

CPRE HAVE MAPPED TRANQUILLITY – NOW LET’S MAKE SURE WE DON’T LOSE IT!

Countryside campaigners CPRE have unveiled a revolutionary new way of measuring and mapping one of the most important things the countryside gives us all: tranquillity. They are challenging everyone to use their striking, colourful new map of England, along with a new measurement method, and act to retain this precious resource from further massive erosion.

Tranquillity is one of the most sought after, hard to pin down ingredients of a good quality of life. The new map shows, in detail and across the whole of England, how likely the local surroundings are to make a visitor feel tranquil. The spectrum of colours ranges from deep red shading – within towns and cities and along major roads – through orange and yellow to a rich green in the most unspoilt areas of deep countryside with big views and little man-made noise. Finding tranquillity in the countryside matters deeply to people: it contributes to mental and physical health and to quality of life. A new opinion poll commissioned by CPRE shows what people most enjoy and appreciate about the countryside is ‘peace and quiet’. And most people, wherever they live, say rural tranquillity is very important to them – and fear it is under threat.

James Frost, Campaigns and Development Manager, for CPRE Norfolk, says of the new campaign; “The tranquillity maps show that you don’t have to go halfway up a mountain in Wales to find tranquillity. It exists all over rural England, including many areas of the Brecks. Before now we had no way of giving anything to the planners that was measurable and definable; now we do. I just hope that they listen to the tranquillity all around us and do something to protect it. With thousands of new homes planned for the area in the coming years, CPRE Norfolk are hoping that this new campaigning tool works to protect one of the Brecks’ most important features, its tranquillity”.

The CPRE Breckland Committee are currently welcoming new members. Meetings are once every couple of months and members find ways to contribute that suit their availability and interests. If you are interested in working to protect your local countryside please telephone John Salisbury on 01953 887414.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT BRANDON PARK

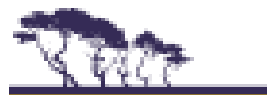
Friday 17 November, 2–4pm at The Visitor Centre

Festive card and decoration workshop. Bookings only, in advance, Adults £3.50 (includes tea and cake!)

Friday 15 December, 2–8pm

Christmas Fair at the Park
Festive fun and shopping in and around the Visitor Centre for all the family.
Free entry

NEWS FROM THE BRECKS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



FREE GREEN GIFT!

Join the Brecks team for a volunteer task on Saturday 2nd December and get ready for Christmas!

Meet at the Brecks office at Kings House, King Street, Thetford (opposite the Bell Hotel) at 9.30am. All drinks, equipment, tools and training provided. Please wear outdoor clothes and stout shoes and bring a packed lunch

Call Abby on 01842 761569, brecks.project@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk or just turn up on the day

Society visit

Saturday 20 January 2007

Afternoon walk at Lackford Lakes, near Mildenhall.

This outstanding Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve is home to a wide variety of wintering wildfowl, as well as water rails and a regular bittern.

Details from James Parry on 01366 328676

**If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter please contact the Editor at
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NEW SCULPTURE FOR THE BRECKS

In 2005 The Brecks Tourism Partnership set out to commission a work or a series of works of art that would contribute to the richness of the Brecks for residents and visitors alike. Artists were invited to apply, and in December Keith Rand was chosen from an extremely strong short list.



The finished work, a two-part sculpture carved and constructed from a single log of Brecks oak, is called *In the Balance, Oak and Rust* and has been sited in Brandon Country Park.

Rand said “I have spent a great deal of time exploring the Brecks and have come to appreciate its very special natural qualities. There is a strong linear sense that excites me in the Brecks’ landscape of forest and heathland, as well as its diverse wildlife, and Brandon Country Park captures all of these”.

The artist has created other sculptures that are permanently sited in Scotland, London, the Czech Republic and Japan. He won the William J Macauley Award in 2003, presented by the RSA in Edinburgh.

The sculpture is the culmination of a series of projects developed by the Brecks Tourism Partnership to promote sustainable tourism in the area. Funding for this and other projects was raised from the European Union, the East of



England Development Agency, Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and Breckland District Council. Forest Heath District Council played a major role in supporting the sculpture and the region’s visual arts development agency, Commissions East, was also involved.

The sculpture was unveiled to the public on Monday 16 October, and stakeholders in the project, including the Society’s James Parry and Liz Dittner, were invited to meet the artist and view the sculpture at a lunchtime reception.

WHAT’S ON

Forthcoming Society events

Saturday 11 November

Author and literary critic D J Taylor will talk to the Society about his novel *Kept*, and why the Breckland landscape inspired him to set much of the action near Watton.

Wayland House, Watton, 7.30pm. Tickets £5 from James Parry on 01366 328676.

Thursday 7 December

Local historian Janet Smith will tell the extraordinary tale of the droving of turkeys and geese – on foot! – along the London road (now the A11) from Attleborough to Thetford and beyond.

Croxton Village Hall, 7.30.
Tickets £3 on the door.

Saturday 16 December

Christmas social at The Hay Barn, Oxborough.
£5, to include light buffet and wine.
Tickets from Sue Whittleby, 01366 328190.

COUNTRY ROOTS OF HALLOWE'EN, ALL SOULS AND ALL SAINTS

Knock knock!! "Trick or treat?!"

"Ooh! What lovely costumes! Have some sweeties from the basket! Happy Hallowe'en!"

Lucinda Mackworth-Young continues her series of articles examining the roots of our popular festivals.



Our American friends have revived a custom that had all but died out in this country. Now, even in the Brecks, probably encouraged by the proximity of Lakenheath and Mildenhall, there is great excitement in many villages as darkness approaches, when hollowed out pumpkins, cut with eyes, nose and mouth, are lit with candles and set on front door steps, and children, dressed up as witches, cats, ghosts or demons set off with lanterns "trick or treating".

Where and why did these customs originate?



To our Celtic ancestors, the end of October brought the end of the year. This was the time when the harvest had been safely gathered in: grains, fruits, berries and nuts. Bulbs and seeds had been carefully stored for next year's growth, and the animals, whose food supply would be scarce over the winter, were either brought down into shelter, or slaughtered and their meat salted for winter eating. It was a time both to honour the end of the year's work, and to remember and honour all those who had died during that year and previous years. It was also a time to look forward to the arrival of the souls who would be reborn, and the next season's growth and projects.

It was a liminal time, a time when the veil between the worlds, our world and the Shadowlands, was very thin. It was a time for departed spirits to return with messages for their loved ones, to help resolve difficult feelings and unfinished business, and it was a time for divination, for the spirit world to communicate messages to help people face their uncertain future with greater certainty. An extra place was set at table and a meal was placed outside the front door to invite and welcome departed spirits, and red poppies, the Lammas symbol of blood on the corn, were laid out in their remembrance, as they still are during November today.



The name of the Festival was Samhain (pronounced sow-wane) meaning, depending on which source you choose, November (Irish Gaelic), Summer's End, or First Frost. As at all the quarter and cross-quarter festivals of the Celtic year, fires were lit on the eve of the festival (31 October) and kept alight through to the end of the day itself (1 November). Young people jumped through the flames and smoke making wishes, and at the end of the festival the ashes were scattered over the fields, and a blazing torch was carried around the boundaries in an act of "saining" (blessing, protecting, making whole or holy).

Fire, lanterns and torches were also used to protect the people from any spirits with mischievous or evil intent as were, originally, skeletal heads of ancestors and, latterly, the hollowed out carved and candle lit turnips, swedes and pumpkins. Root vegetables and apples were roasted on the fire and people sang and danced around it.

The follies and miseries of the past season were consumed in the purging flames and a new year was ahead of them.

When Queen Victoria was at Balmoral, she was entertained at Hallowe'en by a huge fire built opposite the main entrance to the house. A procession of kilted clansmen marched to the fire and in their midst was the effigy of the "shandy dann" a hideous old hag. After a statement of her crimes and evil ways had been read out she was hurled into the roaring fire amidst general rejoicing. Today, it is Guy Fawkes who is the scapegoat that bears away the sins and evils of the community.

Celebrations were always an excuse for children, especially the poorer ones, to beg for food or money. Sometimes they sang a song or produced a little garland of flowers in return, and sometimes the request was accompanied by a threat such as the one in this verse from Ronald Hutton:

"If ye dinna let us in

We will bash yer windies (windows) in".

At Samhain, or All Souls Night, "soulers" would go from house to house, singing either a straightforward begging song, or a similar song with the addition of a plea for prayers for the dead, and they would be given special "soul cakes" baked with dried fruits and honey.

Divination games were played in abundance: marked stones were



cast into the fire, and their condition when retrieved the following morning indicated the owner's fortune for the coming year. Wheat grains and nuts were thrown on the fire: if they burned brightly good luck would last for the coming year. Courting couples would place cereal grains on a hot shovel; if they all jumped off at the same time they would marry and have lots of children. Hazel nuts were lined up in front of the fire, each being given the name of a potential suitor; the first nut to jump and crack indicated the future husband. Or a single hazel nut could be given a suitor's name and tested with the words:

If you love me, jump and fly,

If you hate me, lie and die.

Apples were peeled; if the peel stayed complete it was tossed over the left shoulder, and the initial that it most closely resembled when on the floor would be the initial of the future spouse. Apple bobbing was popular: the first person to remove an apple floating in a large pail of water using only his or her teeth would be married by the end of the year, as would the first person who bit an apple suspended on string hung from the rafters with their arms tied behind their backs.

In Celtic mythology grains and nuts were associated with fertility and the harvest just gathered in, and apples were a sacred fruit. An apple cut through the middle reveals the core to be a five pointed star, a pentacle, symbol of the divine feminine: wisdom and immortality. The goddess at Samhain was in her fully mature Crone or Wise Woman aspect, using her gifts of insight, divination and transformation. And it was said that the god, from 31 October right through to the end of winter, was in his aspect as Lord of the Wild Hunt. He rode through the skies with his pack of white, red-eared hounds, chasing the souls of the dead who were reluctant to leave this earth back with him to the Shadowlands.

ORAL HISTORY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR COLLINS

At the end of April a group of Breckland Society members visited the Stanford Military Training Area. This huge estate, owned by the Ministry of Defence, is an amazing place. Considering its purpose is to train soldiers in the pursuit of modern warfare, it is a surprisingly tranquil area, a haven for wildlife, free from the harmful chemical effects of intensive farming, as well as ill-considered building blight. Also interesting is the fact that there are hundreds of sheep running round much of it. To tell us more about this, Mark Elwes interviewed Arthur Collins.

Mark Elwes: Arthur, I believe that, until quite recently, the sheep were yours.

ME How long did this go on for?

Arthur Collins: They belonged to the Collins family, yes.

AC I came there in 1957, and left in 1987.

ME Tell me how it started.

ME So a long time. Was it your decision to stop?

AC Well, in 1956 there was myxomatosis, but up until then rabbits had kept the place in order, and then the military got scared that they would not only burn themselves down, but 78,000 acres of forest as well. In fact I was training on Salisbury Plain in 1956, and the place was on fire, so we couldn't train with live ammunition because we didn't know where the shells would land. So that was the state of affairs. In 1956 they had asked somebody else to come and graze but he had done it ineffectively, and the sheep were everywhere, and there were even questions in the House! Nobody else would take it on locally, and a land agent who had been on Salisbury Plain came up here and asked my uncle if he was interested. So that was how we got started.

AC Yes. I thought that (a) the Army were getting too greedy in what they wanted, and (b) as the Army was giving up training areas around the world, that the training [in our area] would get more intensive. Whether that has actually happened I don't know.

ME So did you have to negotiate with the Ministry of Defence? Were they your landlords?

ME I said in my introduction that it is a remarkable place, a weird paradox of violence and tranquillity.

AC Yes, but we only saw them three times.

AC Yes. I don't know how long ago it is, but they suddenly decided that they could make use of this environmental image. And they have even appointed an environmental officer, I think.

ME How many sheep did you run?

ME Well, certainly when we were taken over by one of the military staff he was very keen to emphasise the environmental responsibilities of the Army, and also that they were to ensure that the environment was protected. And I must say, from looking at it, it looks as though it is quite well protected.

AC Well, we started off with 1,000 sheep. The man who was there before had had 1,800 sheep on 7,000 acres.

AC Yes. I used to have a little bit of land off the Norfolk Naturalist Trust, at East Wretham, and they said really it was ridiculous, because there is 18,000 acres next door which was kept absolutely natural.

ME How big is the whole estate?

ME I remember the training area quite well, because when I was doing my National Service I was actually posted there. I was resident at Bodney Camp for about three months. I rather enjoyed it, I must say, even though the local pubs were out of bounds! But back to the sheep. What other problems did you face?

AC When I left it was 18,000 acres, of which we had 10,000.

ME How many sheep were there?

AC The first year we started out with 1,032 ewes, and we ended up with 832, because we didn't understand the diseases and the mineral problems

AC Well, we started off with those 1,000. Then we acquired some more, so we ended up with 4,400. That was written into the agreement, so we weren't allowed to keep any more. Not that they believed us. We had a system whereby in December the shepherds were paid on a bonus system, according to how many ewes they had alive. So the shepherds were determined to show every sheep they had. And we asked the people who represented the Army to come along to this count.

ME Are those unique to the training area?

ME As they fired live ammunition on the battle area, there must have been a degree of danger for the sheep.

AC They're unique to Breckland. We chose the wrong breed of sheep. When we finished lambing we counted the number of skins, and we counted 100. With that breed, they would lamb so far, and then forget all about it.

AC When we started, we just let the sheep cover the whole place. Then one day the army landed a shell on a tank under which the sheep were shading themselves, and between the ones that were killed as the shell landed and the ones that ran out to be hit by the next shell, there were 22 sheep killed. So after that we used to gather the sheep in that area and shut them up. We didn't lose any sheep after that.

ME I seem to remember that there were some pits, or something like that, that contained harmful substances.

ME Presumably the MoD didn't pay any compensation?

AC No, it was the lack of minerals. The vet, who had been the personal vet of Lord Iveagh, he sorted them out, and he was just starting out, looking after Lord Iveagh and a few others, and I was lucky enough to jump on the bandwagon. One problem we faced was that the whole place was covered in ragwort. Sheep weren't killed by it as other animals are, they seemed to managed to destroy it.

AC No, we undertook the risk ourselves. On battle areas where the sheep were there first, the Army paid compensation. But because we had come with our sheep after the Army, we had to take the risk.

If any Society members are interested in carrying out oral history interviews, please contact Anne Mason on 01760 755685.