

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 interested 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 Liason 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 Abbots Wood
- 09.33 Tanking horses from the back of St Whites Road to the Nunnery in Abbots 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 tugged by 'scragg tup'
- 15.49 Lambing on the Forest
- 16.30 Scragg 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 HOOOF 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

21.30 Runs and tradition of commoning

23.00 Commercial commoning

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 *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.

Lonk tup: a breed of mountain sheep, see: <http://www.lonk-sheep.org>.

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.

Scuffed: 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

