

# BROXHEAD COMMONERS' ASSOCIATION

(Founded 6th June, 1968)

Chairman: J. H. ELLIS, Headley Mill, Bordon, Hants

## A Short History of My Campaign to save Broxhead Common

September '73

The encroachment by fencing of about 80 acres of Broxhead Common East in 1963 by the late Mr Sefton Myers was a shock to many of the inhabitants of Lindford and Headley, and much more so for the elderly who had spent their lives as caretakers, smallholders and farmers, and many of whom had passed their lives minding and grazing cattle and Horses on the wild unfenced Common. From my early days I observed their activities and later as Miller and Corn Merchant, I came into contact with them in the course of my business.

After discussion with some of the older Commoners, whose memory's went back to 1880, I raised the matter of the illegal fences immediately at a meeting of the Headley Parish Council, who took it up with the late owner, the Parish Councils Association, and the Hampshire County Council. Apart from stopping further encroachments of the Common, little progress was made in removing the offending fences by negotiation, after months of correspondence. I soon discovered only Commoners had any standing in such matters.

By 1965 the announcement of the Commons Registration Act, The Hampshire County Council immediately registered Broxhead Common as Common Land extending to some 404 acres, according to Dr Taverners' survey of some 30 years ago. The Act required that Commoners must register their Rights or lose them for ever, if no Rights were registered the land would almost certainly be free for the owners to take what action they desired

- e.g.
- (a) Leave as natural virgin open space
  - (b) Fence in and clear the Heather Gorse and Trees for Agricultural development.
  - (c) Seek to build
  - (d) Seek to win Sand or Minerals.

A Commoner is a Person who has a Right by Deed or Prescription (Long Usage), to take something legally, - grazing, sand, Turf, Pannage, Piscary, Turbary, - from land owned by another

In 1820 it is interesting to note, there were 309 farms and smallholdings with varying acreages of land in Headley, which extended then, from the now Huts Hotel, Hindhead, to Whitehill Cross Roads, which were surrounded by Forest and Common, and almost the whole community lived by Agriculture.

/sheet 2 over.

There were few other occupations at hand until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when Longmoor and Bordon Camps were built, to be followed by Railway and then the Bordon Gasworks and the School. Gradually, men left the land, and to-day one can scarcely find 20 farms in the Parish and the old farm cottages have been modernised and the cowstall is a Garage.

In 1968 we founded our Association and after considerable investigation, some 41 persons Registered Rights on Broxhead, and only by proving Rights of Common, however many, can this area of land be pronounced a Common in the true sense by the Commissioner, and that is what we Registered Commoners must be prepared to do when the Commissioner decides to hear our case, which is being prepared. Once an area has been pronounced Common Land, new legislation is expected, and it appears that the Metropolitan Act may apply to Rural Commons, permitting legal access for the public to Rural Commons, whereas at the present only Commoners can legally go, but as the Common cannot be fenced, the public at large of course used these open spaces in the past, but not strictly legally.

Broxhead is at present going through the birth pangs of change, as did the London Commons some 80 - 90 years ago - Wimbledon Common, Tooting Bee Common, Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon, and Wandsworth Common - all had similar fights, and it was the Commoners who saved them. It is now our turn to stand firm and do everything we can to save our Broxhead Common, its flora and wild life, which, who can tell, may be as valuable as the Commons in London, for an area of local development as yet undreamed of. May I suggest you take a walk and see the heat in bloom, and listen to the song of the Yellow Hammer before this hot summer passes. At the same time you might exercise your rights of Sun and firewood it will be both mentally and physically refreshing. Here in Lindford we still have a wild natural open space which was mentioned in records dating back to the Reign of Edward the Confessor and I think you will agree to keep it that way.

Reminder : When did you last exercise the Rights you Registered -  
keep it up - it is important.