretch people's knowledge and imaginations. We were always trying to place within a display a sort of, what can we call it now, a sort of crib sheet, so a teacher could come along with a class of children, teachers can't be expected to be experts on everything. So if they were looking at birds of prey, predatory birds, they could stand at the owl case and one of the panels there, with sort of bullet points, went through, I mean it's pretty clichéd in a sense now, but it certainly wasn't clichéd in those days, the business of the owls eyesight, specialisms in the eyesight, you know, the hook beak, the talons, the specialised plumage to enable them to achieve very silent flight, the capacity to hear ultrasound, so that they could focus in on scurrying rodents and shrews in, well as we now know, in total darkness and they can still focus on their prey. So all that was put in, and the birds themselves, the mounted birds were sort of just illustrative of the range of owls.

But I mean that was just, oh we had multitudes of, I don't know how many cases it was but, each-and the cases were huge, I mean, one of the cases, just one of our cases would be, you could get so much in it would be almost like a gallery or a small gallery elsewhere and some of the very large cases, the mammal case and the fish case were absolutely huge and certainly they in their own right were as all embracing as going into a specialist gallery in another museum. So there's a huge amount of work to be done.

Mike Clegg and Chris Devlin and Pete Skidmore, well although Pete, I think Pete had arrived really after the museum was opened but Mike and Chris it was a matter of filling the museum, you know what it's like, you've got an opening deadline and no matter what it is it's always a rush, when it comes to the deadline it's always a mad rush. Well, the current museum was far, far bigger than the old museum, what Gilmore did was to attract from many museums up and down the country. I know material came here from the Scottish National Museum, oh I just can't think just of hand where they came from but there were more than half a dozen museums up and down the country who provided, who were sort of getting rid, and we with open arms received material from them.

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Gilmore, when he was demobbed from the forces and in the forces he'd been in Southern Africa for quite a long time so he had a real feel for African wildlife and ethnography and so forth. When he was demobbed his first job was in the, oh gosh, what was it called, the, was it Imperial Institute, I think it was then called, but it was sort of a museum in London dealing with materials, be they ethnographic or natural history from the British Empire so in other words all over the world, and he was in charge for a short while, he was in charge of the African department. Now because of political correctness the institute as constituted when he was there was being, if you like, dismantled, so there was an awful lot of exotic stuff in the Imperial Institute which was dispersed around museums and of course, because of Gilmore, a lot of it was dispersed to Doncaster. So we ended up with a huge international collection and of course this is one of the reasons we were able to put on such a huge and exotic display here. I mean whatever we did, we could do it from a world perspective, it wasn't just British and it was just parochially Doncaster.

Having said, that you've got this marvellous resource from display work, in addition to the display work are there other collections that people may not regularly see?

Yeah, vast, behind the scenes, vast collections, research collections and, it's quite astonishing how frequently they, well, how regularly they were used and how exhaustively they were used.

How were they originated and built up, and how extensive are they?

It varied enormously. Obviously a huge amount of effort was put into display work at the time I first came here. But we were also out in the field recording and collecting and the entomological collections here were being built hugely and certainly the herbarium and botanical collections here. And the reason for that was that if you're going out recording making species lists it isn't really satisfactory just to have a written record if it's possible to have voucher specimens that's, certainly in the long term, far more effective and beneficial.

Do you mean like, by voucher specimens you mean samples, you mean..?

Yeah. It's only very limited what you can actually record in the field and I mean this is particularly the case in entomology when you simply, the breadth of the fauna is so colossal, you can't simply know what you're collecting, so you collect it, bring it back and identify it in the lab. And as a result of that you have endless records from known localities and map references that in those days they went into note books, cards indexes, nowadays of course it's transferred onto electronic means. But as so often happens, as research progresses you'll find that what, ten, twenty, thirty years ago was a particular species of fly, or plant- research has been done on that particular species and it's been found that it isn't just one species, it's five species. So, if all you had was a written record, you wouldn't be able to determine what that new species was. But if you can go back to your voucher, or run of voucher specimens you can then, using new identification key of published work, work out what you actually have and you know, that is fundamentally the purpose of museum collections. So it can constantly re-identify, re-evaluate the fauna and flora that you're monitoring and recording.

The- personally my interest in museums was on the display side and I- my father worked in Scarborough, he worked for a firm called Rowntrees, which had a department store, he was a very, highly skilled cabinet maker and the, well, I mean he was paid absolute peanuts and the sort of stuff that he produced is now, you know, astronomically expensive. But I mean he as a cabinet maker saw nothing of that, it's only wheeler and dealers who make all the loot. But he worked for this firm, this department store, which was very much like Grace Brothers on, of television fame and when we as a family watched *Are You Being Served*, the celebrated 1970s sitcom, no it wasn't a

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

sitcom, sort of comedy series, although it was extremely humorous it was more of a, it was more of a documentary to us, I mean, we knew all those, all the kinds of people, we knew the hierarchies and how people functioned. But at, one thing that Rowntrees was really good at was displaying their wares, partly in window displays and partly in the departments. And as a youngster I was, I thought that was fabulous, I loved it. So in a sense I'm a frustrated window dresser working, not in terms of the rag trade, but working in terms of, you know, biodiversity. So when I came here it was largely display work that I suppose I was paid to do.

However, which I suppose is really why you're here doing this interview anyway. Various environmental issues were coming up, thick and fast. These were where, I'd never encountered this before, you'd heard of, you know, conservation, you'd heard of, sort of, looking after wildlife and identifying places of interest for wildlife, but I'd never come across anywhere where these sites had ever been threatened. North East Yorkshire, the dynamism of development, just didn't happen, similarly in Exeter, in South- in that part of Devon that I lived in. Come to Doncaster and the development was spectacular. The industries were, well extractive industries, you had, you know, anything from coal mining to lime stone quarrying, sand and gravel extraction, clay pits and of course peat. And I had no idea how absolutely devastating in a, at certain stages, these industries could be. In the long term if managed imaginatively from a bio diversity point of view they could be, you know, sensationally successful and beneficial.

But two things were happening, first of all there were great mootings, by various interested parties to use, Drax Power Station had just got the go ahead. Easily the biggest power station in Britain, and was it one of the biggest ones in Western Europe? And clearly the whole thing hadn't been thought through, for instance, what was gonna happen to all the pulverised fuel ash that came out of it. The, it was important to the local mining industry, well the mining industry in South and West Yorkshire that Drax was where it was and so the vast output from an industry went into that one half as it were, but what was gonna happen to that phenomenal amount of ash? 'Oh, you've got Thorne Moors just down the road, if that can be covered in pulverised fly ash and levelled off you've got the basis of an airport, an international airport'. So there were very powerful lobbying interests rooting for the use of Thorne Moors, or because it was indicated on maps as Thorne Waste that it's very cartographic terminology was a sort of stake in its heart.

This is where we came in contact in a very dynamic sort of way with William Bunting. William Bunting lived in Thorne, he- because of his knowledge and interest in the natural sciences knew that Thorne Moors was of far more interest, far more importance than official bodies were maintaining and he was trying to get people to take a look at the place and find out for themselves, not just to hear him ranting and raving about how good it was, but to come out there and actually find the stuff. He, in the literature had claimed that various species had been found there and, 'Oh yeah, it's just Bunting, ranting and raving because he's got an issue there, we don't believe him, such and such can't have been there that's just impossible, technically impossible'.

So Bunting went round all of the universities, well any academic institution he could lay his hands on and any field, naturalist field, biologist, if he could lay his hands on, they were roped in, or he was trying to rope them in. Because of his rather abrasive manner he frightened a lot of people to death and of course they didn't come and help him. But he got tremendous support from individuals at Hull University and New York University, I mean, the New University at York that is, Bradford University, Sheffield University and I've mentioned Sheffield, yeah. Sheffield, Bradford, Leeds, York and Hull, I think they were the main ones. And some of the people who were helping him became, I mean they were just sort of international giants, it was just quite astonishing and they were sort of leaving their ivory towers and coming out onto Thorne Moors. I mean, Bunting really rubbed their noses in it and there was a fair element of shaming them as well, for making a living on

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

the back of the biological sciences, but when biology needed them to come to its help they were nowhere to be seen. Well quite a lot of them did actually come out and quite a lot of them did undertake studies and collect and identify. But one of the main people, by a long, long way in that respect, was Peter Skidmore. And, I mean the days we had, long before we had transport of our own, so you'd get the, you know, bikes and bus, well it was the bus out to Thorne and then Bunting and his sons cadged bits of bikes and literally made, assembled bikes for us to go out onto the moor with and it was just, absolutely.. I remember falling about, falling about with laughter seeing Pete Skidmore, who was quite a portly character, even more so with this huge rucksack on his back with collecting nets sticking out and vasculums, they're metal containers that you put plants in, sort of getting onto this sort of sit up and beg bike to pedal out onto, to the edge of Thorne Moors.

But we'd cycle onto the edge of Thorne Moors and sort bury our bikes in bracken and so forth, so people couldn't find them, and go out onto the moors to collect, well a whole variety of things. Plants, insects, spiders, you name it and it was just astounding. You were going into a, it was like, was it the lost world, the Conan Doyle fantasy that was sort of 1940s, sort of Michael Rennie blockbuster film and they came across this, was it Rorimer, this sort of plateau in, lost in the Brazilian jungle, South American jungle. Well getting onto Thorne Moors was not unlike that. It was not easy to get to, it was a machete job to cut your way on, I mean you had to cut your way through hundreds of yards of rhododendron thicket. On the foot there were the bases of some of the old peat workings, now Bunting understood what these peat workings were and that you had a rectangular working itself and then you had a grid of ditches and drains associated with that. Well if, we knew nothing of that, it was just a flat terrain with vegetation, we had no idea and he would take us across it obliquely, not along the, as we then ultimately learned, you can read the vegetation and you can work out where the old peat baulks were and you could walk along those safely. But if you walked off them you were up to your chest in sort of peat slurry as it were.

The first time he took us on, well certainly I went on with Chris Devlin on one occasion, I don't know if Pete Skidmore was there. It was before the Thorne Colliery pit head gear that won the sort of design accolades it was before that had been erected, because you were on low, flat land and you had vegetation well above your head, you were, in a matter of yards you were completely lost, and if you didn't have a good sense of orientation, where the light was coming from, blah, blah, blah, you could, well I don't know, you could probably still have been on there today as it were! But you gradually learnt to read the landscape and read these peat baulks and read the vegetation, I think that was the key, but he took Pete's, sorry, Bunting took Chris Devlin and myself diagonally across some of these peat workings knowing full well that we'd get absolutely saturated, it was a freezing cold day, sort of horizontal sleet sort of stuff, but we were determined to do it. I mean getting Wellingtons full of peat slurry was just, you know, wasn't the half of it we were soaked, you know, right up to our chests really. But we saw a range of, certainly plants, it wasn't really the time of year to do entomology, that were seriously important. Not only rarities but indicator species of lowland raised mires, although in those days I don't think we'd even heard the term lowland raised mire. It was just a peat bog, we didn't realise that there's any difference between these lowland peat bogs and peat bogs up on the Pennines.

Gradually as we got used to the place and certainly after Pete Skidmore and Paul, well yeah, Paul Buckland joined the staff in the seventies, and he was just inspirational. He was, I think his background was geology, but he was just, like Pete Skidmore he was a polymath. I think he was actually paid as an archaeologist, but he was just looking at historic landscapes, whether that historic landscape was populated by insects, plants or possibly people, didn't really make any difference as far as he was concerned, it was just how the landscape worked, landscape worked. And they were coming across species that, well ultimately we found out, unique to the moors, but I think at that time it wasn't really appreciated why this was the case. Now it's better understood that

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Thorne and Hatfield Moors are more akin to the lowland mires in the Baltic area, rather than to the rest of Britain. All arguments at that time were, 'oh, it doesn't matter if it's filled in because there's, you know, x, y, and z hectares of peat moor left in Britain, so if Thorne Moors goes it's only such and such a percentage loss and it's such an impoverished habitat, doesn't really matter.'

Well with Bunting being the sort of, what shall we call him, the ringmaster as it were, bringing in all these experts like Pete Skidmore, Paul Buckland and the people from the various universities it was patently obvious that this, well initially Thorne Moors, Hatfield Moors came into the frame much later on, but Thorne Moors was getting more and more and more important in terms of, not only the vast range of species that were being found there, but the habitats they were indicators of. And as soon as, and this is where Paul Butland and his archaeological colleagues were concerned, as soon as he started looking at the insects out of the peat, in other words, the insects that had occurred there in the bronze age, it suddenly occurred to them that out there you're looking at a current, a bronze age fauna, still there.

Still living?

Yeah, the things that were there that Bunting was finding that people were poo pooing, 'can't possibly occur, these things, or they've been introduced,' they've been found in the peat, so in fact it was a continuation of a, of populations of these things and I mean, this is where Pete Skidmore, and he's still working on it, was just so influential in breaking through all sorts of time, sort of time honoured prejudices about peat moors and about the British fauna, etc. It just sort of, you know sent salvoes of torpedoes right through all of these pre, you know, pre-held convenient theories and...

From what he found on ..?

Yeah, and you know, gradually this picture, well not all that gradually, this picture started to emerge that you were looking at historic landscape still populated by the fauna and to an extent the flora of what was there, you know, three, four, thousand years ago. One thing that triggered this was on one occasion the firm doing the peat extraction, the commercial peat extraction on Thorne Moors, at the time we were going on, is a firm called Fisons and in order to render the moor, in order to render the peat extraction more efficient, they came up with the idea of digging not only ditches around an area to be dug out for peat, but for creating extremely deep ditches, right down to the underlying mineral. And very extensive systems of these enormous deep ditches and for, I should think for the first time in three, four thousand years there was movement of water on that site. Water was cascading off. This led to, what I'm sure some of your other correspondents have, or interviewees have been telling you about, Buntings Beavers, where, on a weekend Bunting and Co would go on and build dams just to hold water back so that the argument for how important the moor was could continue. You know, if they'd just let the water vanish off the moor there would have been a very fabulous epitaph. We didn't want our work to be an epitaph we wanted it to be the basis of saving the place as an international resource.

Anyway, in one of the ditches and this is where Paul Buckland really came into his own, he had a fantastic eye for historic landscape, features within the historic landscape and his eye just happened to catch some little bits, some chunks of wood down at the bottom, I mean to me they might just have been chunks of, well just sort of tree roots or something like this. Cause growing out of the peat you got, you know, birch trees and various things, rhododendrons on the edge! They could have been tree roots, but he noticed that they were fashioned at one end. And he jumped down into the, into the ditch and discovered that it was the, a surviving trunk of a track way. So when the moor, I mean, this was metres down, below the peat surface, when the bog was, when Thorne Moor was initially sort of wetting up, initially forming into a bog, in order for people and their cattle to

Thorne and Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

get about, get from village to village, or from grazing to settlement, these track ways, corduroy track ways were created. The archaeologist at the museum in those days was a chap called Malcolm Dolby and so Paul Buckland, Malcolm Dolby and Peter Skidmore looked at these, this track way, samples were taken and particularly samples of peat from in and around the track way were taken.

Now, Peter Skidmore, an eminent entomologist was faced with the tremendous problem of trying to, they were finding insect remains in the peat, but it was almost like getting a beetle, stamping on it and then giving an expert a bit of beetle wing case, or a bit of a leg. Now the identification of insects is traditionally through what are known as dichotomous keys, identification keys. So you have a, does its leg have three spines, or on such and such a joint have three spines or two spines, if it has three spines go to the next paragraph, if its got two spines go to a different paragraph and then you start working out from there. Well if you're just looking at insect fragments the chances are that you are looking at a bit of the beetle that isn't actually mentioned in the identification key, so you can't use the literature, but this is, and this is where museum collections come back, because we've got extensive collections of beetles and flies and so forth here, albeit very painstaking you can compare that fragment with, you know, endless, authoritatively identified beetles and flies or hymenoptera or whatever it might be. And gradually they pieced together the early listings of the fauna at the time the peat bog was being created and..

And at the time this track way was being, had been laid?

That's right, yeah. This put a tremendous spotlight on the moor, because for the first time it brought in archaeologists. Because there was an, a human influence there, a human element, human artefact, shall we say, found down there. Legislation was far stronger where, and probably academe was probably far stronger where archaeology was concerned than with natural sciences. With the natural sciences you had, well, you had the Wildlife and Countryside Act, but that was just dealing with current flora and fauna. It had absolutely nothing to do with what had occurred in the past. Although, as we would argue, you really need to know the origins of your current flora and fauna to understand how important or otherwise it is.

Yeah, out of all this work, sparked off by Bunting, endless literature came out of that.

Can I just stop you for a second?

[Recording Ends]