

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Oral History Project

Interview with: Geoff Trinder

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Interviewer: Lynne Fox

This is Lynne Fox for the Thorne and Hatfield Oral History Project. It's the 7th July 2006 and I'm talking to Mr Geoff Trinder who is the Chair, is it?

The Chairman of the Isle Group of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.

Morning Mr Trinder. I wonder if we could start maybe with, just saying a few words about how you came to be in this area and how you started your interest in the wildlife of the area, but primarily, how did you come to be here in this area?

Well we lived in Bridlington and my step father got a job at Keadby Power Station when it was being built as a store man and so obviously, you know, couldn't travel from Bridlington, so we actually moved to Scunthorpe and then having gone away to college we came back to Scunthorpe and got a job teaching art at Epworths Secondary Modern School, as it was then, South Axholme Comprehensive it became, it's not got another name which I can't remember at the time but, so consequently I eventually came to live in the Isle when I got married.

And you obviously have an interest in wildlife, how did that start?

I don't know how it started but I've always been fascinated by creatures and the natural world. I was one of those revolting kids who kept all manner of animals over the years you know, mice in my pocket, which revolts me the thought of it now and I suppose I have kept most things, during my life, including breeding snakes and other reptiles at one stage, and initially it was birds that interested me in the outside world and, shun't say this today, but I used to collect eggs. But in those days it was a healthy pursuit, I think I even got a badge for doing it in the scouts, obviously not acceptable anymore. And I met a gentlemen called Joe Duddington who was on a wild place just outside Scunthorpe, I was looking at birds nests and he was actually recording moths and butterflies and he interested me in that side and sort of gradually my interests developed and encompassed more than just birds, was thanks to Joe's insects, and then later became interested in plants as well, so really a general interest in wildlife but birds was the sort of starting point as such.

Where did you actually live when you were a child?

I started off, I was born in Tyneside, and then I can't tell you all the places, but we moved around an awful lot due to my fathers work, he was actually a professional photographer, among other places Leeds, Wakefield and eventually ended up in Bridlington before moving to Scunthorpe.

And you actually lived in Scunthorpe in the town?

Yes in the town itself yeah.

Were you aware at that time of the landscape around you?

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Oh yeah, I mean Scunthorpe then there were all sorts of places where I used to go. I mean in my early teens and right through till sort of sixteen or so I'd get on my bike and, you know, off into the countryside. Where we lived, actually, you could only have to go half a mile and you were almost in open country, it's now all building sites, or, you know, there was an area called, what was it called, the 'floods' I think it was called, which is now all industrial site, down adjoining the steel works where John Lake College is now, that was a lovely wild area, used to go there searching butterflies, there were large hedgerows and now its reams, estates and all the rest of it. So in fact there were lots of areas within walking distance, let alone cycling distance of where I lived, fairly close to the outskirts of Scunthorpe, but with industry and you know, need for housing those have all disappeared.

And did you know about the moors at that time?

No, no I didn't know about the moors until Joe actually brought me out to Epworth Turbary which I have managed for the Trust the last thirty years. And probably then we was sort of vaguely aware there were other places within the Isle but Epworth Turbary was where we went to do collecting and recording of moths particularly. We went out with a Tilley lamp and a white sheet in those days and, you know, would stay out there and see how many moths we could record.

Can you tell me how that works?

Well moths can be attracted to light, and in the early days before I had mercury vapour lights, which is used now for trapping moths, you basically had a Tilley lamp which is pumped up and you laid a white sheet on the ground and you put the Tilley lamp in the middle and you sat back and you waited and the moths would come and land on the sheet and then you would catch them in little boxes, identify them and keep lists and in those days, again, you know, collect them. Not in huge numbers but you would build up a collection of them. The important thing was each one you collected must have on it a little label underneath stating when it was caught, where it was caught, the locality the county, who it was caught by, and whether it was caught as an adult insect or found as a caterpillar or as a pupa, because if you didn't have those details then scientifically it was of no value whatsoever. So it was important to record all those things so that you had a, you know, a genuine record, historical record of where it occurred.

So when you'd got them on your sheet and then you put them into a box and then what did you do with them?

Well you would, you would kill them, in my case, thinking about it now, I used to have a cyanide jar in my teens, which I used to carry in a rucksack on my back, and that was a, cyanide, well, layer of plaster of paris, layer of cyanide pellets and a layer of plaster of paris which set on top, and screw top jar, and the fumes actually killed the insect. You know, today you wouldn't obviously be allowed to do it, but as I say...

So, you put the, you put...

You put the moths inside and put the lid on you know, [clicks] moths like that, so almost instantaneous and you made sure you didn't take a breath as well at the same time. So that was the way I used to use, and kill them and then you would set them on a board, special board with a groove down the middle, a pin through the thorax, you put the body in the groove and then you very carefully spread the wings out and held them down with special tape and leave them for two, three weeks till they set, having put a note at the side where they were caught etc and then all the details would be put on a little note that big on the underside of the pin, underneath the moth or the

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butterfly so you could lift it up and see all the detail. Which is one of the reasons I probably have to wear glasses now, because I used to write all these labels out with a mapping pen! Spent hours doing that so, I mean that was one way. The other way to catch moths was actually to use sugar which is a mixture of all sorts of things like black treacle, little drop of rum and brown sugar, boil it all together into a sticky mixture and this is better in the autumn actually when there aren't many flowers around and you paint it on tree trunks and again you just wander round, you know, on a regular route, see what moths have arrived and if you want one you just tap it on the head, it falls in the box, sort of fairly intoxicated, that's what we always felt because of the little bit of rum and you wouldn't have, you couldn't kill those for twenty four hours because if you did they would turn greasy. You had to wait for what they'd eaten, the sugar and things, to pass through their system before you killed them and then you would kill them after twenty four hours so the food had all gone through.

So were they just sort of dopey on this sugar?

Yeah, yeah.

Did they stick to it?

No, you could just literally put the little pill box underneath and tap them on the head and they used to fall in and that was sort of in Longshaw woodland, I didn't do that so much on Epworth or we did do it a little bit but, did it in Loughton Forest for example.

And the ones that you killed, well, all the ones you killed actually, but the ones that you killed with cyanide, did you have to do anything else to preserve them or did they..?

No, you killed them then you had to actually leave them for twenty four hours because rigor mortis set in, but after twenty four hours they would relax and then you would set them, and then, after they'd had this period of drying and you know, become rigid again, you put them in an airtight box. I, the first thing I ever bought when I started teaching was a Victorian insect cabinet, cost me fifty pounds, but I mean, then I was only paid thirty two pounds a month, so you know, first two, three months wages just went on that and glass topped, you know like what they have in museums where they keep insects. So that was one of the first things I ever bought, purely for, to sort of keep the collection in.

And you made, you gathered your own collection did you?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, with Joe, you know, we both used to collect.

Can I ask you why?

Good question that actually, why do people climb mountains? 'Cause it's there'. I mean I think my generation, kids were more tuned into the natural world, I mean, we knew when the conkers were ready, we knew when the frog spawn was there and we were allowed to go out, you know, we weren't sort of kept in, worries about somebody absconding with you or anything like that. We had a lot more freedom than children today have, so you know, we'd go out, we'd find conkers, we'd go out to wild areas and play cowboys and indians and what have you, and, yeah, we knew when the frog, we'd go and collect frog spawn, keep it in a jar, most of it died sadly, but you know. You were just aware a bit more, because you were given this freedom to wander round and it was a natural progression then to sort of collect things. I know David Attenborough, I mean, interviewed, oh years ago on television, when he was, I thought one of the saddest things, people can't collect

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anymore because these things are so scarce now and you know, his generation little bit, slightly older than mine, you know that's how we did things in those days. If you were interested yes you collected. I collected birds' eggs initially then butterflies and moths, some people pressed wild flowers, nowadays of course, you take photographs instead, which is what I do today.

And did you know other people that did it? Did the same things?

Yeah, I mean there was one or two friends who collected moths, and obviously some of Joe's friends who were basically interested, the thing is, it's difficult to imagine now but I used to go bird watching, and had a pair of 'noculars but you didn't really want people to see you walking round with binoculars because we were, should we say, regarded as slightly eccentric, where as I mean today bird watchers you know, they're all over the place, telescopes sticking out everywhere. But it was quite a new thing, there weren't that many people had the interest in natural history that they do today. So it's developed over the last what, fifty years, quite considerably but I mean, particularly bird watching more so than probably the other branches. So I mean, I had a butterfly net and again you didn't sort of wander round with a butterfly net I had a folding one which I put in me pocket, 'cause again if you'd been seen wandering round with a butterfly net people would have probably wanted to lock you up. It was a very strange thing to do, it was the sort of thing that vicar's daughters and vicars used to be in the leading light all naturalist in those days as well. So...

I was just wondering whether it was, something you did with Joe and made your own collection, but had contact with other people and sort of made a general collection.

No, not that many people I mean Joe had his own collection, I had mine, and once I'd met Joe I didn't collect anymore birds' eggs, but no, Joe was the main figure. I mean my father, step father, he'd had a collection of bird eggs years before and he'd actually got a collection of tropical butterflies which, I'm not sure where he acquired those, I think he had a relative who'd been out in the, in the tropics. So you know, that, there'd been that interest from that side as well, and my father initially also, my real father, he'd sort of always kept animals, you know he had dogs and all sorts of things, so it was just a, you know, I'd always been surrounded by creatures of one sort or another. I mean we'd Afghan hounds, rabbits, you name it we've kept it basically.

So it was a personal collection, it wasn't...

Oh it was a personal collection yeah, definitely, yeah, yes.

And do you still have it?

No, no.

What happened to it?

I actually, I think about three years ago, I bought the cabinet from Watkins in Doncaster and I sold the whole lot back to them because, I now do photography and I travel world wide, not just in this country and it was sitting in a corner the cabinet and basically not being used, not being looked at and I thought well if, you know, Watkins of Doncaster buy it off me then somebody else can make use of it rather than just gathering dust and deteriorating 'cause it does need upkeep, you've got to put camphor in to keep mites out and what have you. So you know, I decided right let it go and concentrate on the photography.

So you, you had this, you were collecting moths with Joe?

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Yeah.

And you had this collection, was that the main thing you were interested, well that's the main thing you were interested, but was there other things?

Well birds initially but Joe as I say introduced me to butterflies and moths and for my teens and probably early twenties that was the thing that was, I won't say all encompassing, but that took precedent if you like, because we used to go out quite regularly, and it was something I could do. I'm saying birds eggs, we were, you didn't collect bird eggs anymore, it got to stage where it was, you know, not the thing to do and became illegal, so yes most of my efforts were put into looking for butterflies and moths.

Was collecting birds' eggs something that people continued into adult life?

There were yes, but I mean there are still obviously men egg collectors around today, so adults, but I mean lots of kids collected birds' eggs when I was a child, some will have continued into adulthood. But as I say, at the time when I was sort of, what, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, it was then that it became something that was, you know, illegal. I can't remember the date it was actually made totally illegal, but yeah that phase went and butterflies and moths, you know, took over basically for a period.

And what came after that?

Courting and marriage and children basically! But I had joined the Trust in the meantime due to Joe and we got the newsletter popped through whatever it was, two or three times a year and I didn't think an awful lot about it. And I can't remember exactly how it, oh yes I can, it started again, I was head of the Evening Centre at Epworth, Chris, my wife, was at home looking after the children and I took over running the evening centre as well as the day job and there was a course on natural history and a couple of people came along to this and they'd got some photographs of birds they'd taken and that immediately, so I thought, oh that's interesting 'cause it was something I'd always wanted to do, but I mean, pushed to one side. Well, I'd actually also suffered from depression and I smoked heavily. I'd actually been in the mental hospital for six weeks with very severe depression before I got married and, I think at that stage took the tablets as it happens and these, this couple of people said oh you know, sort of, come and join us. So I bought a camera, a very cheap one, although I had had a camera before, and I actually set up a hide and photographed a wren at it's nest, the first thing I ever did and within three weeks I'd stopped smoking, stopped taking anti-depressants and it just sort of developed from there.

I haven't got those photographs now, I wished I kept them actually, I mean they were ghastly but at the time I thought they were wonderful and it started with birds and then gradually like other things you know, you realise there is more to life in the natural world than birds. So now anything that is anything connected with the natural world I will photograph and in recent years, well since I have retired, took a very early retirement at fifty one, I've travelled the world basically and Galapagos, Falklands, Australia and just back from Borneo four weeks ago, been to Africa several times. And it's, certainly something I wanted to do from this age basically you know, from a youngster, was slapped round the face and told no you can't do that it's ridiculous which nowadays you probably could, you know, you go to, be a good lad you do your exams and go to college and become a teacher. Which I thoroughly enjoyed not latterly but to begin with it was an incredible job, but as the politicians got involved you know, I'm afraid it got me down all the paper work so, that's what I got out very early.

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And you travel specifically, do you travel specifically to take photographs?

Oh yeah, yeah, no I don't see any other reason for going abroad! My wife, well I mean, my wife comes with me now 'cause she retired at Christmas, a lot of trips I've been, you know, with other people on tours, now my wife's retired we don't have to stick to, you know, school holidays. But each summer we used to go somewhere on our own, I mean we've been to Seychelles on our own and, sorry, South Africa on our own, been to Alaska and British Columbia, been to America several times on our own as well, we'd just organise, you know get a car, went to Costa Rica two years on our own. But I'm a mixture, this year we went to Florida on our own to do bird photography in spring, and in June went to Italy with a photographic tour to photograph moths, sorry butterflies and flowers. Borneo was again was a photographic trip, sort of doing all sorts of things from frogs and snakes to monkeys and orang-utans and then we're going to Madagascar, where I've been before actually, again that's a photographic tour and my wife doesn't take photographs but she just likes to be in wild places and she wanders around while we're busy taking pictures sort of thing.

And what do you do with the pictures?

I do lots of slide shows, sort of travel all over the country, talk to RSPB groups, earlier this week I was in Grimsby doing a talk for them. But I am in Carlisle in December, I'm in the Wirral in a couple of weeks time doing talks, so I travel quite widely doing talks and in recent years I have actually lodged photographs with an agency in London who sell them on my behalf. So, I don't make a fortune at it, but I've covered some of my costs, I mean I don't make any profits, but by doing that, as I am now on pension, it sort of supplements my pension and I say it covers at least the cost of the film and goes towards maybe the odd trip here and there but it's not something you make a lot of money at.

Can I ask you about something you mentioned right at the beginning of that section, you said you built a hide?

Yeah.

Can you tell me how you do that?

Well you buy commercial ones... Basically it's a canvas tent, they stand about three and a half foot high, I suppose that should be a metre shouldn't it nowadays, metre square with four corners and guy ropes and you have a little tunnel at the front through which a camera points and you've got a little peep hole with netting over so things can't see in but you can see out. And you position that, with a ground nesting bird you'll put it up in a position away from where, for nest photography which nowadays it isn't done so much, but you put it up check the bird came back to the nest and gradually move it nearer until you are in a position where you could actually take photographs. Occasionally you have to build them on a pylon if you're doing you know owls, which is one of my favourite things. So you have a pylon and gradually build that over a period of days or weeks and have the hide on top of that again, so you can actually see the bird but it doesn't actually see you and you can then photograph it.

What's a pylon?

A scaffolding tower! If you like, yeah, so you get square scaffolding towers. Again, something like about a metre and a half square, and you build that up gradually next to where the nest is, put a platform in and then you move that up gradually and then build the hide gradually on top of that so

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you're actually over looking the nest for photography. In the case of owls you use flash guns obviously because they're nocturnal. So...

And have you always used these commercially produced hides?

No, I've produced some myself, I mean it's very simple just sort of four corner poles and canvas over the top basically. I mean I don't do, that's mainly for nest photography although I have used them in the garden for example with baiting, you know putting bird food out with a nice natural perch and you can sit in there and the birds come down and you photograph them on the perch rather than on the bird table or whatever. But a lot of, nowadays with longer lenses, you know, you photograph, particularly abroad things are so approachable you don't need a hide, but there are lots of hides on reserves now, in RSPB Trust reserves where you can actually photograph things from big sort of wooden built hides. So, don't use the portable ones as much as we used to do.

Can I ask you now about the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and your association with it?

Yeah.

Could you tell me, perhaps we ought to start with your actual connection with it, how you became involved in it?

Well initially Joe I think persuaded me to join, I can't remember exactly when but it was around sort of late teens early twenties. And I wasn't then involved till approximately thirty years ago and, sort of, my wife was back at work, I'd more time and we started going looking at nature reserves and I sort of met Joe again 'cause there'd been an absence when I hadn't seen him and the Reserve Manager Frank Brazier at Epworth Turbary wanted to give it up and Joe sort of somehow raised a meeting where I was gonna be there as well and I'd just started doing photography and said 'Would you like to be Reserve Manager here?'. And I, I mean it's a dream come true, I said 'Yes, sure'. So he recommended me to the Trust and I basically became manager at Epworth Turbary. And Frank, the previous manager, had started doing management work there by removing trees 'cause Epworth Turbary is a relic of raised bog and the trees moved in towards the beginning of the last century, about the time of the first world war, before then it was completely treeless. When the drains were deepened in the late fifties early sixties, it dried out more and trees took over and so we lost a lot of the habitat that used to be there, the heather and what have you, shaded out by the trees.

So I really carried on where Frank had left off, sort of increasing the open areas to get it back to what it was like when, in fact, when I first went there in the fifties, the trees weren't anything like as extensive. So that's sort of the involvement and from there, at the same time the area group was set up 'cause the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust has area groups. I think at the moment we've got seventeen in various parts of the county, where they have a chairman, secretary and committee and they put on a series of programmes for that particular part of the county and we, we set up a group in the Isle of Axholme and I ended up as chairman.

So that was that and then we've, reorganised a section of Humberside, we, you know, Lincolnshire got, the northern part was turned into Humberside, we had a group called the Humberside Liaison Group which was the Isle group, the Scunthorpe group the Barton and Humber group and the Grimsby group and we used to have meeting to sort of, because we'd been separated if you like, from Lincolnshire, we're still part of Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and as a result of that I, to my amazement got onto the council of the Trust and after being on there for a few years and discovering what it was all about, 'cause to begin with it was, you know, what on earth's going on here? I became a member of the board, so my involvement now is the Reserve Manager, which I

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think probably is the most important thing in some ways. I am chairman of the area group, which is very much a social as well as, it's not altogether a natural history group, you know there are lots of social events as well. I'm a board member and then I am also involved with the Heathland Team, which I'm a convener of, you know, meetings on the reserves as management and what have you, the Grasslands Team and the Publications Team, 'cause we do a [inaudible] magazine three times a year. So I'm sort of, you know, pretty well involved in all sorts of branches of the Trust now.

You told me earlier about how you knew about the level of tree growth on Epworth Turbary.

Yeah.

You said you spoke to someone who confirmed what you know about it?

Yeah, I gave a talk, long time ago, probably a very bad talk actually I hope I've improved since those early days, in Scunthorpe and there was a lady in the audience who I think was in her late seventies then, we're talking twenty odd years ago, at least, might even have been in her early eighties and she said 'Oh, you've brought back so many memories Mr Trinder.' I was talking about Epworth Turbary and another place in the Isle of Axholme, 'cause she said 'I used to live on the farm just north of Epworth Turbary, just before the first world war and towards nineteen twenty and as a child I wasn't allowed on there on my own because it was so wet', you could actually sink into the bog and there were no trees, although one or two trees got established at that stage in the north west corner which was slightly higher than the rest of the reserve, and in those days said it was covered in sphagnum moss and also, oh dear me, well, various species of orchid, probably some marsh orchid and also sundew which is an insectivorous eating plant, those have all disappeared now. There was also things like bog rosemary, which used to grow there at its most southern point in eastern England and also before the trees got established it was the most southern point where large heath butterflies occurred and again they're now extinct because of the tree growth.

We tried a reintroduction programme which wasn't successful so it's, it's you know, quite a unique site with many things that occurred there at the most southern point on the eastern side of England anyway. So that's how I knew there weren't many trees there and then when I went in the fifties, what is now the main open area, the tree growth there was sort of no more than sort of four or five foot high and it was when the drain was deepened that obviously it dried out even more and the trees then just accelerated. Mainly birch initially which is a pioneering species and is a short lived tree, only lives for about eighty years. But what happens is the birch comes as scrub, then you get birds moving in like jays to breed, they go out in autumn, collect acorns in their crop, they come back to the breeding woods, they'll bury some of the acorns for use later in the winter and forget where some of them are, so the birch is growing up, the acorns are being brought in and buried, some of those will germinate and oak starts to grow, protected by the birch trees eventually the oak grows up, the birch dies out and the oak takes over. So natural succession if you left an area entirely alone, it would more or less become an oak woodland and of course that's not what is important for. It is a relic of a raised bog and it has sort of, you know, plants animals on there which are unique to that sort of habitat and that sort of habitat is very rare, just as, I mean, very similar to Crowle and Thorne which I think that we're going to talk about a bit later. But that's all part of the relic of what was once the whole Isle of Axholme, you know a landscape which is as I said, now more or less disappeared.

So how would the precious landscape if you like and flora and fauna be affected by this growth in a different environment?

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Well, it creates shade to start with and many things like heather will not grow under trees so that will disappear and you've got heather that grows in wet areas, cross leaved heath, you've got the ordinary heather which grows on the drier areas, tree cover will gradually shade that out and you will lose it and obviously there is plants, sorry animals associated with certain plants and if the plants disappear then the animals disappear. Bog Rosemary, which sadly is not on there anymore, again disappeared probably due, well in fact no, due to the drought in the sort of eighties, early nineties, it occurred on there till, I'm not sure when the last record was, I think it was about nineteen eighty one, but we had a very dry period and the Turbary got even drier than normal and it was hanging on very, you know, precariously and the drought was what finished it off. So a combination of, again, trees, shade areas out, they probably accelerate the drying out to a certain extent as well and that is detrimental to the natural flora you get on there and obviously the fauna which depends on it.

And can I ask you a bit about the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust itself?

Yes.

For a minute? Can you tell me about the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, what it's set out for, what its objectives are and what it sees its role as?

Well it's one of many trusts that cover the whole of the British Isles, and basically they've sort of, very forward thinking actually, the Lincolnshire Trust was the third one to be set up, the Norfolk Trust was the first then the Yorkshire Trust, then the Lincolnshire Trust, and very far sighted people realised that the natural world and the plants and animals which were part of the natural part of the British Isles was under threat. I mean, if you think about the War, you know, dig for victory, it was essential that land was turned over to produce food and all the rest of it, so habitats which had been common and you know, everybody just accepted they were there, began to disappear and as they disappeared so the plant and animal communities that you found on them also disappeared. And the Trusts were really set up to sort of try and halt that decline and where possible, purchase sites sort of value natural history wise, so that these species were conserved really for future generations and also you know, now of course it's called bio diversity.

I think it is important that we have as much diversity on the planet, not just in England, but worldwide as we can, because we are part of that and if we destroy all bio diversity surely we're gonna eventually, I should say, we're going to destroy ourselves. So it was very small beginnings saving, you know, people in those days who thought the natural world was important set up these organisations to try and conserve areas which were under threat.

And what do you mean by conservation, do you mean you just sort of openly bought a piece of land, fence it off and left it?

Well, in the early days, I mean, I think the first year the Lincolnshire Trust was set up their income or their, you know, spreadsheet for the year was something like about ninety pounds, coming in and going out and we are now talking about millions, in a year. So yes, initially really, there were very few people, I think there was sixty members initially, very little funds so if you could buy a site so it wasn't developed in anyway that was the most important thing, at least it was gonna stay more or less as it was. But as we acquired more sites, there is this natural succession I mentioned on Epworth the trees moving in, well that's the same with every site. So if you want to maintain its interest you have to manage it and it's only as the Trust grew and grants became available through people like English Nature, that funds were available to manage them.

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So in the initial stage it was a case of buying these places so they weren't destroyed and then as funds became available we've sort of gradually developed techniques, not just our Trust, but all the Trusts, the RSPB and other conservation bodies, in the best way to manage them to conserve and maintain the diversity of plants and animals that were there, which the site was bought for in the first place.

Now bearing in mind this is a history of Thorne and Hatfield Moors and we're talking about Thorne Moors in this case.....

Yeah.

What are the areas of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust that come within that remit?

Well Crowle Waste, which is part of the Thorne, I mean its all part of the NNR, now the Humberhead Levels NNR and the Trust were the first conservation group, I mean, which actually owned any of the whole complex. We approached Fisons, I'm not sure the exact date, but you know, going back possibly as long as thirty five, forty years ago and initially we had a lease on parts of it from Fisons and we were the first conservation body to do that. Then gradually over the years we've purchased bits and I think because of the way we approached Fisons we weren't sort of extreme in anyway, they looked favourably on other conservation bodies which followed, so, I mean today English Nature now obviously have got established and have got the rights over the whole of Thorne, although it's Natural England in the next few weeks 'cause English Nature has been done away with, and all that's history but I mean, without the Lincolnshire Trust initially, going back many, many years, having a sort of reasonable way of approaching whether all that would have happened I think is possibly doubtful, I'm not saying it's impossible but I think we did help very much in building relationships with Fisons.

And you talked a bit about Epworth Turbary and what it looks like and so on, can you tell me a little bit about Crowle Waste?

Well although there is some habitat, raised mire, if you look at them from the air and often you see things from aerial views that show you an awful lot about the history. On Crowle in particular you can see very distinct lines, because peat there has, apart from one or two small areas has never been commercially dug and had milling machines like on the Thorne side. So from the air you see lines of, very distinct lines which are often trees and then areas, paler areas between which are water. And really that shows that the water areas are where peat has been dug, but it was dug by hand and there are places on the reserve where you've still got peat that's been dug and left to dry and has never been taken off. The raised areas are where the peat was, was stored and then moved down those banks to what was a small railway, that went round to it, take it off the moors, and it was used for domestic fires, not for horticulture as it is today.

So from the air it is very obvious, although on the ground it looks a natural wilderness, you realise that it's been very much dominated by man's use. But in those day hand digging was slow and it was a very gradual process, so the wildlife didn't suffer to the extent commercial peat winning has done, you know, in the last sort of thirty, forty years where whole areas could be completely destroyed, the habitation, the vegetation within weeks. So actually Crowle has retained probably a better diversity initially because the destruction wasn't quite so drastic and quick, but as I say it's not been commercially dug.

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Epworth is very different it was used by local parishioners and peat and turfs could be dug off there, but you haven't got these lines as you have on Crowle and it's drier than Crowle as well, so although they basically are a similar habitat on the ground they do look quite different.

You told me actually about the common rights on the Epworth Turbary.

Epworth Turbary is a turbary which means that it's common land and therefore the, common land was owned by somebody, it was owned by the lord of the manor and he granted rights to the people of Epworth which were that the parishioners could remove one horse drawn cart load of peat or turfs per annum for use on domestic fires, anymore than that and they would be fined a shilling. Now talking to people who have lived in the area for a long time, including the old lady who lived adjoining the turbary in the earlier part of the last century, I can find no record of that having been done, in the last hundred and ten, twenty years. So it, sort of was a practice which died out a long, long time ago. One or two people in the early stages when I became involved said, 'Oh we've got the right to, you know, take timber.' But of course there wasn't any timber when those rights were granted, but timber has only moved in simply because of managing the surrounding land for draining for agriculture. So in fact there were no rights over timber extraction it was purely peat and then turfs and now as an SSSI, Site of Special Scientific Interest, even as owners we have to get permission to mow the path for example, because there are what they call PDOs, Potentially Damaging Operations, and owners of SSSIs have to get permission to do any work on those sites, before they are allowed to do so. So even cutting the paths, we have to have that in the management agreement with English Nature, as it was. And with the Crowle act it goes further than that, owners have now a legal obligation to manage the site to get it into what's called favourable condition. In other words to try and get it reverted back to why it was set up in the first place.

So there's a certain timescale on this and I'm not sure the exact details but it's something like, if, if managers, or if owners don't do this English Nature, which will be English, Natural England sorry, can actually pay contractors to move in and send the bill to the owners. I think that's right but, that might not be, you know, hundred percent, but it's something along those lines. So you have an obligation now under the law with the Crowle Act to manage it in the way which English Nature stipulate.

And what is the environment that you're trying to maintain?

Well, if you go back many years the Isle would have been a flat open landscape with very few trees. I mean the locals made a living by hunting, fishing and that's how they made a living so when, when it was drained there was civil war in the sense that the land was being drained, it was going to take away the ducks and all the rest of it, and obviously with the drainage the whole landscape's changed. The turbaries in Crowle and Hatfield are relics of what the area used to be like, so there would have been these open vistas of wetland with peat areas of sphagnum moss, and fragmites beds, so really what we are trying to do is conserve that past history because that is quite a rare habitat now within the British Isles, in fact within Europe in fact. The Crowle / Thorne complex is on international as well as national importance. So that's, the management is to try and conserve those areas and the species which, you know, survive in them, like the bog rosemary on Thorne and Crowle, like active sphagnum bog which is actually, well moss, which is actually what lays the peat down, as it dies over generations of hundreds of thousand of years that produces the peat and as I say that is a very, very rare habitat now.

And on a practical level how do you manage that?

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Well initially when they first started, and the work was started mainly on Epworth to start with, it was basically clearing the trees and then...

How did you clear the trees?

Well with hand tools initially, latterly with chainsaws, and in fact the school I was at the children there did a lot of work particularly those doing Duke of Edinburgh and the school won an award for the work they did on the Turbary, but you would clear the trees and then what 'ud happen is two years later you would go back and obviously all the old trees went, and you would have to pull out the birch seedlings.

And how would you do that?

You did it by hand, in winter and we did this for years, you know, you clear another area but you'd always have to be going back, and it got the stage where you just couldn't without a workforce, maintain, you know, removing the trees that are coming on areas you'd cleared as the area got bigger and bigger.

Can you tell me about the scale of moving these things by hand?

Well a senior citizen was there one morning pulling out the seedlings, Olive, she is no longer with us now, but in an area probably, I dunno, we'll say twenty yards square, twenty metres square, she'd been there about an hour I went over, we'd recruited several other people, and said 'How're you getting on Olive?' She said 'Well, I stopped counting when I'd pulled out twelve hundred.' So that gives you an idea of the dynamics of birch regeneration. On Crowle, by keeping areas wetter, then the birch can't get back.

On Epworth, eventually I decided well this is ridiculous, you know, you can't carry on doing this for the rest of you life, there must be a better way and discovered that in Yorkshire they were using Hebridian Sheep. Now they're, rather than grazers, they're browsers, and I found out that they will nibble leaves on bushes rather than grass, and they were being used in Yorkshire to control birch. Once, if you cut a birch tree down or any deciduous tree down it will grow again from the base, now the idea with the Hebridians was you cut the trees down, you didn't use chemicals, which we did with the bigger trees initially, any re-growth the Hebridians will eat it off and obviously if there is no green growth surviving the stump will die, similarly any seedlings they will eat, in theory that is. So after a lot of discussion and then when English Nature came in and said 'Look we'll grant aid more clearing and also pay for a fence, because we think this is the way forward.' The Trust eventually decided right we've got to have sheep and the initial flock was on Epworth Turbary about twenty eight animals. The areas that are being cleared are being cleared more and more, more fences put up and it was also used on other reserves, so Crowle now for example has grazing animals on. Others, similar habitats, heath land habitats round the county now, not just in this area, we also have got fence, again with grants from English Nature and we grazed Hebridians.

Now it's moved on a bit from there because, you've got quite a lot of grass vegetation on places like Epworth, purple moor grass which is very tussocky and the Hebridians don't really touch that at all. And although they made a tremendous difference in controlling the birch to a certain extent it was no way a hundred percent, in fact I don't think any animal would ever be a hundred percent but a local hobby farmer really, not to be rude to him, 'cause he's a fabulous bloke, approached us to putting cattle on Epworth and we discussed this with English Nature. So the sheep were taken off, they were only there the summer anyway when the birch was growing and we've been using Galloway cattle for the last three, maybe coming up to four years and they actually have a benefit,

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they still browse and so keep silver birch at bay, although not a hundred percent but they also eat the milliney grass which breaks it down, and by breaking it down exposes bare soil and then heather which still exists on there can then get established on bare ground, it won't grow where there's thick vegetation.

They've also, where we've had reed, we've created ponds on the Turbary with local farmers who have dug us ponds at no cost to the Trust actually, been incredible some of the local farmers, they've actually controlled the growth of fragmites as well. So we now use them as a major management tool and as a result the first main open air on Epworth is now in what's called favourable condition, which is, under the law we've now got to get it. The rest of the reserve, we're hoping eventually with continual grazing we're going to get the rest of the cleared areas in a similar state, but it's gonna take time. Initially it looks terrible, you know, you clear an area, it looks like a bomb site, but given sort of five, six, maybe even ten years, we'll hopefully get it back to more or less what it used to be like with these open vistas.

And is it commercially viable to put animals on?

No, we don't make a profit, the new schemes with payment for managing land in the correct way the farmers can now have, the schemes were being extended so actually you can now get payment when you've jumped through all the necessary hoops for using animals for grazing and what have you. So at the moment the, we have got our own Hebridian sheep, but other grazers come in on other reserves and most of them don't pay rent. Now when we have applied for these new schemes, hopefully it will mean that we'll get paid 'cause we're grazing these areas and we will be able to pay the grazers for doing a manning job for us. So that's hopefully the way in the long term, things are going to go. And the advantage having graziers is they look after the animals. I mean the sheep, it meant that my wife and I or one of the family or the warden for North Lincolnshire had to check the sheep every day, the cattle it's the owners job to check the cattle so that takes, you know, one aspect of the work away from the Trust and we haven't got a large staff really but we've got very active volunteers. I mean, a lot of the work is done entirely by volunteers, so you know, anything like that they can help in the management and take pressure off volunteers and the small number of staff we've got is ideal. So at the moment it is working very well on Epworth.

We do have Hebridians on Crowle, but the reserve manager there who was a volunteer, he again took early retirement from teaching and is now actually employed by the Trust, not just to work at Crowle but within the area of North Lincolnshire.

And you say you've got Hebridians on Crowle, do you think they will go the same way as Epworth?

I don't know whether cattle will be put on there or not, they're doing a reasonably good job on Crowle actually. So there's no plans at the moment for cattle but we are, David has actually, the person who has the cattle, he's building up his herd and we've now got them grazing a marsh area at Messingham Sand Quarry and they're gonna be also be used for the heath land at a place called Scotton Common, which is just other side of Scunthorpe fairly close to Messingham, next year, which is actually the first reserve the Trust ever bought. So you know, it's the way forward because the man hours involved to maintain the open aspects, you know if you're doing it purely by physical human labour is just extraordinary and as I say once you've initially cleared it you've gotta go back and pull all this, so animals do a far better job.

Do you see this as an extremely long term prospect or do you envisage the landscape being able to maintain itself in the manner that you want to keep it at?

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Unless water tables can be maintained at the levels they used to be before areas were drained I don't ever see us not having to manage it, and even then I think there'll need to be some management, probably not the amount we have to do now. I mean I don't ever see Epworth because it's a eighty acres, a little island surrounded by arable land, I don't ever see that being a viable thing without management so that, I think, will always have to be the case. Crowle and the Thorne complex, that's probably different, there's still going to have to be management but with water tables having been raised by damming etc, you know, it becomes less and less necessary. But there will always be need for some input I think.

Are the water tables in, is the water table in Crowle Moor become significantly high so that it is starting to be able to regenerate itself or, maintain itself?

Yeah, I mean, even on Epworth actually when I, we've created ponds, we have got sphagnum to get established on their sand in a very short period unfortunately it hasn't survived that well. And that was quite surprising I mean it was a, you know, happy accident and quite surprised one of the peat land specialists, 'cause it doesn't normally happen. But yes, by keeping a better water table, sphagnum which is there, the active sphagnum can obviously spread and the other reason, I mean, at Crowle the triangle which is between Thorne, it's part of Crowle now, but it's between actually Thorne and Crowle, Yorkshire Triangle as it used to be called, we've dammed that and the water tables been brought up considerably and so the birch there has actually died because it's been drowned. And eventually hopefully that will get sphagnum, active sphagnum growing and recreate some of the active sphagnum bogs that used to be there. We have still got active areas on Crowle, but not on Epworth, not really, there's sort of remnants of sphagnum in places but it's not really wet enough to, you know, maintain it.

And work is going on, is work going on to actually increase the level of the water table?

Yes, damming work, I don't know whether there's lots planned for the next two or three years but we've done a considerable amount of damming on Crowle and obviously tree clearance, I mean, again when I took early retirement I spent the first eight years sort of doing birch clearance on these sites and on other heath land sites in the county, so there will be still some need to remove some birch. Although I, I must admit I've got mixed feelings having probably removed more birch on these sites than anybody else because money became available and it had to be done. I sometimes wonder whether it was maybe a bit too much too quickly and although initially there wouldn't have been any trees on there, I think now, because it's changed and we're never actually gonna get it back to a complete area as it used to be before drainage of the Isle, I think the trees and developing scrub are an important part of it particularly for invertebrates. I mean if you talk to invertebrate specialists they will tell you the wet woodland parts of Crowle are probably from pond living invertebrates the most important part. So to sort of just completely denude it of trees I don't think would be a good idea. There needs to be a balance, but you know there will be needs at times to cut scrub down, providing you've got other scrub developing. I think it's important to have various ages, you know, if you leave it alone it becomes mature trees, you don't really want that, you want areas of scrub of different ages because that supports different species.

And you say, you've commented on the involvement of local farmers in the whole work of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.

Yeah.

Would you say that this kind of thing is supported within the community the community are interested and supportive of this kind of activity?

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Some are, some aren't, I mean I got an awful lot of criticism at one stage, what I did on Epworth. I think there's a lot more sort of support now than there used to be because really we were doing something very radical when we started. And I have to admit it wasn't through any scientific reasons what I did at Epworth initially, the Trust agreed to but it was just a gut feeling that it needed doing, and really I suppose we've been very lucky, what we have done seems to have worked, touch wood! But it's not an exact science, managing a reserve and anyone says it is, is I don't think got a very good grasp of what's going on, because, you know, it has to be a long term thing we don't know, in fifty years time people might go to Epworth turbarry and say 'What the hell has Geoff Trinder done to this place, he's ruined it!' The knowledge we have at the moment we think we've got it right and that's all you can work to, whether in the long term it's right is another matter, people have to decide in the future.

But yes, I mean, the support from local farmers, I mean we'd been loaned diggers, the trees that we cut down we sold as firewood with volunteers, we were loaned trailers, tractors to deliver it and what have you, we eventually had our own tractor, in fact we had two tractors which volunteers ran because we didn't have any paid staff working as part of the county then, and one of the local farmers said 'Where are you getting your diesel?' I said 'Well we're buying it from the garage.' 'God, that's too expensive' he said, 'come and fill up your tractors with my,' you know, 'farm diesel which is a lot cheaper and I'll bill the Trust every three months if you keep a record of what's used'. In ten years he never sent the Trust a bill, and I mean, we used gallons and gallons. And other farmers, you know, round about have helped us, loaning materials and what have you and there is a sort of feeling that farmers and conservationists can't get on and there is a gap and a rift between certain elements I must admit, but my experience, the farmers I've known and have helped us have been just as involved and felt it important to look out for the environment as conservationists and those are the ones I'd rather talk about. Because that's how you build bridges, if you all the time say 'Oh farmers, you know, they do terrible things to countryside', it's just gonna drive them away they'll not want to come and talk to conservationists, but if you can say 'Look, there are positive things happening and there are farmers who are doing a superb job,' then I think the two sides can eventually come together even more so than now. I mean they are doing more and more nowadays anyway, but sort of twenty, thirty years ago there was quite a gulf between them actually.

Is there a commercial reason why they might be, want to support the work of conservationists in the area or is it just a matter of, you know, is there some self interest?

The farmers who were helping us, they were not getting anything commercially out of it at all, and I mean they didn't want it publicising, I'm not gonna name names 'cause they never wanted their names to be mentioned, they did it because they felt, you know, they could help and obviously they must have believed what the Trust was doing was important. I mean it all started when, we had a sponsored bird watch to get a digger in to dig a pond, now initially the first pond on the Turbarry we'd dug, a local farmer I used to teach did that for us for nothing, came down for a day with his digger, and then we decided the pond ought to be extended, some youngsters from the school, and the area group had a sponsored bird watch and we raised some money to pay for a digger to come in commercially, a bigger digger to enlarge Pantry's Ponds, as it was called after the initial farmer had dug it. And a few weeks after that the farmer who'd joined the Turbarry, he actually, his wife accosted me at the gate and said 'Look Geoff, for god's sake don't spend money on diggers we've got one and provided it's not being used, you know, just let us know and we can do this work for you.' So that's how it all started and you know, ten, twelve years, it was just superb the way they helped the Trust. So, yeah, they did it I think because they felt it were important and what we were doing was right.

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I've had a look at the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust website and I know that conservation is the main function of it, but there's more to the Trust than that isn't there?

Oh yeah, I mean we have, I mean obviously the reserves which I, I'm never sure 'cause it goes up and down, I think we've got something within the region of about a hundred reserves which cover somewhere in the region again, not exact, about eight thousand acres, but at places like Far Ings, Snipedales, Gibraltar Point in particular, which is just south of Skegness on the coast, and Whisby, near Lincoln, we have facilities for educational use, and many schools come to the reserve and we have staff who, education staff, who, at Gibraltar Point anyway they actually have a residential courses for youngsters and even students, you know, university people come to do research work. So education is very, very much a major part of the Trust's work and in fact part of the fact we're charity, the education is, you know, very much necessary to retain charitable status. So we, we, I hate to use the word education, but, or educate, but hopefully what we do is, is, give people a better understanding of the natural world if you like, I don't like the word educate though! Having been a teacher! But, yes that is very much part of the Trust's work.

And to finish, to actually, you've brought that round to exactly what I wanted to talk about for the last bit of what we're doing today, is the fact that you were a teacher, and what was the subject you taught?

Art.

And we actually have some pictures in the room that we're sitting in, some really beautiful wildlife paintings and I wondered if you'd tell me a little bit about those?

Well, one of em's mine! We'll gloss over that! The one of a long eared owl there is by a friend who lives in Barton, the two there the otter and the mountain hare they're by one of my ex pupils, who I was very privileged to teach. And it was a really happy accident, he came to me as a fourteen year old, a third year, with lots of drawings he'd done of birds and he was obsessed with this and they were all copied out of a book on birds and I mean he copied them brilliantly but they weren't really the birds, if, I don't know whether I ought to explain that. They weren't, they didn't capture the essence of the birds, you know, yes you could see it was a great crested grebe but it wasn't quite right. And I said 'well, you know, they're very good', his last art teacher thought they were brilliant, 'but, you know, there are short comings', and he didn't really like that criticism and he went away and didn't do an awful lot for the rest of the third year, he came halfway through the third year. But at the beginning of the fourth year he brought me two paintings he'd done in the summer holidays, one of a sparrow, one of a kestrel, and the heads were absolutely exquisite, I mean, you know, he was a brilliant artist, but he hadn't really studied birds, the bodies were awful, they really bore no resemblance to the heads, they were wrong shape, they were unbalanced and everything else, and I said you know, 'is this really important to you?' He said 'yes, that's what I want to do for the rest of my life.'

So I sort of got his dad to drop him round at our house one evening and we looked at photographs of birds which I had taken and I had some stuffed birds and I gave him one of those and said 'Look, stop drawing from a book, draw this', 'cause it's fairly straight forward to copy a two dimensional image, the difficulty comes when you've got a three dimensional image, because you, you've got to relate that to two dimensions and that's what most people find difficult. So I gave him this long eared owl to borrow, which was very nicely stuffed actually, and said go and draw that and paint that. Which he did, and then I said 'Look, throw your bird book away and draw the birds in the garden', and he said [inaudible], I said 'Look if this is really what you want to do, you know, you

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want to do this for, that's what you've got to do, not copy from other people, but do you own thing and learn to draw living creatures', and he took that advice and really that, that was all I did for him 'cause I couldn't teach him how to draw and he then went off to art college and eventually went to the Royal Academy of Art and got his MA and he now is a wildlife artist and he won the European Wildlife Artist of the Year competition, I think the RSPB one, the Wildlife Trust one and also the BBC Wildlife one and is now highly regarded as a wildlife artist and is just a thoroughly super bloke actually.

Does he still live locally?

No he lives in Harrogate, or just outside of Harrogate and you know he's got no sort of edge to him, he's just a lovely human being.

So he was very lucky to find in his art teacher someone with an interest in natural history.

It was just a happy accident, I knew about natural history, he wanted to draw it and probably most artists don't have the knowledge or experience that I have with wildlife, so, I say, it was one of those happy accidents where I could point him in the right direction, but he could teach me how to draw!

I mean I remember he, when he got his A level results I told him before, when he left our school, that he'd get an A, and he lived in West Woodside, so he had to come through Belton and he stopped at my house first before he went home, knocked on the door, 'Got an A Sir!', and I met a couple of girls who were in his class actually doing some work from art college, well they went, that was a very good year, that year for art, in the churchyard at Epworth and they were saying 'Oh have you seen what David's done?' I said 'Yeah, it makes you sick doesn't it', and they rounded on me and said 'No it doesn't, it's a privilege having been in the same class as somebody with that sort of talent'. Which is a lovely way of looking at it.

Well thank you very much indeed.

[Recording Ends]