Mick Holder

Mick Holder is an established commoner who has run large flocks of sheep for many years. He is also a businessman and secretary of the Commoners Association. He has had an interest in haulage and coal distribution. He was born in Cinderford. He has worked tirelessly to maintain the tradition of commoning in the Forest of Dean. He is a member of the Sheep Liaison Group, a multi-agency group that addresses local issues and that established the Responsible Shepherding Agreement. He has also a point of contact for sheep related issues and runs a call out service for sheep related problems that is widely appreciated. Chris, his wife is very active on the farm and with shepherding. They live at Pleasant View Farm, Blaize Bailey with panoramic views over the Severn estuary (2016).

Part one

00.27 Born at No. 42 St Whites Road, Cinderford in 1942.
00.50 Family
01.80 Introduction to commoning
02.00 Cinderford use of common land for grazing
02.30 Pannage
02.50 At 17 years married and moved to Gloucester
03.20 Early jobs, laboratory etc. leading to timber felling cutting down diseased elm trees
04.20 Coal delivering
05.08 Approved coal merchant
05.51 Moved back to the Forest of Dean to become shopkeeper
06.30 Bought Pleasant View Farm
07.25 Decided to keep animals bought sheep and subsidy
07.50 350 sheep running on the Forest
08.38 Started commoning in 1987
08.50 Learned commoning practice as a child
09.30 Taking goats from St Whites Road to Abbotts Wood
09.33 Tanking horses from the back of St Whites Road to the Nunnery in Abbotts wood
10.00 Bought sheep off the Thomas boys
10.17 Sheep Annual Premium
10.50 Value of subsidy
11.20 Four children; two boys, two girls. Boys took over business
12.05 Phone Call
13.10 Sons now farming
13.20 First run from Littledean to Soudley owned by Bobby Thomas
14.20 Shepherding and other responsibilities
15.20 Tups out bonfire night
15.40 Lambing started in March, April unless ewes tupped by ‘scragg tup’
15.49 Lambing on the Forest
16.30 Scrag tup
17.30 Breed of sheep
17.41 Crossbred Welsh, small frame, ate Forest vegetation, easy lambing
18.40 Lonk tups
19.20 Black faced ewes, merits of Suffolks
20.05 Lamb mobility at birth
20.52 Health issues
21.00 Suspected Scab
22.10 Fly strike
22.30 Merits of OP dip, worming benefits
23.00 Preventative measures
23.30 Dipping twice a year
24.10 Future of dipping
24.30 Statutory forest status as one farm
25.10 Forest clearance to achieve effect
26.00 Wool on the wire, burning to clean
27.00 Consensus to dip
27.30 Economics of dipping
28.00 Help from other commoners, Thomas boys
28.30 Help from Henry Mills and joining the Commoners Association
29.25 Commoners and collective dipping, three exercises
30.00 Glyn Barclay and administration of sheep dipping
31.30 Using hydrometer
32.00 Diluting the dip
32.50 Contribution to ideas and team work
33.50 Buying sheepdogs
34.10 Gordy Martin
34.30 Self sufficiency in the Forest
35.27 (Donald Johns) (Nigel Durnford- Trading Standards) Becoming secretary in 1997-8.
37.00 Malpractice
37.50 Sheep straying on to A48
38.30 Continuing problems
39.00 Public Liability Insurance
40.40 Characters in the Commoners Association and management
41.40 Henry Mills, Gilbert Morse and others
42.20 Foot and Mouth in 2001
42.30 DEFRA compensation
43.20 Knowledge of where sheep were and valuation of hefted sheep
44.20 Negotiations with DEFRA
45.00 Sheep knowing their owners
46.30 Rules regarding collection of sheep
47.20 Tom Preest, John Thomas, Royston and collecting each others sheep.
48.00 Collecting 8,000 sheep in 8 days
49.00 Hefted valuation of sheep
49.40 Implications of re-hefting sheep
50.20 Failure to pay hefted value and solicitors advice
51.40 Cost calculations
52.00 Background noise, wife Chris going to feed stock
52.30 Lack of unity in meeting costs of legal action
54.00 Claim shelved because of unity, support from Prince Charles
55.00 Token payment of £12k accepted and distributed
56.00 Return of commoning and impact of employment and compensation
58.00 F & M restrictions
58.20 Travel permits
58.46 Henry Mills bereavement losing sheep
60.00 Cleaning property as a preventative measure
61.50 Financial benefits
62.18 Renting burn site
63.13 Top money
63.39 Implications of being compensated
64.46 Made people hesitant to commit to re-hefting
65.10 Made people financially, no incentive to recommence
66.30 Worst and best time
66.40 Cyril Tuffley, example of commoner who kept his sheep but couldn’t get food.
68.20 Regrets of commoners who lost sheep
69.00 Re-hefting and impact of not receiving £250,000.
70.10 Incentives to keep a small flock
71.17 Lack of standing still and hefting
72.07 Concerns about bad shepherding
73.17 lack of a tag
74.00 Failure to restock the Forest
74.30 Present stock of sheep on the Forest
75.30 Small shepherds who gave up

Part Two

00.17 Present day attitudes
00.44 West Dean Parish Council
01.15 Public perceptions
01.50 Buck passing by authorities
02.20 Liability for cleanliness
02.30 Blaming sheep badgers
04.00 Responsibility for mess
04.46 Sheep Liaison Group
05.40 Progress at Sheep Liaison Group
06.10 Dead carcass removal
08.00 Relationship with DEFRA
09.30 Sheep Liaison Group Fund
10.30 District Council Sheep Scrutiny Committee
12.30 Public Spaces Protection Order
13.00 Attitude of District Council and Parish Councils
14.20 Soliciting problems
15.30 Complaints about a grazier not in the Commoners Association
16.27 Rights of sheep to pass
18.00 Flow chart system
18.30 HOOF campaign, working together
19.11 Future of commoning
19.30 HLF funds for equipment
20.30 Recognised area or numbers, recognition of right of common
Glossary

Draw a lamb: Help a lamb be delivered by pulling it out in a measured way.
Eaning - the act of giving birth in sheep, alternative to lambing.
Farmers lung: A type of pneumonitis caused by an allergic reaction to spores in mouldy hay.
Fly Strike: Fly strike or myiasis – infestation of the wool, skin and eventually flesh with blowfly or botfly maggots.
Haunting: Old term meaning to settle sheep in a particular location where they would generally stay. There is an instinct in some breeds to stay with a certain certain heft (a small local area) throughout their lives. This allows commoners to graze their sheep without the need for fences. Lambs learn their heft from their mothers. Continuity of generations of sheep is therefore extremely important.
Hefting: Modern equivalent of above.
Heafing: As above.
Grancher: Grandfather.
Mark: A mark, usually an initial or large letter that indicates the owner of the sheep. This was preceded years before by the practice of cutting marks in the ear. Earmark – a distinctive mark clipped in the lobe of the ear.
Pit: A Colliery.
Scrag tup: A ram lamb that is not castrated and left on the Forest. Unless ringed and castrated they will serve their own mother.
Scruffed: Gently beaten or roughed over.
Sheep Scab: An acute or chronic form of allergic dermatitis caused by the faeces of the scab mite, psoroptes ovis. See: http://www.scops.org.uk/ectoparasites-sheep-scab.html
Silicosis: Lung fibrosis caused by the inhalation of dust containing silica
Tag or Ear tag – plastic or metal tag clipped to ear, with identification number, name or electronic chip.
Tats: Welsh sheep.
Tup: A ram.
Tupping: Ram mating with a ewe.
Wool on the wire: Wool left by sheep accidentally or when scratching that can be contaminated with sheep scab. Scab sometimes causes the itching and it is therefore considered good practice to burn or remove the wool in case it is a contaminant.
Worming drench: Drench – a veterinary medicine administered orally and usually an anthelmintic or wormer.
OP dip: Organo-phosphate sheep dip (chemical) used to prevent fly-strike and scab.

Abbreviations

NFU: National Farmers Union
MAFF: Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
DEFRA: Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs
FC: Forestry Commission